



Dynamics of Extreme Violence during the Indonesian National Revolution in Subang, 1945-1949

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Abstract: This research aims to reconstruct the patterns and impacts of violence that occurred in the Subang region, particularly in the Pamanoekan and Tjiasem lands (P & T Lands), during the early period of the Indonesian War of Independence. Subang was a strategic area with vital economic infrastructure, making it a focal point of conflict between Dutch military interests and the guerrilla tactics of Indonesian fighters. Using the critical historical method, this study examines primary sources, including newspaper reports, memoirs, and letters from Dutch officers. The findings show that violence in Subang occurred in two main forms: infrastructure sabotage by Indonesian fighters and "cleansing" operations (*zuivering*) conducted by the Dutch army. Dutch military operations often used euphemisms to cover up repressive acts, such as the burning of villages (scorched earth) and mass executions of citizens suspected of being "troublemakers". In addition, this study highlights the precarious situation of civilians living in an acute climate of suspicion, in which they became victims of both parties to the conflict. The results conclude that violence in Subang was not merely an excess of war, but part of a systematic military strategy to control territory and logistics, which resulted in widespread suffering for the civilian population.

Keywords: Indonesian national revolution; Subang; state of exception; violence

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merekonstruksi pola dan dampak kekerasan yang terjadi di wilayah Subang, khususnya di kawasan Pamanoekan dan Tjiasem (P & T Lands), pada masa awal Perang Kemerdekaan Indonesia. Subang merupakan wilayah strategis dengan infrastruktur ekonomi vital, sehingga menjadi titik pusat konflik antara kepentingan militer Belanda dan taktik gerilya para pejuang Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan metode sejarah kritis, penelitian ini mengkaji sumber-sumber primer, termasuk laporan surat kabar, memoar, dan surat-surat dari perwira Belanda. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kekerasan di Subang terjadi dalam dua bentuk utama: sabotase infrastruktur oleh pejuang Indonesia dan operasi "pembersihan" (*zuivering*) yang dilakukan oleh tentara Belanda. Operasi militer Belanda sering kali menggunakan eufemisme untuk menutupi tindakan represif, seperti pembakaran desa (taktik bumi hangus) dan eksekusi massal terhadap warga yang dicurigai sebagai "pengacau". Selain itu, penelitian ini menyoroti situasi genting yang dihadapi warga sipil di tengah iklim kecurigaan yang akut, di mana mereka menjadi korban dari kedua belah pihak yang bertikai. Hasil penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa kekerasan di Subang bukan sekadar eksekusi perang, melainkan bagian dari strategi militer sistematis untuk menguasai wilayah dan logistik, yang mengakibatkan penderitaan luas bagi penduduk sipil.

Kata Kunci: kekerasan; revolusi nasional Indonesia; Subang; *state of exception*



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Introduction

Recent developments in historiography view the revolutionary period as a time filled with violence. Fetting (2013) writes that the violence that occurred during the revolution reached extreme levels. Estimates presented by Oostindie (2022) state that casualties during the revolution reached more than 150,000 for Indonesians and 5,000 for Dutch officers. This fact is reinforced by the acknowledgment of Dutch veteran Joop Heuting, who explained that the Dutch army burned villages and executed civilians and prisoners who were considered to be trying to escape (Limpach, 2019).

Unfortunately, that reality is not well represented in national historiography. Frakking and Wahid (2023) state that the historiography of the revolutionary period in Indonesia is trapped in a mono-narrative of defending the republic's existence against Dutch aggression. Leksana (2023) conveys his criticism by stating that domestic historians face difficulties in conveying alternative complexities, so that potential new narratives tend to be ignored. However, along with the publication of two edited volumes resulting from collaboration between Indonesian and Dutch historians, this historiographical blind spot has begun to be addressed.

Contributions from several post-collaboration historians have enriched the historiography of the revolutionary period. The writing of Yuanda Zara (2023), for example, explains poster creation as one form of revolution carried out by the Indonesian nation. These posters contained mockeries of allied troops, depicted through satirical animal-shaped caricatures. Yuanda Zara in his research successfully brought an alternative narrative outside the conventional heroic narrative usually shown in the historiography of the revolutionary period in Indonesia.

In contrast to Indonesian historians, Dutch historians focus on discussions regarding the violence that occurred during this short period. Limpach's works consistently provide findings that the violence inflicted by the Dutch military on local natives during the revolution was structural and systematic violence (Limpach, 2019, 2014). Oostindie, on the other hand, examines various diaries, letters, memoirs, biographies, and interview recordings of Dutch veterans. The focus of his study is on war crimes and trauma that existed during the revolution in Indonesia (Oostindie, 2020, 2022; Oostindie, Hoogenboom, & Verwey, 2016, 2018).

