'A few shots were fired'

An analysis of concealing discourse describing extreme structural violence during the Dutch Military Operations in Indonesia (1945-1950)

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Abstract

Revolution was extreme and structural. There are multiple studies researching this extreme structural violence, but this has never been researched through a discourse analysis on a microlevel, connecting individual actions to a low feeling of responsibility. This thesis, consisting of a discourse analysis of an anonymous Dutch soldier's diary, takes the first step to explain individual motives for participating in extreme structural violence. The discourse analysis makes use of Hannah Arendt's concept of the banality of evil. It links euphemistic and concealing discourse to habituality, thoughtlessness and distancing, three characteristics of the banality of evil. It is argued that the anonymous soldier kept participating in violent actions due to those three characteristics that become evident. Therefore, the results from this study shed light on individual motivations for extreme structural violence.



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In memory of K.W. Weiss, who taught me to reflect and to listen; to weigh my observations carefully before drawing conclusions.



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Introduction

On August 17, 1945, inhabitants of the former Dutch colony Indonesia proclaimed their independence, which the Dutch government refused to acknowledge. Consequently, Dutch boys and men were sent to the Dutch East Indies to participate in the Indonesian National Revolution, also known as the Indonesian War of Independence. In this conflict, cruelties were committed but soon forgotten. Violence of Dutch soldiers came to light in 1969, when veteran Joop Hueting shared his experiences with violence, which resulted in the Dutch government investigating the case, concluding that the violence was incidental. After that, the topic remained highly controversial in the public sphere, triggering countless testimonies of other veterans confirming or denying Hueting's revelations.¹ This debate dominated public and academic spheres until historian Rémy Limpach demonstrated that the violence carried out by the Dutch during the Indonesian National Revolution was extreme and structural rather than incidental.²

Perhaps the most important question now is not if the extreme structural violence happened, but why it happened. Limpach's view has refocused the attentions of historians on the systematic nature of the committed violence. Whereas Limpach highlighted the problem, using various memoires and testimonies amongst other sources, violencemotives are not thoroughly analysed on an individual level, due to his understandable focus on the broader picture. Other research on this topic likewise tends to focus on the collective.³ This seems sensible, for the word 'structural' implies that the extreme violence was systematic and organized and therefore, it could only exist because it was performed frequently and by many army-members. Nonetheless, it requires an accumulation of participating individuals to transform extreme violence into something collective or structural. Although there are a few studies researching extreme structural violence on a microlevel,4 it has never been researched through an analysis connecting concealing discourse to a low feeling of responsibility. My study, a discourse analysis of an anonymous Dutch conscript soldier's diary,⁵ takes the first step to explain the grounds for individual actions. The diary provides the required information to interpret individual actions, for it contains multiple references to extreme structural violence. The findings respond to the research question 'What motivated an individual conscript soldier to continue participating in a systematic framework of extreme structural violence?'

This study is inspired by philosopher Hannah Arendt's work. She analysed the discourse of Eichmann, a top-Nazi who was on trial for making the Holocaust possible. Arendt concluded that Eichmann did not feel responsible for his deeds, for he felt that he

¹ Remy Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor* (The Hague 2016), 20-33.

² Ihid

³ For examples, see Harry van den Berg, Stef Scagliola and Fred Wester (eds.) *Wat veteranen vertellen. Verschillende perspectieven op biografische interviews over ervaringen tijdens militaire operaties* (Amsterdam 2010).; Herman Burgers, *De Garoeda En De Ooievaar: Indonesië Van Kolonie Tot Nationale Staat* (Leiden 2011).; Remco Raben, 'On Genocide and Mass Violence in colonial Indonesia', *Journal of Genocide Research* 14 (2012) 3/4, 485-502.; Peter Romijn, "Beyond the Horizon": Disconnections in Indonesian War of Independence', *Historical Social Research* 45 (2020) 4, 130-150.; Peter Romijn, 'Learning on "the job": Dutch war volunteers entering the Indonesian war of independence, 1945-46', *Journal of Genocide Research* 14 (2012) 3/4, 317-336.

⁴ For examples, see Gert Oostindie, *Soldaat in Indonesië 1945-1950. Getuigenissen van een oorlog aan de verkeerde kant van de geschiedenis* (Amsterdam 2015).; J.A. de Moor, *Generaal spoor. Triomf en tragiek van een legercommandant* (The Hague 2011).

⁵ Jan Gort (ed.), *Dagboek van een: Bokkenrijder in de Oost* (2018) PDF e-book.



was carrying out orders, together with others. This is what she named the banality of evil.⁶ Even though Arendt does not mention it explicitly, Eichmann's discourse could be described as euphemistic and concealing. It contains euphemisms such as 'final solution' and 'deportation', concealing actions that could also be described as 'liquidation' or 'killing'.⁷ Despite differences in manner of speaking and writing, the diary central to this study appears to contain euphemistic and concealing discourse as well. This indicates that the banality of evil is applicable to the diary. It explains the psychological process of carrying out orders without feeling responsible. Thus, the discourse analysis is performed through the concept of the banality of evil. This is operationalised by indicating two linguistic keys characterizing the diary: terminology and the passive voice. Analysing those defines to which extent the banality of evil is applicable to the case of the anonymous soldier. This clarifies motivations for performing and witnessing extreme structural violence.

