From colonizer to victim: The memory culture of the War in the Pacific through the Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad Monument

De colonizador a víctima: La memoria cultural de la Guerra En El Pacífico a través del Monumento a la Línea Ferroviaria Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe

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Abstract

In this article I will demonstrate how the Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad Monument embodies the development of the memory culture about the War in the Pacific in the Netherlands. I will explain why this was a contested war, and outline the ways in which it did gain a place in Dutch memory culture. Through a visual analysis I will also uncover who is being excluded from the monument's commemoration and why.

Resumen

En este artículo demostraré como el monumento a la línea ferroviaria Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe da cuerpo al desarrollo de la memoria cultural sobre la Segunda Guerra Mundial en el Pacífico en el ámbito de los Países Bajos. Explicaré por qué se trató de una guerra cuestionada, así como trataré de esbozar las fórmulas mediante las que este monumento ha alcanzado su lugar en la memoria cultural de los Países Bajos. A través de un análisis visual, trataré igualmente de desentrañar quién queda excluido del ámbito de conmemoración del monumento y por qué ocurre esto.

Keywords

War in the Pacific, Memory Culture, Commemoration, *Lieux de Mémoire*, *multidirectional memory.*

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Palabras clave
Segunda Guerra Mundial en el Pacífico, Memoria cultural, Conmemoración, Lugares de memoria, Memoria muldireccional.

Summary:

Sumario:

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IMAGE 1

Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad Monument, Tamara Breugelmans, taken 29th December 2017.

1. Introduction

Due to the divide in the Netherlands about its former colony, the Dutch East Indies, and in particular about the role of the Dutch as a colonial power, the commemoration of the War in the Pacific has had a difficult development in the Dutch memory culture and still is the subject of debate. The Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad Monument is located at the Bronbeek estate, and when it was bought by King William III in 1854 served as a home for the elderly and disabled of the Royal Dutch Indies Army (KNIL)[1], which it still does today. As there are now only just a handful of former KNIL-soldiers living there, the Ministry of Defence - which is the present owner - uses the estate to promote larger awareness about the history of the Dutch East Indies, for instance through museum exhibitions and several monuments that are scattered around the estate (Ravensbergen,

1 Translation of Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger, which existed from 1830 until 1950. It is also important to know that the KNIL existed out of Dutch soldiers, but also Indo-Europeans and at the very bottom Indonesians, who for instance had to do the errands.

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2015, p. 3,5).The Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad Monument itself represents only a small part of the history that the Bronbeek museum wants to create more understanding about. In specific, the monument commemorates the prisoners of war and forced labourers who perished during the War in the Pacific during the construction of the Burma-Siam railroad between Thailand and Myanmar (former Burma). Later, the commemoration of the victims of the Pakan Baroe railroad in Indonesia were also added to the monument.[2]

During the War in the Pacific, the Dutch East Indies were occupied from 1942 until 1945 by Japan, who was expanding its territories with the aim of establishing a great Asian empire under its rule (Bingen, 1999, p.88).In this period, the role of the Dutch in the Dutch East Indies thus changed from being the colonizer to being victims of war. According to Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, "implying patterns of inclusion and exclusion – who remembers whom and what, who and what is left out? – Pacific War monuments in the Netherlands are illustrative examples of the ongoing construction and contestation of the Pacific War" (2003, p. 106). She goes on to argue, along the lines of Pierre Nora, that these monuments function as *lieux de mémoire*, by serving as a centre for visibility for the Indies group[3], and define their identity, rather than a national one, at a time when memory is starting to lose contact with history itself (*ibid:* 128).