By looking at the new directional developments in the historiography of the revolutionary period, this period should begin to be viewed through a distinctive local lens. One of the regions affected by the revolutionary period and possessing broad historiographical potential is Subang Regency. The region formerly known as Pamanoekan & Tjiasemlanden directly borders major cities such as Purwakarta, Karawang, Bandung, and Indramayu, making it a territory located on an important transit route during the revolutionary period.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in its effort to present the historiography of the revolutionary period through a local perspective by placing Subang Regency as the primary locus of study, particularly in the discussion of violence. Unlike national historiography, which tends to emphasize conventional heroic narratives or macro-scale structural studies, this research highlights forms of violence experienced by civilians at the local level and its impact on social dynamics during the revolution. Thus, this study not only expands the understanding of the complexity of revolutionary violence outside the hitherto dominant centers of conflict, but also fills the gap in the historiographical narrative regarding Subang's local experience, which has so far received inadequate attention. By raising the main question, "How were the dynamics and forms of violence experienced by civilians in Subang shaped amidst the revolutionary conflict?", this study aims to uncover the blank spot in the narrative regarding Subang's history during the revolution. Through this, it is hoped that historiographical gaps, particularly in Subang, can be addressed.

Furthermore, the urgency of this study stems from the pressing need to look beyond the macro-level mono-narratives of national historiography, which frequently obscure the profound civilian suffering and social disruption experienced at the regional level. Given Subang's strategic position as a vital economic hub and transit corridor within the Pamanoekan and Tjiasem lands (P & T Lands), examining this locus is crucial to understanding how the wartime state of exception reduced local populations to *Homo sacer*, trapped in a pervasive climate of suspicion without legal or political protection.

Theoretically, this study contributes to bridging historiographical gaps in the Indonesian revolution through a "history from below" perspective. Furthermore, it seeks to pioneer the deconstruction of local violence narratives in Indonesia by applying Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception* theory, thereby providing a new analytical model for examining the relationship between sovereignty, law, and the existence of civil society during times of crisis. Practically, this study is expected to serve as a vehicle for social reconciliation within the Subang community by uncovering the marginalized narratives of civilian victims. Additionally, the findings of this research can be utilized to enrich local history curricula at the regional level, as well as serve as a primary reference for future scholars seeking to delve into micro-history and social history in the West Java region.

Research Methods

This research applies the historical method consisting of four main stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Wasino & Hartatik, 2018). At the heuristics stage, the collection of primary sources was focused on newspapers and memoirs published between 1945–1950. The search for Dutch sources was conducted through the digital repository Delpher.nl using the keywords “Soebang”, “Pamanoekan”, “Tjiassemlanden”, and “Pamanoekan & Tjiassemlanden”. From this platform, various newspapers were gathered, such as Nieuwe Courant, De Preangerbode, Het Dagblad, and De Locomotief. Meanwhile, domestic sources were accessed through the Khastara service of the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, encompassing publications such as Panjebar Semangat, Sedar, Kenpo, Sinpo, and Harian Pagi Nasional. These primary data were reinforced by analyzing memoirs available in the NIOD and Puntaal databases. The source criticism stage was conducted through external and internal verification to examine the credibility and ideological leanings of each source. Given the contrasting colonial and national backgrounds, the author performed cross-source comparisons to identify reporting biases. Next, the verified data were analytically interpreted to reveal the dynamics and forms of violence that occurred in Subang during the revolutionary period. The final stage, historiography, was carried out by constructing a chronological and contextual historical narrative based on the results of the data processing.

Research Result

From Private Lands to State Lands

Subang Regency is a region existing between the Java Sea to the north, the Cilamaya River to the west, the Cipunagara River to the east, and Priangan to the south (Imadudin, Sofianto, & Falah, 2012). Before becoming a regency, this area was better known as the private land domain of Pamanoekan & Tjiassemlanden (P & T Lands). The phenomenon of the emergence of private lands was originally caused by the practice of selling state lands to non-indigenous private parties, especially the Chinese and Europeans (Samsudin & Wijayati, 2025; Wijayati, 2001). These lands were traded because state savings and revenues were unable to cover the operational sustainability of government administration (Effendhie, 2007; Darini & Ekayati, 2023; Amelia Claudia, Atha Prima Azaria, Ghina Annisa Nurshaliha, & Intan Asri

Hakim, 2024). In 1812, based on a manuscript titled *Short History of Pamanoe kan & Tjiasemlands*, this region (marked as parcels 3 & 4) was sold by Raffles to Muntinghe for 30,000 Spanish dollars (KITLV, 1938).

Although Muntinghe was recorded as the first owner, it was only during the era of Sharpnell and Skelton that the two land parcels of Pamanoe kan and Tjiasem were united into a single administrative territory of P & T Lands (Samsudin & Wijayati, 2025). After that, the area, which reached an extent of 212,900 hectares, changed ownership several times (Effendhie, 1999). There were several names of owners in P & T, but the most well-known was Peter William Hofland, who officially owned the entire enterprise after his brother, Thomas Benjamin Hofland, stepped down in 1858 (Samsudin & Wijayati, 2025).

Several previous researchers concluded that during Hofland's period of ownership, P & T Lands reached its golden era (Effendhie, 1999; Imadudin et al., 2012; Junaedi, 2018). However, after Hofland passed away, the enterprise gradually declined and began to falter. The decline was caused by the incompetence of Hofland's successors—his own children—in managing the company. In addition, in 1880 a financial crisis occurred that caused coffee prices to crash on the world market (Kartodirdjo & Suryo, 1991; Kharimah, 2023). This crisis forced Hofland's children to transform the enterprise into an N.V. (*Naamloze Vennootschap*).