This study contributes to the historiographical debate, taking a different approach on the research topic by narrowing the scope of analysis to a microlevel. Although microhistory has shortcomings, it is essential in order to explain individual motivations whilst considering the relativeness of them. Historian John Tosh describes the concept of microhistory as bringing an individual's story to life through a primary reference. The challenge is that microhistory-results cannot be generalised. Simultaneously, this is an advantage. Microhistory shies away from grand narratives by providing nuance and detail, helping to understand individual human agency. Approaching the topic on a microhistory-level is appropriate, for this study advocates researching subjective, personal experiences through diaries and memoires. Personal aspects cannot be overlooked when it comes to explaining individual motives. Those are harder to take into account when choosing a more general approach.

Subjective sources such as the diary are slippery, but they provide a unique window on researching motives of extreme structural violence. Without the voices of people who participated in it, historians cannot construct a narrative about motives for participating in extreme structural violence. The diary only represents one of those voices, thus findings from this study cannot be generalised. It was, however, not uncommon to write about experiences during the Indonesian National Revolution. There are many diaries and memoires of Dutch veterans that could be analysed this way. Therefore, it should be underlined that this thesis is only the first step, the prologue to a longer story. The diary is selected random, for it was accessible online and research on individual motives has to start somewhere. The uniqueness of this diary is that the soldier wrote every day. When it comes to place and time his descriptions are specific, which makes it achievable to retrace historical facts with the help of other sources. Hence, it provides the opportunity to apply source criticism, an essential condition for imbedding

 $^{^6}$ Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem A Report on the Banality of Evil (New York 1963) PDF e-book, 129-134.

⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁸ John Tosh, *The pursuit of history. Aims, methods and new directions in the study of history* (London & New York 2015), 67.

⁹ Brad S. Gregory, 'Review: Is Small Beautiful? Microhistory and the History of Everyday Life', *History and Theory* 38 (1999) 1, 100-110, p. 105.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*, 42.



nuance into this study.

The first chapter presents an overview of the historical context, provides background information about the soldier and sets out relevant theories and concepts. The second chapter sets out the method of the discourse analysis. Patterns in linguistic keys are connected to the banality of evil. The third chapter, a discourse analysis of the diary, reveals to what extent the banality of evil is applicable. This provides insight into an individual's perspective on the situation and the actions that he witnessed or carried out.



Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

To understand the historical context of this diary, knowledge of the Indonesian National Revolution and the military actions carried out is required. This chapter provides a succinct overview of the revolution, the Dutch 'police actions' and the diary. Furthermore, the definition of extreme structural violence is applied to the diary. Therefore, this chapter ties the knot between extreme structural violence and individual violence against a historical background.

1.1 The Indonesian National Revolution (1945-1949)

The Indonesian National Revolution is perhaps best described as an armed conflict between the declared Independent Republic of Indonesia and the Netherlands. Indonesia was a colony of the Dutch for the past centuries. During World War II, the Japanese invaded Indonesia. The Japanese occupation led to hardships for parts of the Indonesian, Dutch and Indo-Dutch inhabitants. Other Indonesian residents, however, benefited from Japanese rule. Innumerable citizens were militarized and maintained anti-Dutch and anticolonial beliefs. This combination put an end to the racist, layered society that the Dutch colonists created centuries ago. It became the breeding ground for the struggle of independence that took place just after the last convulsions of World War II. Other Indonesia.

After the Japanese left the territory, the Netherlands did not acknowledge the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence. By the end of 1946 the Dutch government enlarged the number of Dutch troops in the territory. This increasement provided the Dutch military with the possibility to carry out large-scale offensives, euphemistically labelled as 'police actions' to bring order and stability. In reality, these offensives were characterized by extreme structural violence. It is important to note that Indonesian revolutionaries also made use of violence. During the so-called *Bersiap*-period approximately 25.000 to 30.000 Dutch, Indo-Dutch and Ambonese residents were killed. This is, however, not the subject of this study. This study focusses on extreme violence performed by the Dutch military, which included technical violence (by means of vehicles, artillery, mortars, the air force and the marine), pillage, arson, vandalism and 'cleansing actions'. Furthermore, violence consisted of torture and liquidation of prisoners and, to a lesser extent, violence towards women and children. These types of unnecessary, extreme violence often remained unpunished, which created beneficial circumstances for mass-violence.

The frequency of the extreme violence made it, at the same time, structural. Structural violence is violence within a system. Whether governmental institutes turned a blind eye or allowed it openly, members of the Dutch army could carry out violence

¹² Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*, 50-52.

¹³ For a more detailed overview, see M.C. Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to Present* (Signapore: 2012), 59-79.

¹⁴ Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*, 50-52.

¹⁵ Ibid, 52-54.

¹⁶ Ibid., 389-462.

¹⁷ Ibid, 555. For more information about the Indonesian National Revolution and the Dutch military actions, see Gerlof D. Homan, 'The Netherlands, the United States and the Indonesian Question, 1948', *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990) 123-141.; Jennifer L. Loray, 'The Trauma of Liberation: Dutch Political Culture and the Indonesia Question in 1945', *Historical Reflections* 41 (2015) 3, 79-94.; Harry A. Poeze, 'The Cold war in Indonesia, 1948', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40 (2009) 3, 497-517.



without severe consequences. Structural violence was not only possible, but also continuous. Thus 'structural', in another sense, means 'often' and by no means 'incidental' or 'sporadic'. 18 Other research supports this argument. Historian Remco Raben argues that the extreme violence was continuous and contained characteristics of genocide, referring towards multiple mass killings carried out by the Dutch. 19 Another study puts the national self-image of the Netherlands as non-martial, conflict averse and tolerant into perspective. It demonstrates that the Dutch army adopted a militarized and army-centric approach.²⁰ Those studies all demonstrate that the violence carried out by the Dutch was not incidental. This is the fundament for the discourse analysis of the diary.