Before going into an analysis of the Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad monument, I will explain in this article why the War in the Pacific was such a contested war and how its memory culture developed in the Netherlands, in particular through Pacific War monuments. As there is little archival information to be found concerning the monument itself, I have gathered most of the information from an interview that I conducted with a former facility manager at Bronbeek, who later became the vice-president of the organisation that tries to keep these memories alive.[4] In the analysis of the monument I will answer

2 Website National Committee 4 and 5th of May: https://www.4en5mei.nl/herdenken-en-vieren/oorlogsmonumenten/monumenten_zoeken/oorlogsmonument/837/arnhem%2C-birma-siam-en-pakan-baroe-spoorwegen-monument

3 The term Indies is an umbrella term for people of Dutch nationality that still have ties to the former Dutch East Indies. This can be Indo-European people, who have mixed blood, but also white Dutch people who used to live in the Dutch East Indies.

4 The interviewee wishes to remain anonymous.

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how the monument fits into the development of the Pacific War memory culture in the Netherlands. Through a visual analysis - described by Mieke Bal as a critical analysis of visible objects and the way in which they are framed, including relations of power and sources of inequity (Bal, 2008, p. 178)- I will also try to find out who is included and excluded from its commemoration and why.

2. The contested war

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Netherlands still had a firm grip on their colony of the Dutch East Indies, even though Indonesian nationalism came to the forefront in 1908 already. The Dutch government legitimatized maintaining their colonies from a civilizing mission point of view, in which they saw it as their moral duty to rule the colonies and its people. In the Dutch East Indies, this resulted in a layered society, in which the white Dutch people were the highest in the hierarchy, after that came the Indo-Europeans of mixed blood – who were formally recognized as being a Dutch citizens, which in reality certainly did not mean that they therefore had the same opportunities as the white Dutch people – to be followed by the native Indonesians, all the way at the bottom of the ladder (Captain & Jones, 2010, p. 36 - 37).In Japan's quest to destroy the European upper layer in order to establish a great Asian empire, everyone who was considered European was put into camps (Leeuwen, 2008, p.35). Most of the Indo-Europeans were considered Asian by the Japanese, and therefore most of them remained outside the camps, with the exception of those who had fought for the KNIL who were taken as prisoners of war. However, as most Indo-Europeans resisted the Japanese occupation, the Japanese largely distrusted them, and consequently they were far from safe outside the camps either (Captain & Jones, 2010, p. 42, 43).

During the occupation, the Japanese were sympathetic towards the Indonesian nationalists, as long as they did not interfere with Japanese interests. This allowed the nationalist movement to grow, and after the Japanese were defeated by the Allied forces, Indonesia proclaimed its independence on the 15th of August, 1945 (Captain & Jones, 2010, p. 44). In the power vacuum right after, groups of young nationalist 'freedom fighters', known as the *permudas*, violently attacked everything and everyone that they associated with Dutch rule. This

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period, called the *Bersiap*, between 1945 and 1946, was one of the most violent phases in the decolonization process, in which many Dutch, Indo-Europeans, but also Indonesians lost their lives (Bosma, Raben & Willems, 2006, p. 186). When the negotiations between the Dutch government and the Indonesian Republic about self-government failed, the KNIL started the so-called 'police-actions' – the Indonesians have a more apt term for this: *agresi militer Belanda*[5] - in order to 'orderly' come to a situation in which not only the Indonesian interest would be served, but also the Dutch. The Indonesians saw this as a way for the Dutch to re-establish their colonial rule and to deny Indonesia's independence. This is evident if we take into account that the Netherlands for a long time acknowledged 1949 as the year of Indonesia's independence, instead of 1945 (Captain & Jones, 2010, p. 44, 45; "Nederland Erkent Indonesische Onafhankelijkheid", 2010).

The events that happened after the War in the Pacific explain why this war was such a contested war. That is, if people even knew about the Pacific War in the first place. According to Iris van Ooijen and Ilse Raaijmakers, during the Second World War there was a lack of knowledge and interest in what was going in the Dutch colony, due to the distance and poor communication, but also because the Netherlands were absorbed with their own occupation and suffering. To those who did have more interest in what was going on overseas, the decolonization process had started to become controversial and the period from 1942 until 1949 seemed to them to have blended into a terrible period of violence (Ooijen & Raaijmakers, 2012, p. 469). Locher-Scholten also argues, in relation to the difficult recognition of war memories related to Indonesia, that the distance of the Pacific War in relation to the Netherlands is one of the important factors, as well as the decolonization process, which had split the national consensus (2003, p. 107).This explains why the Pacific War monuments, as *lieux de mémoire*, "where memory crystalizes and secretes itself (…) because there are no longer real environments of memory," (Nora, 1989, p. 7) function not as identifying a national identity, but rather, as Locher-Scholten argues, in identifying the Indies identity - which is also not a coherent one (Interviewee, 2018).