Hofland's children formed N.V. Maatschappij tot Exploitatie van de Pamanoe kan en Tjiasemlanden, but in 1903, the majority of shares were acquired by N.I. Landbouw Maatschappij, which subsequently took over control of the company (Imadudin, 2014; KITLV, 1938). In 1911, ownership of P & T Lands transferred to the company Anglo-Dutch Plantation of Java Limited (Imadudin, 2014). And in 1920, considering various problems occurring on the private lands, the government gradually bought up land in P & T (Imadudin, 2014).

Towards the Revolutionary Period

August 1945 marked a decisive phase in Indonesian history. On August 15, the Empire of Japan accepted defeat and surrendered unconditionally to the Allies, thereby also ending their occupation in Indonesia, which had lasted approximately 3.5 years. Two days later, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. Meanwhile on the Dutch side, the restoration of the realm was felt to be a new obligation, with one of its goals being post-war economic reconstruction (Romijn, 2020). However, at that time the Netherlands did not have adequate troops. Ultimately, it was British Allied forces that arrived first and seized control of several small areas in key Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Semarang (Romijn, 2012). In late August towards early September 1945, various relief efforts began for prisoners of war, displaced persons, and other victims. This action was carried out by UN agencies, RAPWI, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, Indonesia, and the Dutch East Indies (Romijn, 2020).

In late September 1945, British forces under the authority of the SEAC command led by Lord Louis Mountbatten landed in Jakarta (formerly named Batavia). The objective brought by these forces was to restore peace and order. They disarmed and repatriated Japanese troops, and additionally evacuated European internees (Romijn, 2020). In the Netherlands, the priority was different. The Dutch military demanded that the Allies restore order in the territory they still believed to be their colony. The agenda brought by the Netherlands was to reoccupy the Archipelago as had been done for hundreds of years. However, the British Government and Commander Mountbatten had no desire to become involved in Dutch recolonization efforts. This reluctance stemmed from political sympathy that arose among British troops, who were mostly British-Indian, toward the Indonesian struggle (Romijn, 2012, 2020).

In December 1945, the Dutch Government decided to send the first unit of Oorlogsvrijwilligers (OVW) or war volunteers to the Dutch East Indies. The volunteers were told that extremist bands had to be eliminated for the purpose of expanding beneficial governance for the entire Indies (Kingma, 1948; Romijn, 2020). The first division of OVW sent was named the "7 December Division", referring to Queen Wilhelmina's speech on December 7, 1942 (Foray, 2012; Romijn, 2020). This first unit departed from Southampton on British troopships and only reached East Indies waters in mid-January 1946 (Romijn, 2020).

In Indonesia, after news of the proclamation was disseminated, the atmosphere of independence echoed across various regions. Several Indonesian youths joined pro-republican groups or laskar militias (Prayogi, Setiawan, & Nasrullah, 2024). In the first few weeks, the remaining Japanese troops were described as withdrawing from urban areas to avoid confrontation with the people (Isnaeni, 2015; Prayogi et al., 2024). During that time, youths "ready to die" for independence could be found everywhere. Abductions of non-indigenous people, Dutch internees, Eurasian (Indo) individuals, Moluccans, and Chinese were common. The reason for abduction was usually because these individuals were considered spies. Youths who viewed older leaders as "traitors of the revolution" became the group that triggered the outbreak of internal conflict among civilians (Reid, 1974). It is understandable that the situation at the time was chaotic and filled with suspicion, even among fellow Indonesians themselves. That chaos, together with the arrival of OVW troops, and ideological intrigues among civilians, constituted the opening chapter of the revolutionary period.

During the revolutionary period, the Subang region became the seat of the Jakarta Residency. In December 1946, an event occurred that played a significant role in the existence of the Subang area, namely the appointment of Kosasih Purwanagara as resident of the Jakarta Residency. The appointment of Kosasih was accompanied by the appointment of Mu'min as vice resident (Husni, 2019). Under Kosasih's leadership, a meeting was held in Cimanggu hamlet, Cimenteng Village, which issued several decisions, one of which was to guarantee the smooth functioning of government by dividing the territory into: East Karawang led by someone named Karlan, and West Karawang whose management was handed over to Mu'min (Husni, 2019).

On October 26, 1947, due to communication difficulties and a deteriorating situation, Kosasih Purwanagara left Subang, followed by Mu'min who left Purwakarta on February 6, 1948. Having lost two leaders, Karlan and his companions held a meeting on April 5, 1948, which resulted in the decision to appoint the first regents of East Karawang and West Karawang, namely Danta Ganda Wikarma and Syafei. That East Karawang territory subsequently became Subang Regency (Kusma, 2007).