1.2 The diary

The anonymous writer of the diary central to this study, was sent to Indonesia as a result of mandatory service. In November 1946, he started his military training as an infantryman in Maastricht in the Netherlands. In July 1947, he and the fourth battalion 6 R.I., which he was part of, arrived in Batavia²¹ after a long journey over water. He wrote in his diary almost daily after the moment he said goodbye to his family and friends and set foot on the boat that would bring him to a place yet unknown to him. His writings came to an end in February 1950, when he arrived back home.²²

In 2018 Jan Gort, the son of another member of the fourth battalion, received the diary, for the anonymous writer had passed away. Gort digitalized the writings and bundled them into a 329-pages long memoir, which he published in-house. With the help of his father, he edited it with photographs that he received from various former members of the battalion and verified historical facts. Gort's motivation for publishing the diary becomes clear from the synopsis, which he wrote himself. According to him, the diary provides an insight into the daily life of the soldiers of the battalion.²³

Due to the soldier's anonymity, not much is known about him other than through his own writing. Source criticism can, however, be applied through consulting additional literature and verifying the historical facts in the diary through various other sources. The fact that the writer is anonymous, may also be beneficial to the legitimacy. It is less likely that incriminating evidence is left out of the writing, for it is harder to retrace an anonymous person.

The challenge concerning microhistory is the matter of not remaining too distant from the subject, but also not becoming too close to it. In order to understand the subject, the historian must be the subject's advocate. To provide honest historical research, the historian must, at the same time, be the subject's antagonist, not shying away from exposing shameful matters.²⁴ Therefore, the analysis of the diary contains compassion for the writer, taking into consideration the extreme circumstances under which he had to

¹⁸ Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*, 738.

¹⁹ Remco Raben, 'On Genocide and Mass Violence in colonial Indonesia', Journal of Genocide Research 14 (2012) 3/4, 485-502, p.498-499.

²⁰ Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, 'The use and abuse of the "Dutch approach" to Counter-Insurgency', Journal of *Strategic Studies* 36 (2013) 6, 867-897, p. 873-875.

²¹ Batavia refers to the capital Jakarta, as Indonesian people call it. The Dutch named the capital Batavia. This name is used in the study for the diary contains this name.

²² Gort (ed.), *Dagboek van een: Bokkenrijder in de Oost*, 329.

²³ Ibid., 338.

²⁴ Jill Lepore, 'Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography', The Journal of *American History* 88 (2001) 1, 129-144, p. 134.



operate. On the other hand, the analysis of his writings is highly critical, taking into account the public debate and the historical facts brought to attention by Limpach.

1.3 Extreme structural violence in the diary

The diary repeatedly mentions actions that prove the violence both extreme and structural. Therefore, the diary contains the kind of violence to be investigated on an individual level. Extreme violence concerning killing and arson occurs frequently in the diary.²⁵ Not all forms of extreme violence are found. However, this does not mean they were not performed. Due to the culture of silence within the military, extreme violence was not to be written about explicitly.²⁶ Moreover, not all forms of extreme violence have to be present to qualify actions as extremely violent. The descriptions of shootings and arson alone indicate conscious extreme violence.

The concept of extreme structural violence is applicable to the diary, for it contains many descriptions of violence. As appears from the soldier's writings, his battalion used violence frequently. This diary does not only concern individual experiences, but also actions of other members of the battalion. Therefore, it demonstrates extreme violence on an individual level, within a broader framework. In October 1947 alone, the soldier writes eight times about shootings carried out by the battalion. In addition, he writes two times about arson carried out by the battalion and four times about bombings carried out by the Dutch, not always by members of the battalion. The following month, he mentions shootings six times.²⁷ In other months, there are less fragments including violence. In July 1948, he writes four times about shooting.²⁸

The former does not necessarily indicate that there was less violence. The soldier simply writes less about it. What is also important to note, is that violent actions depend on location. The battalion was on furlough in a resort until the $10^{\rm th}$ of July. During this period they did not have to carry out military actions, which lowers the frequency of descriptions of violence. Another time, the soldier spent five days in the infirmary with a fever. Most fragments, however, are drenched in descriptions of shootings, attacks of $kampongs^{31}$ and being attacked, as will become clear in chapter 3. More often than not, these fragments are unclear on who used the violence and what exactly happened, which seems concealing.

1.4 Linguistic concealment of violence

As stated previously, members of the Dutch army and government concealed extreme structural violence. Through downplay, denial and lack of proof, unnecessary violent actions stayed hidden for years. Another remarkable concealment-strategy was euphemistic or concealing use of language. The Netherlands justified the military actions

²⁵ For examples, see Gort, *Dagboek van een: Bokkenrijder in de Oost*, i.a. pages 36, 37, 53 and 55.

²⁶ Susie Protschky, 'Burdens of Proof. Photography and Evidence of Atrocity during the Dutch Military Actions in Indonesia (1949-1950)', *Bijdragen tot de Taal- Land en Volkenkunde* 176 (2020) 2, 240-278, p. 255

²⁷ Gort, *Dagboek van een: Bokkenrijder in de Oost*, 40-58.