5 Meaning: Dutch military aggression.

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3. The development of the Pacific War memory culture through monuments

Despite the split in national consensus, Locher-Scholten describes how Pacific War memories were still able to find a place in a wider national setting through three social and cultural processes: "a 'depoliticization,' i.e. a separation of the memories of 1941 – 1945 from those of the 1945-1949 period; a growing recognition of the shared suffering, or a 'psychologization' of the war; and the emancipation of the Indies groups" (2003, p. 107). Locher-Scholten analyses three different monuments which are illustrative of the evolution of Pacific War memories in the Netherlands. Shortly after the Second World War in the Netherlands, the most important monument – the National Monument on Dam Square – was erected to commemorate the victims of the war. Back then, it consisted of, among other things, half a circle with eleven urns, filled with earth from execution sites from the eleven Dutch provinces. During the unveiling of the monument in 1947, the struggle against Japan was not mentioned, and the repatriates from Indonesia felt neglected by this. To also get recognition for their efforts for what they called 'the national cause', this group then came forward with the idea to add another urn with earth from Dutch cemeteries of honour in Indonesia - although some Indonesians fought in the KNIL-army, mostly Dutch or Allied soldiers are buried there.[6] After a long struggle, the working committee who was responsible for the National Monument finally decided that the urn could be added, on the condition that it should only be representative for the victims of the 1941-1945 period (Locher-Scholten,2003, p. 109, 110). Here one clearly sees the separation of the memory of the War in the Pacific from the memory of the Decolonization War that followed after.

Van Ooijen and Raaijmakers characterize the events surrounding the National Monument in a slightly different manner: "The case shows that the focus on heroes and national unity in the cultural memory of the Second World War enabled Indies veterans to articulate and advocate their own interest" (2012, p. 465). They describe this process as *multidirectional memory*, borrowing the term

6 The soil that was used for the urn came from cemeteries of honour, where actually also Dutch soldiers who died after 1945 are buried (Locher-Scholten, 2003: 112). This highlights even further the artificial separation of the memories from the War in the Pacific and the Decolonization War.

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from Michael Rothberg who postulates that "against a framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory – as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources – I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing and borrowing: as productive and not private" (2009, p. 3).Van Ooijen and Raaijmakers argue that Rothberg only sees this process with discourses of victimization, whereas they think the *multidirectional memory* approach also holds true for discourses of heroization (2012, p.473). What I find missing from their analysis, however, is a critique of the Eurocentrism that this heroic approach to *multidirectional memory* implies. They are right in that Rothberg departs from a discourse of victimization, which he does because he writes from a postcolonial perspective on the side of the former colonized, and not, as Van Ooijen and Raaijmakers do, from the colonizer's perspective.In this sense, the concept towards *multidirectional memory* appears to be rather one-directional. According to Rothberg: "Far from being situated – either physically or discursively – in any institution or site, the archive of multidirectional memory is irreducibly transversal; it cuts across genres, national contexts, periods and cultural traditions" (2009, p. 18). The problem, I think, lies in the national character of the National Monument. Rothberg tries to move away from thinking in terms of nation when it comes to *multidirectional memory,* as he questions: "Must the claims of memory always be calculated according to their relevance for national memory?" (2009, p. 2). Yet, Van Ooijen and Raaijmakers' heroic approach of *multidirectional memory* shows how the call for recognition by the Indies veterans group is still closely related to how it assimilates into the national cultural memory. Even more so, the appeal for acknowledgment for their memories comes from a group that already belongs to the nation. Therefore, I argue that this seemingly 'cross-referencing' of heroism is not as multidirectional as Rothberg's understanding of the concept, as it does not cut across genres, national contexts, periods and cultural traditions. I would rather propose the term 'multinationalist memory' in the case of the assimilation of the memories of the Indies veterans, as well as the 'depoliticization' of the memories from the War in the Pacific. These memories are fundamentally different than the ones from the Second World War in the Netherlands that they refer to and borrow from, yet these claims are made on the grounds of also having made sacrifices for what the veterans have called 'the national cause'.