Knowing the critical situation after Kosasih Purwanagara left, particularly regarding the arrival of Dutch troops in Subang, several laskar organizations were reinforced. Some of the organizations in question were the BKR headquartered at Gedong Gede, Pesindo at Gedung Geding, KRIS and Barisan Banteng at Gedung Cipo, Pasukan Istimewa at Gedung Pasanggrahan, Hizbullah in the Gedung Big House area, Laskar Buruh Indonesia at the Howing Pavilion, BP BPRI at Gang Asem, Pasukan Tarate at the Engineer Building, and POLISI at Gedung Hejo and Kontrolir (Tim Peneliti, 1980).

On the other hand, regarding how Dutch troops entered the East Karawang or Subang area, notes by an officer named Johannes Bernardus Christiaan Berendsen provide impressive clarity:

Poerwakarta onbeschadigd, behalve de T.R.I.-kazerne, gebombardeerd door de onzen. Namen hier 8 Brits-Indische soldaten gevangen, die overgeleverd zijn aan de Engelsen en terechtgesteld zijn wegens desertie uit het Engelse leger. Van

Poerwakarta naar Pamanoekean, van hier naar Soebang, toen we daar aankwamen stond de hele stad in lichtervlaam door de T.R.I. (Berendsen, 1947).

Purwakarta was undamaged, except for the T.R.I. barracks, which were bombed by our forces. Here we captured 8 British-Indian soldiers, who were handed over to the British and executed for desertion from the British army. From Purwakarta to Pamanukan, from here to Subang; when we arrived there, the entire city was ablaze (burned) by the T.R.I. From Purwakarta to Ciater.

From the notes above, it can be learned that Dutch troops came from the west (specifically from Cikarang). From Cikarang, the troops pushed into the Tambun area, only then reaching Karawang. Dutch troops continued penetrating to the east, namely toward Cilamaya and Purwakarta. Only after scorching Purwakarta did they arrive in the Pamanukan area, Subang (Berendsen, 1947).

Furthermore, Berendsen also wrote several short notes regarding what his team did while in Subang. For example, on Monday, July 28, 1947, he wrote, “*Zijn nu in de uitgestrekte Pamanoekean en Tjasem landen. Om Tjasem felle, maar korte gevechten, zwaar mortiervuur wordt beantwoord met de kanonnen* (Now in the vast Pamanukan and Ciasem lands. Around Ciasem fierce, but short battles; heavy mortar fire is answered with cannons)”, indicating that intense firefights occurred between the laskar and TRI in Subang and the Dutch forces. After those tense events, only on July 30–31, 1947, based on Berendsen's statements, did Subang fall and become occupied (Berendsen, 1947).

Chaos During the Revolutionary Period

Djaja Negara near Paroeng koeda attacked. Gg. Anaga near Poerwakarta burned. Maswati near Poerwakarta burned. Gg. Soesoetoe near Poerwakarta burned. Kembang Koenig near Poerwakarta burned. Tjibening near Poerwakarta attacked. Between November 4 and 19, plantations in the Pamanoekean and Tjasem land were attacked 11 times (Waspada, 1947).

The text above is an excerpt from an article in the December 27, 1947 edition of the *Waspada* newspaper. According to the information presented, the conflict that occurred in Subang (or East Karawang) during the early period of the revolution took place on a broad scale. The burnings that occurred in Gang Anaga, Soesoetoe, Kembang Koenig, and Tjibening around Purwakarta, followed by 11 attacks on P & T plantations between November 4 and 19, mark the first case of extreme violence to be analyzed in this sub-section.

Extreme violence is most commonly defined as a form of violence synonymous with criminality (Ferguson & Beaver, 2009; Thuyen, Hai, Kuhr, Tien, & Dao, 2024; Anqi, 2025). This type of violence is typically driven by intense emotions such as anger, hatred, and revenge (Turner, 2007; Fischer, Halperin, Canetti, & Jasini, 2018; Van Doorn, 2018; Sun, Yu, & Li, 2023). In his review, Turner (2007) further associates extreme violence with armed forces in the context of national or international conflicts. Ultimately, such violence often stems from a strong sense of solidarity built among officers (Turner, 2007; Fors Brandebo, Börjesson, & Hilmarsson, 2022; Utama, 2025).

In the case of violence occurring during the revolution in Indonesia, a period known as *bersiap* is recognized. The *bersiap* period was a chapter in Indonesian history that took place after Japan surrendered and before the return of Dutch troops, when Allied forces were tasked with maintaining security. During this period, thousands of civilians including Dutch internees,

Indo-Dutch, Chinese, and Ambonese became victims of a series of acts of violence committed by Indonesian youth and militias (Wahid, 2016).

In the novel *Jalan Tak Ada Ujung*, Mochtar Lubis frequently wrote the word “Siap” to depict scenes where struggle militias conflicted with Allied troops (Lubis, 2001). The word “siap” was usually followed by a series of violent actions, such as shootings or searches. The fear generated during that period made the bersiap period a turning point for counter-violence when Dutch forces arrived in Indonesia.