²⁸ Ibid., 118-125.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 203-204

³¹ A *kampong* is a local village or community in the countryside. For further explanation, see Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*, 847.



claiming to bring justice and security.³² Army reports concealed violence by referring to pillage as 'souveneering' or 'organising' and describing a tortured prisoner as 'somewhat battered'. Killing was referred to as 'putting down', the only term that left little room for concealment. Other documents referred to killing with the more juridical euphemism 'summary justice'. In addition, the 'military action' was quite vague and therefore suitable for camouflaging extreme violence, just as 'police action'. Violence was, as claimed, always strictly unescapable due to the antagonist's actions. Sometimes army members called it 'acting harshly', which could mean multiple things. Referring to the Indonesian revolutionaries as 'extremists' suggested that only their actions were extreme. Extreme actions carried out by Dutch troops – such as mass slaughter and pillage – were concealed by vague terms such as 'misconduct' or 'criminal acts'.33 Another unclear term concerns 'cleansing actions'. These so-called sweeps were meant to find weapons or other stocks of revolutionaries. In reality, these actions were characterized by extreme violence.³⁴ Considering Limpach's findings, the first part of the discourse analysis of the diary consists of researching euphemistic language. The research method makes use of the concept of the banality of evil, which is clarified in the next chapter.

³² Brocades Zaalberg, 'The use and abuse of the "Dutch approach" to Counter-Insurgency', 874.

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³³ Ibid., 581. Translated from the Dutch, respectively 'souveneering' or 'organiseren', 'enigzins toegetakeld', 'neerleggen', 'standrecht', 'militaire actie', 'politionele actie', 'hard optreden', 'extremisten', 'wangedrag' and 'euveldaden'.

³⁴ Ibid., 430. Translated from the Dutch phrases 'zuiveringen' or 'zuiveringsacties'.



Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter sets out the method of the discourse analysis. First, I argue that the diary can be perceived through the concept of Hannah Arendt's banality of evil. Usage of euphemistic and concealing discourse resembles Eichmann and the anonymous soldier. This is connected to a low feeling of responsibility, characterizing the banality of evil. Euphemistic and concealing discourse in the diary becomes evident from two striking recurrences in language, from now on called linguistic keys. These two linguistic keys are terminology and passive writing.

2.1 On the banality of evil

That discourse reveals more than it seems, is emphasized by Hannah Arendt. In 1961, she covered the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem for *The New Yorker*. Later, she bundled her findings in a book, outpointing Eichmann, a top-Nazi who was processed for making the Holocaust possible by means of transportation, as the face of the banality of evil.³⁵ By analysing the Eichmann's discourse, she realized something important. When he talked about the deeds that he carried out, he repeatedly pointed out that he acted 'together with others'.³⁶ In addition he pleaded that he was just a 'tiny cog' in the machinery that made the Holocaust possible. Based on those observations, Arendt argues that experiencing actions as being part of a bureaucracy and simply carrying out orders, lowers the feeling of responsibility. Not evil, but thoughtlessness and estrangement from reality were the mean things that led to Eichmann's crimes.³⁷

Although Arendt does not mention this explicitly, Eichmann's discourse contains euphemistic and concealing elements. Euphemisms such as 'evacuation', 'final solution', 'special treatment' and 'deportation' conceal actions that could also be described as 'liquidation' or 'killing'.³⁸ Thus, linguistic concealment downplaying violence is characterizing Eichmann's case. Despite differences in rank, manner of speaking and in writing, the soldier at the centre of this study also uses discourse of a euphemistic, concealing sort. For instance, the euphemism 'cleansing action' occurs frequently. Furthermore, the soldier's pragmatic, passive manner of writing is striking. The discourses of both Eichmann and the anonymous soldier central to this study, indicate distancing, thoughtlessness and a lower feeling of responsibility. This points into the direction that Arendt's theory is also evident for the anonymous soldier, tangled up in superior orders and bureaucratic measures.

It is much discussed what Arendt meant by pointing out Eichmann as the face of the banality of evil. To compare Eichmann and the soldier from the diary effectively, it is essential to understand this term. What is banality in a linguistic sense? When looking up the origin 'banal' in the Oxford Dictionary, one would stumble across the following definition: 'very ordinary and containing nothing that is interesting or important.'³⁹ In earlier fragments, Arendt portrays Eichmann as quite standard within the Nazi-regime: 'Many were like him', and the many were 'terribly and terrifyingly normal.'⁴⁰ This was the

³⁵ Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, 118.

³⁶ Ibid., 14-21.

³⁷ Ibid., 134.

³⁸ Ibid., 43. For more examples, see pages 67 and 76.

³⁹ Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 'Banal',

https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/banal (consulted 4 April 2021).

⁴⁰ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 129.



point. To summarize a very complex argument, Eichmann's normality within the existing bureaucracy made difficult for him to know or feel that he was doing wrong. This refers to the banality of it all. Ordinary individuals are able to carry out extreme deeds if the circumstances provide them with a feeling of thoughtlessness, habituality and distantness, causing a clear conscience. Therefore, evil deeds are not retraceable to pure evil instincts. In this light Eichmann became the public face of the banality of evil. There were many like him, but Eichmann was the one so famously processed for the crimes he committed 'together with others'.⁴¹

How is this related to the microhistory central to this study? Analysing the discourse in the diary may provide observations synchronous with Arendt's ones in Jerusalem. Discourse indicating thoughtlessness, distancing and habituality points into the direction of a low feeling of responsibility, demonstrating that the conscript also could have been the face of the banality of evil. In order to research if this hypothesis is correct, the banality of evil essentially becomes the lens of this study. The discourse of the diary contains two linguistic keys – striking recurrences in discourse – evaluating the banality of evil: terminology and the passive voice. To put it more concrete, the soldier seems to use discourse that is concealing violent actions. This becomes clear through his use of terminology and the passive voice. As will be further explained, an analysis of terminology and writing style provides conclusions about habituality, thoughtlessness and distancing. Those are indicators of a low feeling of responsibility, characterizing the banality of evil. By connecting those linguistic keys to the banality of evil, this analysis details the experience of an individual who was part of a broader system that caused structural violence.