To illustrate the emancipation of the different Indies subgroups, Locher-Scholten describes how around 1970, women who had been imprisoned in camps

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in Indonesia began to organize a monument, to claim their suffering as well: the Women's Monument in Apeldoorn, later to be transferred to the Bronbeek estate after it had been vandalized (2003, p. 117 – 119). The last monument that she describes – the Indies Monument in The Hague – was erected in 1985, at a time in which there was an intensification of interest in Second World War. The monument was not established on the initiative of the Indies group, but resulted out of a collaboration between the Advisory Commission on War Monuments, set up by the government because of the forty-year commemoration of the Second World War, and a Dutch resistance fighter, who wanted to create a sense of solidarity between the Dutch resistance and the Pacific War victims (Scholten, 2003, p. 122, 123). This last example is illustrative of what Locher-Scholten described as a growing recognition for a shared suffering. I would argue that this case can also be seen from a 'multinationalist memory' approach, rather than the other way around as with the National Monument on Dam Square case described by Van Ooijen and Raaijmakers. This time, the initiative came from a person who fought in the Netherlands during the Second World War and who sought recognition for the Indies group out of a form of alliance, instead of the Indies group cross-referencing the national Second World War narrative.

Gert Oostindie confirms that there currently is no longer a lack of recognition concerning Pacific War related suffering of the Indies group. However, he does state that the commemoration has not become truly national and doubts whether the commemoration will outlive the survivor group: "The opposite is more likely to occur. Historical monuments and ceremonies tend to become anachronisms once the generations who shared the experiences being commemorated have died out" (2011, p. 94, 95). Esther Captain, however, argues the opposite. According to her, the second and third generation show a remarkable interest in their family history and take a great initiative in commemorating the war and its victims (2010, p. 10).

4. The Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad Monument

The Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad Monument is not a clear-cut example of one of the three different social and cultural processes outlined

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by Locher-Scholten which describe the development of the Pacific War memory culture in the Netherlands. Rather, I would say that it is a combination. However, from the interview I did not get the impression that the monument, or the later additions to it, were erected out of a 'multinationalist memory' approach departing from the national Second World War narrative. In a similar vein, the monument was also not erected out of a recognition for the shared suffering between victim groups of the Second World War here in the Netherlands and the War in the Pacific overseas. The original monument, erected in 1989, was the initiative of a general who was the former member of the committee that commemorated the victims of the Burma-Siam railroad, and who would later also become the commander of the Bronbeek estate.[7] Back then, the monument consisted solely of three pagodas (figure 1) –referring to the three pagodas that stood along the so-called Pagoda-pass on the border between Thailand and what is now Myanmar. Originally, it stood at a different spot at the Bronbeek estate than where it is today. How the monument was financed and why the monument was erected so many years after the War in the Pacific, the interviewee did not know (Interviewee, 2018).However, the date of the erection of the original monument in 1989 was in the midst of intensification of an interest in Second World War memories, and only a few years after the erection of the National Indies Monument in The Hague. It could be that this intensification of interest in war related memory culture was one of the contributing factors to why this monument was erected more than forty years after the events themselves. This does not mean, however, that the events of the Burma-Siam Railroad did not already have a memory culture on its own. In 1967 the Committee Burma Railroad organized their first reunion in The Hague for the prisoners of war that worked on the railroad between Thailand and Burma ("Kruidenier Betaalt Rekening", 1967). The year 2017 saw their fiftieth reunion, or rather commemoration of the railroad veterans - organized by what has now become the Foundation Commemoration Burma-Siam Railroad[8] - at the Bronbeek estate, where the commemorations have been held after the monument was erected, and which now also includes the Pakan