On the Dutch side, all violence caused by Indonesian youth and militias during the bersiap period was fuel for revenge. Journalist Fabricius argued that the blame for the violence in the final months of 1945 had to be placed on the Indonesian side (Van 'T Veer, 2024). Therefore, Dutch retaliatory violence was a form of response to the violence committed by Indonesians during that brief period (Honings, 2021; Van 'T Veer, 2024). Following Van 'T Veer's train of thought, one strategy to justify violence was to depict the 'Other' as a 'despicable' figure. The role of emphasizing racial hierarchy between Europeans and non-Europeans became crucial here. Because of this, the dogma that Indonesians were a primitive nation prone to amok was able to flourish. With this flourishing dogma, violence transformed into a justification for counter-violence (Van 'T Veer, 2024). This was one of the initial fuels for why violence by the Dutch during the revolutionary period occurred.

Meanwhile, on the side of Indonesian fighters, the erasure of all things colonial was felt to be an obligation. The slogan “Indonesia is never again the life blood of any other nation” became a firm declaration of stance. In Subang, the erasure of everything with colonial nuances also impacted physical objects. For example, in an article in the August 20, 1947 edition of the newspaper *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser Courant*:

In West-Java is in de streek van Krawang ongeveer de helft van de Chinese rijstpellerijen vernietigd. De in de kaart genoemde drie grote rijstpellerijen in de Tjiasem- en Pamanoekanlanden zijn de Pamanoekan, Poesakaratoe en de Pegaden-Baroe. In Tjikampek zijn de nog resterende acht rijstpellerijen bedrijfsklaar. De twee grote reparatiewerkplaatsen, die voor alle pellerijen in de Krawangvlakte werkten, zijn zo goed als leeggeroofd. Het hoofdkantoor der Tjiasem- en Pamanoekanlanden is vernield (Provinciale Drentsche en Asser Courant, 1947).

In West Java, in the Karawang area, about half of the Chinese rice mills have been destroyed. The three large rice mills mentioned on the map in the Tjiasem and Pamanoekan lands are Pamanoekan, Poesakaratoe, and Pegaden-Baroe. In Cikampek, the remaining eight rice mills are ready for operation. The two large repair workshops that served all mills in the Karawang plain have been almost completely looted. The head office of the Tjiasem and Pamanoekan lands has been destroyed.

The destruction carried out by the people of Subang against colonial symbols, such as the three rice mills in Pamanoekan, Poesakaratoe, and Pegaden-Baroe, demonstrated the people's anger toward things associated with the Dutch. At its peak, the headquarters of P & T, often called The Big House, was also razed to the ground.

The chaos that arose during the revolution in Subang did not stop at physical destruction alone, but extended to terror. An article published in the February 26, 1948 edition of *Kengpo*, for example, highlights an incident in which three individuals accused of being rioters were arrested by the M.P. for throwing a grenade at Purwadadi Market. The explosion from the grenade severely injured several minors (Kengpo, 1948). Although the attribution of the perpetrators remains debated, this incident reflects an acute climate of suspicion among the people of Subang.

Worse still, the August 2, 1947 edition of *Nieuwe Courant* reported even more massive destruction. According to an official Aneta report, the hydroelectric power plant (PLTA) belonging to the Saregsari factory (northwest of Segalaherang) had been destroyed. A similar fate befell the Tjidjambe PLTA (northeast of Segalaherang) and Goenoengtoea. Meanwhile, the Tjinangling PLTA was partially damaged, and several bridges collapsed (*Nieuwe Courant*, 1947). In several other articles, such as the June 28, 1948 edition of *Harian Pagi Nasional*, it was stated that a 200-meter section of the railway track between Kosambi and Tjikampek was sabotaged, and a 100-meter section between Tjikampek and Pegaden-Baroe was dismantled (*Harian Pagi Nasional*, 1948). Another recorded case, as in the August 25, 1948 edition of *Kengpo*, involved two railway track workers between Pegaden and Pasirboengoer who, while inspecting the rails, saw a group removing rail screws and placing log obstacles in the middle of the track (*Kengpo*, 1948).

This rail sabotage tactic was one of several used by Indonesian fighters to attack Dutch forces. Similar incidents can be found in a letter by a Dutch officer named Klaas Bruinsma, who during the revolution was stationed in Soekamelang, around the Pegaden district. This letter was transcribed by Hilma Bruinsma, his daughter, to be posted on her website, Puntaal. In the letter, Klaas explained that the railway line between Karawang and Cirebon was frequently dismantled or sabotaged by Indonesian troops. This led to trains being heavily escorted by Dutch forces. Besides sabotage, another method used by Indonesian troops was piling stones on the rails, forcing trains to stop to clear the rocks. When the train stopped, Indonesian troops would shower it with gunfire before fleeing (Klaas, 1947).

This hit-and-run strategy by Indonesian fighters frustrated Dutch troops. Forces that originally chose a defensive posture were ultimately forced to go out and fight. Klaas wrote in his letter:

Na de laatste strubbelingen nemen we geen enkel risico meer en schieten meteen. Daardoor worden ook wel eens onschuldige slachtoffers getroffen. Je kunt aan de buitenkant niet zien of het een TNI-er of een goedwillende kampongbewoner is. Het is jammer maar er is niets aan te doen. We moeten korte metten maken en TNI een slag voor zijn. Voor ons zijn tien onschuldige inlanders beter dan één van ons. Er sneuvelen de laatste tijd al meer dan genoeg (Klaas, 1947).