2.2 Linguistic keys: terminology

In order to determine if the diary contains concealing terminology, a characteristic of the banality of evil, the first step of the discourse analysis consists of researching the euphemistic discourse as highlighted in paragraph 1.4. This contains a search for the phrases 'souveneering', 'organising', 'battering', 'summary justice', 'military action', 'police action', 'harsh act', 'extremist', 'misconduct', 'criminal act' and 'cleansing action' in Dutch.⁴² This selection is based on Limpach's research showing that those concealing phrases were used frequently.⁴³ To prevent overlooking, the terms are tracked down in singular and in plural form. In addition, synonyms and conjugations are taken into account. Important is researching whether the soldier's terminology changes over time. More specific terminology towards the end of the diary indicates increasing indifference and loss of conscience. In other words: this would be evidence for thoughtlessness and habituality, characterizing the banality of evil. These are not the only characteristics to be analysed. In addition to terminology, the manner of writing is an indicator of linguistic concealment. The next paragraph sets out a detailed plan for the analysis of writing style forming the second step.

⁴¹ Ibid., 129-134.

⁴² Translated from the Dutch, respectively 'souveneering' or 'organiseren', 'enigzins toegetakeld', 'neerleggen', 'standrecht', 'militaire actie', 'politionele actie', 'hard optreden', 'extremisten', 'wangedrag', 'euveldaden' and 'zuiveringen' or 'zuiveringsacties'.

⁴³ Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*, 581-582.



2.3. Linguistic keys: passive voice

Remarkably, the soldier writes in a passive manner. In a passive sentence, the subject is acted upon by some other performer of the verb. 44 This leaves the acts of the subject passive and sometimes unclear. Although the passive voice is not directly retraceable to the case of Eichmann, it is typically concealing. It indicates a feeling of distantness which is relevant for a low feeling of responsibility. Therefore, it evaluates if the banality of evil is applicable. Even though the passive voice can be just writing style, this manner of writing is vague. In several passages, the passive writing style leaves it uncertain who exactly carried out an act of extreme violence. Take, for instance, the soldier's report of two people attempting to flee after encountering the patrol that the soldier was a part of. '... the first one was shot down directly, the other was still able to flee.' This passive voice creates vagueness around the question who fired the shots. Was it the soldier or another patroller? It will never become clear if the soldier wrote in this way consciously. He is not here to clarify his intentions and his pragmatic manner of writing leaves out emotions. Consciousness is of subordinate importance here. The point is that, given the former, his passive manner of writing appears concealing, requiring further analysis.

The analysis of the passive voice consists of evaluating descriptions of possibly unnecessary violence of a) himself; b) other members of the battalion and c) superiors such as officers with a higher rank and the Dutch government. It will be evaluated if similarities and differences between a, b and c point into the direction of distancing, and therefore a low feeling of responsibility, or not.

The method in this chapter proves to which extent Arendt's theory is applicable to the diary belonging to the anonymous soldier. The two linguistic keys are touchstones. Each researched term or sentence only answers one question: is the banality of evil in this case evident or not? The two linguistic keys as provided in this chapter are tested in the next chapter.

⁴⁴ Alice E.M. Underwood, 'Passive voice', https://www.grammarly.com/blog/passive-voice/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw0caCBhCIARIsAGAfuMwQj0sDqVzh_0tI6JWs7rxxmQgIZhAmvfodcT66u0qwaarSn_Ouh_kaAkLNEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds (Consulted April 4 2021).

⁴⁵ Gort, *Dagboek van een: Bokkenrijder in de Oost*, 163. Translated from the Dutch passage '... de ene werd direct neergeschoten, maar de andere kon nog ontvluchten.' See for more examples i.a. pages 42, 44 and 45.



Chapter 3: Discourse analysis

This chapter provides an analysis of the writings. Which fragments indicate that the banality of evil is relevant and which fragments do not? What alternative explanations are there for the discourse of the anonymous soldier? This chapter argues that the linguistic key terminology is evident for two characteristics of the banality of evil: thoughtlessness and habituality. Distancing, the other characteristic, becomes evident through an analysis of another linguistic key, the passive voice.

3.1 Terminology

Important for this analysis are the concealing euphemisms describing extreme structural violence, for they evaluate two of the three characteristics of the banality of evil: thoughtlessness and habituality. In order to define whether the soldier uses concealing discourse, the euphemisms as indicated by Limpach are counted and analysed. What do they reveal and what is left uncertain? Additionally, it will be researched if the context of concealing terms becomes more specific over time. Moreover, does less-concealing discourse replace concealing discourse over time? If the discourse becomes more specific, this would indicate thoughtlessness and habituality. The results from the quantitative method are displayed in the table below.⁴⁶

Dutch phrase	Plural	Dutch synonyms and conjugations	English translation	Meaning	Frequ ency
Souveneering Organisatie	Souveneerings Souveneeringen Organisaties	Organiseren Organiseerden Georganiseerd	Organising Organisation	Pillage	0
Toetakeling	Toetakelingen	Enigszins toegetakeld Toegetakeld Toetakelen	Maiming (somewhat) battered	Torture	1
Standrecht	-	Standrechtelijk	Summary justice Summary law	Murder	0
Militaire actie Politionele actie	Militaire acties Politionele acties	Militair optreden Politioneel optreden	Military action(s) Police action(s)	Offensive often characterized by diverse forms of extreme violence	0
Hard optreden	Harde optredens	Hard opgetreden Trad(en) hard op Harde actie	Harsh act(s) Acting harshly	Camouflaging diverse forms of extreme violence	0
Extremist	Extremisten	Opstandeling Opstandelingen Extremelingen	Extremist(s)	Antagonist Revolutionary	3

⁴⁶ The count of the concealing phrases includes their plurals, synonyms and conjugations. The digitalized PDF of the diary provides the possibility to search for concealing terms through the search function. Nonetheless, to ensure that no words are forgotten, the diary is read entirely.

