

# Response from NIOD

It was with great interest that I read Dr Herman Bussemaker's reaction to my article on 'The Pitfalls of Independent Historical Research'. Although I interpreted his contribution as a confirmation of much of what I wrote, there are a few things that might need emphasis.

Dr Bussemaker's contention that NIOD's research projects are executed unchecked is perhaps understandable but, alas, off the mark. As I tried to explain in my contribution to the *IIAS Newsletter*, much research carried out under the aegis of NIOD is of a sensitive nature, in the sense that it touches upon the often unhappy life stories of large numbers of men and women in Dutch society and beyond. For this reason, NIOD operates with a complicated structure of advisory boards, not only to guarantee the scholarly standards of the research, but also to elicit ideas and feedback from experts and activists from non-academic backgrounds. Thus, its present research concerning the issues of back-pay, war damage, and rehabilitation is monitored by a special advisory committee, consisting of representatives of the Indisch Platform and academics, who meet regularly to discuss research progress and provide the researchers both with advice and source materials.

One could argue, as Dr Bussemaker does, that NIOD follows its own course, regardless of the existence of sounding boards from the communities involved. In truth, NIOD has closely paid heed to suggestions from its discussion partners, and has amended its plans according to their feedback. This approach characterized both the 1999 exhibition 'Dutch, Japanese, Indonesians: The memory of the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies' in the Rijksmuseum and the current project 'Indonesia across Orders'. As a result, the period known as the Bersiap has, from the start, received ample attention in all the component studies of the latter programme, including the research into war damage and rehabilitation. Those among our discussion partners who criticize the choices NIOD has made, underestimate the extent of their own influence on these choices.

Nevertheless, it should be stressed that in the end only one party will be held responsible for the results of the research, and that is NIOD. In fact, only if there is a decisive point where NIOD is responsible for making choices and for selecting research problems, will NIOD be able to avoid allegations of bias.

On many occasions over the last decade, and prior to that, NIOD has cooperated with many members from the Indies community in the Netherlands – who, it should be emphasized, are far from one-minded – and often, to mutual contentment. Dr Bussemaker has been a valuable voice in our past projects and will hopefully continue to be so in the future. ◀

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