After the latest friction, we take no more risks and shoot immediately. Because of that, innocent victims are also sometimes hit. You cannot see from the outside whether someone is a TNI member or a well-meaning village resident. It is unfortunate, but nothing can be done. We must act decisively and be one step ahead of the TNI. For us, ten innocent natives are better than losing one of our own. Lately, more than enough have fallen.

The psychological pressure among Dutch troops due to these hit-and-run tactics resulted in innocent civilians taking the brunt. Their difficult position—where reporting would lead to execution by Indonesian fighters for being considered traitors, and remaining silent would draw suspicion from Dutch troops for being considered part of the "Indonesian extremists"—made extreme violence against them difficult to avoid. The following sub-section details the specific types of violence that occurred in Subang during the revolution.

Violence Against Civilians During the Revolutionary Period

To examine the violence inflicted on civilians, a guiding lens is first required. Why did violence occur? Was it intentional? Or was there a specific situation in which morality collapsed and violence became inevitable? As a starting point, both Dutch forces and Indonesian fighters

had their respective versions of truth: one felt that its colonial land had been contaminated and therefore had to be purified, while the other wanted to defend its independence from the shackles of colonialism. However, behind these two conflicting forces lay a gray space where individuals were excluded. That space was occupied by people not involved between the two warring forces. They were civilians living under suspicion. In Agamben's terms, they were *Homo sacer*, born out of a state of emergency in which the law was suspended (Agamben, 2020; Antonello, 2019; Caravaca Morera, 2019; Prozorov, 2023).

Homo sacer is a concept used by Italian thinker Giorgio Agamben in his theory of the State of Exception. The term refers to a condition in which a human being loses political attributes (*bios*) and is viewed merely as a natural body (*zoe*). *Homo sacer* refers to Roman law regarding *sacertus*. *Sacertus* was a juridical-religious sanction imposed on anyone who disturbed the *pax deorum* (Peace of the Gods), causing the person sentenced to lose the political protection granted to every citizen (bare life) (Antonello, 2019). *Homo sacer* would be excluded from both *ius humanum* (human law) and *ius divinum* (divine law) (Agamben, 2020; Burke, 2019).

During the revolutionary period, as Wahid observed, chaotic conditions could not be contained, and violence occurred in various forms. In his investigation, as many as 779 reports of violence were found during that brief period (Wahid, 2016). Of course, this number could still increase, given that new sources constantly reveal new events. What is clear, however, is that the setting of the revolutionary period was a state of emergency. Regarding this urgency, Wahid notes that the principle of “better safe than sorry, kill or be killed” became the sole option if one wished to survive (Wahid, 2016; Wimmer & Miner, 2020; Bara & Schumann, 2025).

In Subang, several cases of violence were recorded in both newspapers and officer memoirs. The first is a case of cleansing recorded in the July 19, 1948 edition of *Kengpo*. The article itself is rather long and multi-layered, so I will divide it into several discussions per paragraph.

Pembersihan di Tjikampek. Berhoeboeng kegentingan di sekiternja Tjikampek teroes memoentjak, oleh I.D. dan K.N.I.L. koetika Djoemahat berselang, soedah dilakoeken penangkepan besar-besaran, tida koerang 35 orang soedah ditangkep dan bebrapa sendjata bersama sadjoemblah peloeroe dibeslag (Kengpo, 1948).

In the opening paragraph, an event termed as “cleansing” (pembersihan) in Tjikampek and its surroundings is described. This term was consistently used and raised by Dutch forces or pro-Dutch media as a euphemism for massacre. This can also be seen in Berendsen's diary, specifically in the sentence “*Zijn nog in Tjiater en zuiveren een beetje de kampongs, veel geweren, munitie en wapens is de buit* (Still in Ciater doing a bit of cleansing in the villages; many rifles, ammunition, and weapons are the loot)” which he wrote on Sunday, August 3, 1947. There, Berendsen also used the term “cleansing” or “purification” in the Tjiater area, Subang.

To understand what cleansing was and how the process was carried out, a letter from an OVW veteran deployed in East Java might provide a brief picture. Reported in an article on the *De Groene Amsterdammer* website, a letter coded 2121 gives painful testimony regarding what the writer described as the worst case he could recall. The action began when a marine vehicle struck a landmine planted by Indonesian fighters in a village in East Java (the letter writer admitted forgetting the name of the village). The landmine incident instantly killed all marines in the vehicle at the time (the exact number was not mentioned). Immediately after the incident became known, fresh troops were deployed to the location to conduct a “cleansing” in the area. All houses in the village were burned. A day later, orders for a *strafexpeditie* (punitive

expedition) were issued. Across a 10 km area, all houses were burned and all males over the age of 14 had to be shot dead. Tragically, when the writer and his team returned after the execution, young children stood in front of their burned houses with thumbs raised while shouting “Djumpol Toean”, unaware that their fathers and brothers had been executed (Mathijssen, 2019).