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		Extremen			
Wangedrag Euveldaad	Wangedragingen Euveldaden	Slecht gedrag Onacceptabel gedrag Euvel	Misconduct(s) Criminal act(s)	Mass- slaughter or pillage	0
Zuiveringsact ie Sweep	Zuiveringsacties Sweeps	Zuiveren Gezuiverd Zuiverden Zuivering Zuiveringen Doorzoeken van kampongs	Cleansing action(s)	Patrols meant to find weapons or other stock of revolutionari es, often characterized by extreme violence	21

Table 1: Overview of concealing terminology and its frequency

The next step is analysing the context of these terms. Limpach characterized the term 'extremist' as concealing for it implied an abnormality of the Indonesian revolutionaries in contrast to the Dutch.⁴⁷ However, concealment was not the main reason for usage of this term. Rather, this lexicon provided by the Dutch government functioned as a tool for characterizing Indonesian revolutionaries as villains that needed to be fought against, therefore creating a distance between Dutch soldiers and Indonesian revolutionaries. During the conflict in Indonesia, the Dutch adopted a militarised and enemy-centric approach.⁴⁸ The Dutch government justified the 'police actions' with the message that 'extremist bands' had to be eliminated.⁴⁹ Thus, at that time, 'extremist' was part of the general lexicon concerning the war. The distance it created was set in motion by the Dutch government rather than by the soldier as an individual. Therefore, it is less evident for the banality of evil on an individual level. However, striking is that the soldier makes use of the word 'extremist' to refer to his antagonists only in the beginning of his diary, 50 which indicates habituality. Possibly, the soldier's lexicon changed over time, containing terms that he picked up from other army members. This hypothesis requires a solid foundation. The implicit term 'extremist' is replaced by more explicit discourse. References such as 'the enemy' and 'robbers' are not used incidentally.51 Thus, the soldier's phrases become more specific, revealing him perceiving his antagonists as villains. The evolvement of usage of the implicit term 'extremist' to the latter explicit terms, indicates habituality as evidence for the banality of evil and this is something which is substantiated by the analysis of the phrases 'cleansing action' and 'battering'.

The term 'cleansing action' serves as the best example for thoughtlessness and habituality, as evidence for the banality of evil. The word is used more frequently and the context becomes more explicit as time goes on. From the first three months of his military service, it does not become clear what this term means to the soldier and the battalion. Diary-fragments only clarify that a big 'cleansing action' on Java was about to start during

⁴⁷ Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*, 581.

⁴⁸ Brocades Zaalberg, 'The use and abuse of the "Dutch approach", 874.

⁴⁹ Romijn, "Beyond the horizon", 136.

⁵⁰ Gort, *Dagboek van een: Bokkenrijder in de Oost*, 30, 40 & 56.

⁵¹ Ibid., See for examples i.a. pages 102, 103, 148, 197, 201, 204, 262. Translated from the Dutch, respectively 'de vijand' and 'rampokkers'.



which the battalion had to guard a building.⁵² Another time he describes a journey towards a village they would 'cleanse' without defining the included actions.⁵³ From additional literature it becomes clear that he is talking about the first 'police action', taking place on Java and Sumatra in July and August 1947, aimed to regain territory from the Indonesian revolutionaries. During this offensive, thousands of revolutionaries and ordinary inhabitants were killed.⁵⁴ This fragment does not clarify if the soldier and the battalion took part in these killings.

What a 'cleansing' carried out by the battalion meant, becomes clear later. It involved shooting at persons attempting to flee when the battalion arrived at a *kampong.*⁵⁵ Additional research shows that troops carrying out cleansing actions made little effort to distinguish fighting revolutionaries from ordinary inhabitants and that cleansing actions often included arson.⁵⁶ From an earlier fragment, scribbled down in October that same year, it becomes clear that this was also the case for a cleansing action carried out by the battalion. 'We went to Wanagiri', the soldier writes, 'where we were shot at the previous day. We cleansed the *kampong* Wanagari. First we fired through the cottages, whereafter we went in and where most of the time nothing was to be found, and after that most cottages were set on fire.'57 This fragment is explicit about violence compared to the first fragments involving the word 'cleansing action.' The chronology of actions is detailed, compared to other fragments. Thus, the soldier defines his first vague descriptions of 'cleansing actions' later in time. Could this explicitness mean that he became more indifferent towards the violence, or that it became so normal to him that he unconsciously described it in more exact terms? The answer to this question will never become clear, for the soldier is not alive to clarify his motives. However, habituality and thoughtlessness are confirmed by the frequency of the use of 'cleansing action'. There is a time where the soldier mentions the word often and quite guileless, lacking emotion as if this jargon has become part of his routine.⁵⁸ The argument that habituality also shows through lack of emotion, is supported by the single fragment containing the concealing phrase 'battering.' In contrast, this fragment does not contain violent actions performed by the Dutch, but by Indonesian *rampokkers*.⁵⁹ The soldier describes the happenings after stating that the Dutch saved a *Loerah*, an Indonesian village chief, who was wounded by rampokkers: '... Thereafter the rampokkers have departed and they have left the Loerah quite battered.'60 Corresponding to the fragments describing 'cleansing actions', no emotions are described here. Although not describing emotions does not mean the emotions are not there, it could also mean that the soldier became numb. This numbness,

⁵² Ibid., 19.