7 The interviewee had expressed his wish to keep all the names that he mentioned in the interview concealed.

8 Own translation of Stichting Herdenking Birma-Siam Spoorweg (SHBSS)

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Baroe Railroad.The interviewee also attended the fiftieth commemoration and confirms Captain's observation that the second and third generation are very active in keeping these memories alive (Interviewee, 2018).However, as there are still a few survivors alive today, we cannot really know yet whether the second and third generation's interest in these memories will go against Oostindie's claims that these memories will fade away once the generation who experienced the events themselves has passed away.

In the memory culture of the commemoration and also in the monument itself, the separation of memories of the War in the Pacific from the Decolonization War can be clearly identified, as it only commemorates the victims of both railroads, built during the Japanese oppression. Because of this, the monument also fits in well with what Locher-Scholten described as the emancipation of the Indies subgroups, as the monument is specifically meant to only commemorate the victims of both railroads. The interviewee explained that the Ministry of Defence had the wish to keep all Indies related commemorations central, preferably at the National Indies Monument in The Hague. However, there were many Indies subgroups who wanted their own monument, for which the Bronbeek estate (also owned by the Ministery of Defence) was the perfect spot as it could offer good facilities for maintenance and commemorations. More importantly, the estate was already a place where members of the Indies group regularly came, because a lot of Indies related things, such as the home for the elderly and disabled KNIL-soldiers, and the museum were assembled there. The interviewee explained that the Indies subgroups would therefore feel like "coming home" (Interviewee, 2018). Furthermore, the addition of the wall with the names of the perished prisoners of war from the Burma-Siam railroad was added in 2005 by means of a private gift from an old veteran,[9]who for almost forty years had been trying to erect a monument for his fallen comrades, butwas always met with resistance (Interviewee, 2018). The interviewee told me how he – when he was the vice-president of the Committee Commemoration Burma-Siam Railroad (CHBSS)[10] – got a call from a friend of an old veteran

9 The interviewee had expressed his wish to keep all the names that he mentioned in the interview concealed.

10 This was later changed from committee to foundation. The original name in Dutch was Comité Herdenking Birma-Siam Spoorweg, which was changed to Stichting Herdenking Birma-Siam Spoorweg, in order to properly harbour the donation that the veteran made. For more information on the foundation, please visit: http://www.shbss.org/

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soldier informing him of the wish of his friend, who was on his deathbed by then, asking whether the committee could be of any help. The interviewee was then brought into contact with the old veteran who had the explicit request that the addition could only have the names on it of the people who had perished during the construction of the Burma-Siam railroad (Interviewee, 2018). This shows the urge of members of the Indies subgroups to also get some form of recognition for their particular suffering. The addition of the Pakan Baroe monument, consisting out a plaque and later on also of two pieces of railroadwith the names of the perished prisoners of war from this particular railroad are engraved, came forth out of the wish of two former members of the foundation. The interviewee told me that there were almost no survivors of that railroad anymore and that both men had wanted to keep these memories alive. Seeing as both events are related to the construction of a railroad, the foundation decided to join them into one monument (Interviewee, 2018).

5. Inclusion and Exclusion

Mieke Bal postulates that visual analysis is a critical analysis of the prevalent dominant master narratives that:

> "frame events of seeing and their objects, and that are presented as natural, universal, true and inevitable. It attempts to dislodge them so that alternative narratives become visible. It explores and explains the bond between visual culture and nationalism (…) and the participating discourses of imperialism and racism" (2008, p. 179).