Now the question arises: was the process of “cleansing” that occurred in Subang similar to that in the East Java village? To answer this, the continuation of the July 19, 1948 edition of *Kengpo* reads as follows:

Bebrapa tractor dan truck dari K.N.I.L. soedah koeroeng tiap desa dan penggledahan dilakoeken sanget tertip. Di antara marika ada terdapat 2 bekas students G.H.S. Banjak soerat resia soedah dibeslag oleh militair, begitoe djoega plakaat jang sifatnja menghina pada Blanda. Penangkapan di tiga desa jaitoe di Kalihoerip, Doekoeh dan Babakan, dapetken perlawanan tapi satelah saling tembak, achirnja pengatjau voejar dengan tinggalken 2 korban (Kengpo, 1948).

As revealed in the continuation paragraph of *Kengpo* above, blockades and searches were conducted in three villages: Kalihoerip, Doekoeh, and Babakan. Among them (the searched villagers), there were two former students of the Geneeskundige Hoogeschool (Medical High School). All placards considered insulting to the Dutch were also confiscated. The existence of these insulting placards aligns with Yuanda Zara's study on media as a revolutionary tool for Indonesian society at the time (Yuanda Zara, 2023). Next, arrests occurred accompanied by exchanges of gunfire. The action resulted in two casualties from the fighter side, though it was not explained in detail whether these two were actual fighters or civilians made to look like fighters.

The cleansing (*zuiveren*) conducted in Subang followed a pattern nearly identical to that described in letter 2121 in East Java. Both were moments when bios within an individual was reduced until only *zoe* remained. That moment occurred with the military surrounding villages using ‘tractors’ and ‘trucks’, symbolizing the absence of space for civilians to defend themselves politically. Furthermore, the article continuation stated, “They turned out to have a broad, well-organized organization led by educated people; the plan was arranged such that within this month they were to act simultaneously (Kengpo, 1948)”, implying that every educated person received extra attention because they were viewed (suspected) as the masterminds behind all fighter activities and plans. Although it must be acknowledged, the article provided no further explanation regarding the fate of those two former G.H.S. students.

From another example, an article in the September 20, 1948 edition of *Kengpo* provides information regarding actions in the East Karawang area (including Subang). The article reported that the K.N.I.L. was assigned to guard several areas from attacks by “troublemakers”. The actions carried out by the K.N.I.L. occurred primarily at night through patrol activities. From these patrols, it was reported that hundreds of “troublemakers” had been apprehended and shot dead (Kengpo, 1948).

As another illustration, the cleansing conducted by Dutch troops against the people of Subang is shown in Bruinsma's letters. In one of his letters around July 1948, Bruinsma described how the situation deteriorated when he and his team faced armed group terror. He explained that during the first half of July, a total of nine villages were erased. He viewed this small-scale village burning or scorched earth (*verschroeide aarde*) tactic as harsh but necessary. If not done, the armed groups left unchecked could potentially commit looting, shootings, and sabotage against much infrastructure around the area. Furthermore, captured members of armed groups (stated to be roughly 200 people) were interrogated in the “old way”. Cleansing via

scorched earth tactics was considered effective because armed groups (Indonesian fighters) would lose their foothold, food supplies would burn, and they would be forced to seek alternative hideouts. On the other hand, this tactic was also considered to make residents hesitant to cooperate with those fighters (armed groups) (Klaas, 1948).

The two examples of cleansing in the September 20, 1948 edition of *Kengpo* and Klaas Bruinsma's letters demonstrate the trapped state of Subang's civilians during the revolution. Interventions by the Dutch Army against the living spaces (villages) of the population made their protection of life extremely thin, if not non-existent altogether. The tendency of Dutch soldiers like Bruinsma to refer to Indonesian fighters as gangs or troublemakers gave them moral justification to conduct cleansings regardless of whether those individuals were protected by any right to life. On the other hand, Bruinsma's letters also record the psychological pressure experienced by Dutch soldiers in Subang during the revolution. For instance, in one letter, Bruinsma wrote that they feared a resurgence of battle, hoping that all chaos and problems would be swiftly resolved so the situation would become more peaceful (Klaas, 1948).

In 1949, conflict in Subang had still not abated. Several articles reported ongoing conflict between fighters and Dutch troops. Worse, several of these conflicts once again ensnared casualties who were likely civilians. In the September 2, 1949 edition of *Waspada*, an incident was reported involving Dutch police from Jakarta arriving in the Ciasem region, where they were tasked with confiscating a large quantity of contraband goods destined for Singapore. The police inadvertently encountered a unit of the Indonesian Army. Upon first arrival, the police were immediately greeted with warning shots and shouts of "Merdeka". The police were surrounded by approximately 80 members of the Indonesian Army and could not move. For two hours, the police were detained until they requested permission for the goods to be inspected and seized. The goods consisted of quinine, cloth, and pepper (Waspada, 1949). Although nothing was stated about what occurred during the two-hour wait or afterward, the report showed that sentiments between the two conflicting parties remained high, even though the Round Table Conference was already underway in August 1949.