⁵³ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁴ Herman Burgers, *De Garoeda En De Ooievaar*, 553.

⁵⁵ Gort, Dagboek van een: Bokkenrijder in de Oost, 192.

⁵⁶ Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*, 430-433.

⁵⁷ Gort, *Dagboek van een: Bokkenrijder in de Oost*, 43. Translated from the Dutch passage: 'Het ging naar Wanagiri waar we de vorige dag vuur hadden gekregen. We hebben de kampong Wanagiri gezuiverd. Eerst schoten we door de hutten, daarna gingen we naar binnen waar meestal niets te zien was, en daarna werden de meeste hutten nog in brand gestoken.'

⁵⁸ See for examples pages 163, 164, 175, 178, 186, 187, 189 and 192.

⁵⁹ This term was used to describe armed robbers or gang members. See Gort, *Dagboek van een: Bokkenrijder in de Oost*, 335.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 102. Translated from the Dutch passage: '... Hierop zijn de rampokkers er tussenuit gedaan en hebben de Loerah flink toegetakeld achtergelaten.'



combined with more explicit use of terminology towards the end of the diary, indicates an increasing indifference and a loss of conscience, characterizing the banality of evil. Therefore, this paragraph has demonstrated habituality and thoughtlessness are present and therefore pointing into the direction of a low feeling of responsibility.

3.2. Passive voice

The previous paragraph has demonstrated two characteristics of the banality of evil: thoughtlessness and habituality. The linguistic key in this paragraph – the passive voice – will evaluate whether distancing, the third characteristic is evident. This paragraph connects distancing to responsibility and the banality of evil by analysing the passive and pragmatic writing style. As argued in chapter 2, the writing style of the soldier is concealing when it comes to violence. Through frequent use of the passive voice, he makes it hard to define whether he himself participated in the described violence or not. But what becomes clear is that he witnessed it. His passive and pragmatic manner of writing indicates he is distancing himself from responsibility for the violence, whether it is carried out by himself or by others.

The usage of the passive voice when it comes to actions that the soldier himself possibly took part in, does not change over time. It stays concealing, not clarifying which actions he carried out himself. Additionally, the passive voice is combined with pragmatism, showing no emotion. This indicates distancing from violent actions, feeling less responsible. There is an exceptional fragment in which distancing from an unnecessary violent action is not the case. This concerns the fragment about 'cleansing' the *kampong* Wanigari, which is not written in the passive voice. Furthermore, there is explicit usage of the word 'we': 'First we fired through the cottages, whereafter we went in'.61 This passage clarifies that the soldier participated in the firing without knowing if there were inhabitants inside the cottages, and therefore, he indirectly admits responsibility. Most other fragments, however, contradict the latter fragment. Passages earlier as well as later in the diary contain the passive voice. Take, for instance, the first description of violence in the diary. Outstanding, is the passive voice in relationship to the firing: 'a few shots were fired'62. This description points into the direction that the shots were not fired by the soldier himself. By the end of October, he writes about attacking assumed enemies: 'Eight men were killed or shot down' and 'The three-inch was requested and it has thrown many bombshells again'.63 In 1949, towards the end of the war, he again writes about 'cleansing' a kampong during which '... there was only fired a few times at a few people who quickly wanted to leave the kampong.'64 This illustrates that the passive voice stays intact when it comes to describing unnecessary violence that the soldier himself witnessed and possibly participated in.

The two latter fragments above show that the passive voice stays intact when it comes to actions of others of the same rank as well. Additionally, when it comes to others, the soldier describes their actions as not his own, but his descriptions conceal who exactly

⁶¹ Ibid., 43. Translated from the Dutch passage: 'Eerst schoten we door de hutten, daarna gingen we naar binnen.'

⁶² Ibid., 28. Translated from the Dutch passage: '... werden een paar schoten gelost.'

⁶³ Ibid., 48. Translated from the Dutch, respectively 'Acht mannen werden er gedood of neergeschoten' and 'De drie inch werd aangevraagd en heeft er weer menig bommetje uitgewapt.'

⁶⁴ Ibid., 192. Translated from the Dutch passage: '... alleen enkele keren werd er geschoten op een paar personen die nog vlug de kampong wilde verlaten.'



carried them out. For instance, he describes that the nightguard thought he saw something and fired. It does not become clear who was the guard that night. The description of actions that concern the soldier himself or others of the same rank, remain mostly in the same concealing and passive voice. This demonstrates that the soldier makes no distinction between his own responsibility and the responsibility of his comrades. Nevertheless, the passive voice is also a general characteristic of the soldier's writing style. He uses the passive voice in passages that do not describe violent actions, for instance: 'In the afternoon football was played.'66 Although it is of importance to acknowledge the above, it does not take away the fact that the passive voice in general is a tool for concealment and distancing. Whether the person carrying out a violent action was the soldier himself or someone else, the passive voice enables the soldier not to point out responsibility, therefore keeping himself isolated from the actions. Take, for instance, this passage: '... a lot of ammunition was fired today.'67 This this pragmatic description of happenings makes it impossible to define the persons responsible for these actions. Therefore, it remains vague and concealing.

Striking is that the soldier describes actions of himself and others of the same rank in the same passive voice. Could this mean that he does not see the violent actions as their responsibility? If the description of violent actions carried out by superiors is less passive, this would indicate that the soldier has a lower feeling of responsibility for he experiences the carried out actions as orders. This question cannot be answered, for he hardly writes about violent actions carried out by superiors. The one time that he does describe a superior firing, he uses the active voice: '... they', referring to antagonists, 'did not shoot, not even when the Major fired a few times.' This single finding is not enough to demonstrate that the soldier describes superior's violent actions less passive. Therefore, it not just to argue that the soldier is distancing himself from violent actions as a result of experiencing his actions as being part of a hierarchical system. Therefore, the banality of evil becomes less evident from analysing the passive voice when it comes to describing superior's actions.