Visual analysis is thus not about the aesthetics of an object, but rather what the materiality of it seeks to represent. By doing a visual analysis of the Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad Monument, my intention is precisely to discern the dominant master narrative concerning the War in the Pacific as it is represented by the monument. As Bal argues, in visual analysis an autonomous assumption of the object that is being analysed "is no longer acceptable, especially in light of the social intricacies of the 'life' of objects"

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(2003, p. 24). Seeing as the monument serves as a place for commemoration, it functions as a social object and therefore should not be viewed as an object on its own, but rather in the context in which it is situated. The context of the Bronbeek estate, which, as already mentioned before, serves as a home for the elderly of the KNIL and also has a museum about the history of the Dutch East Indies. The location of the monument at the Bronbeek estate thus further emphasises the dominant master narrative. My aim is to uncover the narrative that the monument is not telling and in that way lay out the discourse of imperialism that is embodied by this monument. It is important to note that interpretation is one of the basic elements of visual analysis in order to extract the meaning of the object that is being analysed. According to Bal, this practice is dialogic, as meaning is a dialogue between viewer and object (2008, p. 178). She goes on to argue that the act of looking is "profoundly impure", as it is inherently subjective. She builds on Foucault to argue that the gaze of the interpreter is coloured by the knowledge that the interpreter has acquired, thereby making visible the aspects of objects that otherwise remain invisible (2003, p. 9 - 11). Having a background in Cultural Analysis, in which postcolonial theory plays a large role, my gaze is thus influenced by knowledge about the underrepresentation of the subaltern. It is this knowledge that I use to analyse the Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad Monument.

A visual analysis of the monument shows that the distinction between the white Dutch and Indo-Europeans - whom as stated before, were formerly recognized as Dutch citizens - which was so prevalent in the colonial society of the Dutch East Indies, is not made on the plaques which accompany the monument (figure 2 and 3). However, there is a clear distinction made between the prisoners of war, and the so-called Romushas, which according to one plaque are "forced labourers, recruited by Japan, coming among other places from Java"[11] (figure 3). Takuma Melber, describes the Romushas as a group which was made up of local inhabitants who were recruited by force from all over South East Asia, but most of them were indeed recruited from Java (2016, p. 168). The same plaque also informs that this group of forced labourers make up ninety percent of the people who perished along the construction of the Burma – Siam railroad: 180 000 compared to 3.098 Dutch prisoners of

11 Own translation of: "Door Japan geronselde dwangarbeiders, onder meer uit Java".

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war (figure 3). The plaque with information of the Pakan Baroe railroad informs that about 80 000 Romushas died, compared to 2.494 prisoners of war (figure 2), most of whom were Dutch, in contrast to the Burma-Siam railroad on which also British, American and Australian prisoners of war had worked and perished. This made me wonder why there were no names of the Romushas added to either the wall behind the monument, or on the railroad tracks, as most of them were also citizens of the Dutch Kingdom at that time when Indonesia was still considered a Dutch colony. When I asked this question, the interviewee replied that the Japanese had a very good administrative system that kept track of the prisoners of war through which the CHBSS could retrace the names of the Dutch prisoners of war which are now on the walls behind the monument. According to the interviewee, the Japanese did not keep such a system for the Romushas, whom they merely saw as slaves (Interviewee, 2018). Seeing as the Japanese had occupied parts of South East Asia in order to establish a great Asian empire, one would assume that the Japanese had the local inhabitants in higher esteem than the white Dutch and Indo-Europeans. Shigeru Sato writes that, according to Japanese rhetoric, the aim of the invasion by Japan was:

> "[T]o emancipate Asians from Western colonial powers that had subjugated them for centuries. In reality, however, the Japanese drafted many million local people as labourers under the slogan 'Construction of a Great Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere'. Their regime of forced labour while not 'slavery' in the accepted sense of the term, involved deprivation of freedom and immense suffering for the local people" (2008, p. 97)

The interviewee explained that the perception of the Romushas as part of the bottom of society was unfortunately the way in which these forced labourers were regarded at that time (Interviewee, 2018). This perception of the Romushas, although not regarded as slaves then, could be seen a continuation of the Dutch colonial system and its accompanying perception of the local people, as Melber writes: "Japanese administrators found themselves able to use the harsh working conditions of earlier colonial systems as a springboard for