In addition, sabotage cases were still rampant. In the July 7, 1949 edition of *Sedar*, for example, it was reported that around 12 noon, an unescorted train had just left Pringkasap Station bound for the Pabuaran halt. En route, the engineer saw a red flag raised in the middle of the track. Suspecting track damage, the engineer brought the train to a stop. But after stopping, roughly 100 armed gang members suddenly emerged from the left and right, 6 of whom held the engineer at gunpoint with pistols and forced him down. The remaining members entered the carriages and gave similar orders to the passengers. Frightened passengers quickly disembarked and fled, leaving their belongings behind. Several gang members who understood locomotives tried to operate the train, but the incident coincided with the passage of a Dutch patrol force consisting of a truck and a jeep. Seeing this, Dutch forces disembarked from their truck and intervened in the robbery. The gang members were pursued by Dutch forces, leading to a firefight that lasted for three hours. The action claimed 2 lives on the gang side and 1 on the Dutch side (Sedar, 1949).

The term "gerombolan" (gang/armed group), as used in the case above, refers to ununiformed Indonesian fighters. The term was used, once again, to justify every action taken by the Dutch army as a way to maintain security stabilization. The March 21, 1949 edition of *Sin Po*, in an article titled "Daerah P & T Moelai Anget", provided a list of conflict events occurring in Subang during the revolution. Some of these events included: A truck owned by the P & T Company in Cicadas was shot at by an armed group hiding in a bamboo grove near the main road; the morning patrol in Sumurgintung village, Pagaden Baru, was attacked by two armed men on the night of Saturday, March 11–12; the following day, March 12–13,

Bojonggeding village in Binong District was visited by an armed group; then on Sunday, several P & T employees in Sukamandi went hunting for wild boar. Near Rancabango village, they were reported to have crossed paths with armed groups, resulting in a firefight that left one P & T employee dead (Sin Po, 1949).

There was a specific method for clearing armed groups, as revealed by Bruinsma in one of his letters. First, Dutch troops would set up cannons in hidden locations aimed directly at areas suspected to be their nests or headquarters. The cannon range varied between 4 to 11 km. An operation of this kind required at least 100 or more infantry troops. Before execution, troop squads had already calculated the direction, distance, and everything necessary on maps. Patrol squads would carry radio receivers and transmitters identical to those of the crews responsible for the cannons. After receiving a signal from the patrol commander, the cannons were fired. Bruinsma noted that if they were lucky and the armed group was still at the siege location, their lives were over then and there (*ze zijn nog niet jarig*) (Klaas, 1949).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Subang region—historically defined by the vast and economically significant Pamanoekan & Tjiassemlanden (P & T Lands)—served as a harrowing centre for systematic violence during the Indonesian National Revolution (1945–1949). Beyond its status as a strategic corridor, Subang was, above all, a lived space where the human cost of conflict was most acutely felt. The clash between Dutch recolonisation interests, prioritising economic restoration, and the Indonesian struggle for sovereignty transformed this territory into a landscape of constant peril. The findings suggest that the violence inflicted upon this region was not merely a series of accidental wartime excesses, but rather a deliberate military strategy that prioritised territorial and logistical control over the sanctity of human life.

The dynamics of this conflict revealed a devastating symmetry of destruction. On one hand, Indonesian fighters and laskar (militias) adopted a desperate scorched-earth policy, dismantling colonial symbols—from rice mills to the iconic 'Big House'—to paralyse the enemy's economic machinery. On the other hand, the Dutch military apparatus responded with 'cleansing' (*zuivering*) operations, a clinical term that functioned as a chilling euphemism for the reality of village burnings and summary executions. These field practices, characterised by collective punishment and the impersonal terror of long-range artillery fired from distances of up to 11 kilometres, underscore a profound dehumanisation of warfare. In the pursuit of 'security', the military logic of the time reduced vibrant communities to mere targets on a map, where the safety of civilian life was consistently sacrificed for tactical efficiency.

Theoretically, the tragedy in Subang provides a stark empirical validation of Giorgio Agamben's concept of the State of Exception. In this theatre of war, the normal legal order was not merely disrupted; it was entirely suspended, creating a 'grey zone' where the local populace was reduced to Homo sacer, or 'bare life' (*zoe*) stripped of political protection and basic rights. The pervasive 'climate of suspicion' forced civilians into a state of terminal precariousness, trapped between the loyalty demands of the Republic and the lethal repression of Dutch patrols. For the people of Subang, existence during this period was defined by a haunting uncertainty, where one's status as a 'civilian' offered no refuge from being labelled a 'disturber' or a 'target'.

In finality, by illuminating the micro-history of Subang, this research seeks to address a profound blind spot in national historiography. While the grand narrative of the revolution is often told through a lens of heroic triumph, the lived reality in the P & T Lands reminds us of the silence and suffering at the grassroots level. By integrating primary archival evidence—from the cold reports of the *Kengpo* newspaper to the weary reflections of Dutch officers like Klaas Bruinsma—this study offers a more compassionate yet critical account of the revolution.

It serves as a reminder that behind every strategic victory and political milestone, there lies a human history of loss, suggesting that the true price of sovereignty was often paid in the 'bare lives' of those caught in the unforgiving machinery of war.

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