On the other hand, distancing becomes clear through the passive voice when it comes to describing actions in general. The descriptions do not clarify what actions the soldier himself carried out and the use of the passive voice is a tool to point into the direction that the actions were carried out by others, or to keep actions vague. Thus, the soldier keeps himself mostly isolated from the actions. Therefore, the passive voice is still arguing for a low feeling of responsibility, not necessarily as a result of being part of a hierarchical framework, but as a result of distancing. Not showing guilt or emotion further supports this argument, although not showing guilt or emotion does not mean it is not there. It is noted that this explanation for extreme structural violence has its imperfections. The writings of the soldier are not a solid reflection of his mind. Emotions such as fear can have caused him to write pragmatically and passively. Perhaps he was lost in an ocean of thoughts, guilt even, but he did not have the courage to describe this. Thus, it is possible that the banality of evil is not evident at all: that the soldier did feel

⁶⁵ Ibid., 67.

 $^{^{66}}$ Ibid., 89. Translated from the Dutch passage: "s Middags werd er gevoetbald."

⁶⁷ Ibid., 63. Translated from the Dutch passage: '... er werd deze dag veel munitie verschoten.'

⁶⁸ Ibid., 55. Translated from the Dutch passage: '... ze schoten niet, ook niet toen de Majoor een paar keer schoot.'



guilty, lost and anxious, but saw no way out. This, instead of thoughtlessness and habituality, can be an explanation for shooting at local inhabitants. The war was a guerrilla war, which made it unclear who was the antagonist.⁶⁹ Shooting at inhabitants without defining who they were could be a result of fear of being shot first. However, this does not become clear through a discourse analysis. The discourse analysis in this paragraph has shown distancing as partly evident for the banality of evil. On the one hand, the fact that the soldier does not write more explicit about superior's actions or orders indicates that he has a lower responsibility, feeling he is simply carrying out orders. On the other hand, distancing is supported through usage of the passive voice in general.

⁶⁹ Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*, 59.



Conclusion

As highlighted in the introduction, the problem with the history of extreme structural violence during the Indonesian National Revolution is that research, more often than not, focusses on the collective. Scholars such as Limpach demonstrated that Dutch violence was systematic, but not why an individual would participate in this framework. This thesis has connected individual performances of violence to a low feeling of responsibility through the research question 'what motivated an individual conscript soldier to continue participating in a systematic framework of extreme structural violence?'

Based on the results from the previous chapter, I argue that performing extreme violence became normal over time. Thoughtlessness, habituality and distancing enabled the soldier to participate in extreme structural violence. Those three indicators provided him with the low feeling of responsibility that typifies the banality of evil. The analysed linguistic keys support this conclusion. The first linguistic key, terminology, demonstrates that terminology becomes more specific over time. This finding indicates thoughtlessness and habituality. The analysis of the other linguistic key, the passive voice, results in finding it partially evident for the banality of evil. On the one hand, the passive voice is only a characteristic of the soldier's writing style. This is illustrated by passages written in a passive manner, lacking descriptions of violence. Additionally, there is no striking difference in the soldier's descriptions of actions carried out by himself in comparison to others or superiors, which points into the direction that he, opposite to Eichmann, did not experience a low feeling of responsibility as a result of being part of a hierarchical system. Nonetheless, the low feeling of responsibility becomes evident through another indicator: distancing. The passive voice is a catalyst for concealing violence. It provides the possibility to make it unclear who carried out violent actions, therefore functioning as a tool for the soldier to keep himself isolated from them. This finding supports distancing as an indicator for a low feeling of responsibility.

The results of the analysis illustrate that the diary contains three characteristics causing the low responsibility characterizing the banality of evil: thoughtlessness, habituality and distancing. Although individual thoughts and feelings cannot be generalised, the microhistory of this particular soldier demonstrates the history of an individual who did not feel responsible. Therefore, it illustrates the individual part of structural violence through the concept of the banality of evil. Concealing language could be designated as a symptom of the banality of evil, evident for both Eichmann and the anonymous soldier of this study. Therefore, the anonymous conscript soldier could be pointed out as the face of the banality of evil, just like Eichmann.

Concealing language is only one symptom of extreme structural violence. It is central to this study, for it is a case-study through a discourse analysis. A different symptom could have been found through another method. A comparative analysis of multiple diaries could have proven the banality of evil through concealing discourse only evident for this particular soldier. Thus, the results from this study can by no means be generalised. Nonetheless, this study contributes to the historiography of extreme structural violence. Whereas scholars such as Limpach prove the violence to be extreme and structural, this study analysed why an individual would participate in it. The results indicate that he had no feeling of wrongdoing. This made him a suitable contributor to the collective system of extreme structural violence. The soldier was one of the cogs in the machinery, keeping the extremely violent framework of the 'police actions' functional.



Therefore, this study has taken the first step to explain motivations for extreme structural violence on an individual level. This conclusion needs to be perceived as an explanation, but not a justification of extreme structural violence. As appears from the writings, the soldier did know that the violence was on occasions directed at ordinary inhabitants. However, a low feeling of responsibility made him able to continue witnessing and participating in extreme structural violence until the end of the war.

Although a comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this study, it is required in order to generalize this conclusion. I encourage historians to create more studies like this one, analysing discourses of more diaries. The second step is to create a prosopography, comparing those studies to one another, resulting in commonalities and differences that, once more, require further research.



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