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their own approach. Under Japanese rule, forced labour therefore experienced a renewal, although to a much greater extent and under much harsher conditions" (2016, p. 181). Another reason that might explain why the Japanese did not keep an administrative system concerning the Romushas, is that Japan signed the 'Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War' in Geneva in 1929, of which article 8 states that "belligerents are required to notify each other of all captures of prisoners as soon as possible, through the intermediary of the Information Bureaux" (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1929). By law, the Japanese thus had to keep track of their prisoners of war, which the Romushas technically were not.

Melber also states that knowledge about the Romushas is very limited because of a shortage of primary sources concerning this group (2016, p. 169, 177). Furthermore, the interviewee explained that the Dutch government also had no interest in investigating the deaths of these Romushas after the war had ended, as they had other matters to deal with, such as rebuilding the country after the Second World War in the Netherlands (Interviewee, 2018). Sato, confirming the lack of information, states however that most of the information that does exist about the Romushas is through eye-witness accounts, in particular from the Allied prisoners of war that had to work alongside the Romushas. What is even more interesting, is that Sato also writes that the Netherlands War Crimes Investigation, with the aim of identifying Japanese individuals who committed brutality, interviewed a group of Romushas in 1946 in Singapore, most of whom were sent to the Riau Islands during the Japanese occupation (2008, p. 97).A possible explanation for this is that the investigation was done in order for the Dutch to be able to prosecute the Japanese for war crimes, and not necessarily out of interest towards the faith of the Romushas in particular.

6. Conclusion

The Burma-Siam Pakan Baroe Railroad Monument is a good example of how the memory culture of the contested War in the Pacific has developed in the Netherlands. Although the monument did not arise out of a recognition for the shared suffering, or 'multinational memory', between the victims of

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the Second World War in the Netherlands and those of the war overseas, the separation of the memories of the War in the Pacific from those of the Decolonization War, and the emancipation of the Indies subgroup can be clearly identified. It is also evident that the memories of both railroads are maintained and kept alive by the second and third generation.

Despite that the Romushas are mentioned on two of the plaques that accompany the monument, they are clearly not as equally commemorated as the Dutch and Indo-European prisoners of war. From the interview I have used as the basis for parts of this article I extracted that the reason for this was that there was simply very little known about the Romushas, because the Japanese did not maintain the same administrative system of the prisoners of war with the Romushas, and that the Dutch government had other matters to worry about after the War in the Pacific had ended. Melber and Sato confirm the general lack of information, but Sato also writes that the little knowledge that does exist comes from eye-witness accounts of none other than Allied prisoners of war. This does not necessarily mean the particular prisoners of war that worked on both railroads, but does confirm that at least something was known about the Romushas. Oostindie writes about the Indies war related memory culture in the Netherlands that "the impact of the war on the vast majority of the 'native' population of Indonesia has never been a central issue. The memory remained Indies" (2011, p. 93). Stuart Hall, in his essay aptly titled 'Whose Heritage?', writes: "like personal memory, social memory is also highly selective, it highlights and foreground (..) it foreshortens, silences, disavows, forgets and elides many episodes which – from another perspective – could be the start of a different narrative" (1999, p. 5). For further research it would therefore be interesting to see how for instance the 'One Life, One Sleep' monument in the garden of the Death Railway Museum in Thanbyuzayat in Myanmar deals with the memories of the War in the Pacific, and whether this monument has a different representation of the Romushas.

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IMAGE 2

Committee Commemoration Burma-Siam RailRoad/Comité Herdenking Birma-Siam Spoorweg, Date Unknown.

IMAGE 3

Plaque Pakan Baroe Railroad, Tamara Breugelmans,, taken 29th of December 2017.

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IMAGE 4

Plaque Birma Siam Railroad, Tamara Breugelmans, taken 27th December 2017.

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