

Paul W. van der Veur. *The Lion and the Gadfly: Dutch Colonialism and the Spirit of E. F. E. Douwes Dekker*. Leiden: Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (KITLV Press), 2006. 858 pages.

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“Comrades! Nay, more than comrades, Indiërs!”

With this rousing call, Ernest François Eugène Douwes Dekker routinely opened meetings of the Indische Partij (Indies Party), which he founded in Bandung in 1912. But who were the “Indiërs”? The organization spoke first to Eurasians or Indos, persons of part-European, part-native origin like Douwes Dekker himself. If they were recognized by their European fathers, they were Dutch citizens and members of the privileged group of “Europeans,” whatever the social stigma of mixed parentage might mean. The party extended, however, to welcome all who made their home in the Indies, the *blijvers*, as opposed to those passing through from the Netherlands or elsewhere, the *trekkers*. And because the party wanted to appeal to all “races,” it was to be open to natives and to ethnic Chinese and even to those full-blooded Europeans who expected to live out their lives in the Indies. All of these people were the Indiërs.

Van der Veur’s title is apt. The lion’s share of this weighty book’s pages cover the Netherlands Indies colonial system: its personal and party politics, laws and regulations, racial divisions, forms of harassment, vindictiveness, and retribution. This was the environment in which the brilliant early nationalist met defeats and, in the end, the victories of his careers in politics, journalism, and education that spanned the first half of the twentieth century. In spite of the constant obstacles, Douwes Dekker nevertheless influenced the course of Indonesian nationalism. As “gadfly,” he never endangered Dutch rule, yet the colonial power repeatedly mobilized the full force of its legal and police machinery to swat at the pesky agitator and to remove him from the scene.

Douwes Dekker, later known simply as “DD,” was born in 1879, in Pasuruan, East Java, to a Dutch father and a German-Javanese mother. His great-uncle was Eduard Douwes Dekker, better known by his penname Multatuli, whose controversial novel *Max Havelaar* had laid open the misdeeds of colonial rule in the nineteenth century. Something of his burning sense of injustice was passed to the great-nephew, despite DD’s “European” status, which gave him access to elite schooling, including graduation from the Gymnasium Koning Willem II, in 1898.

Absorbed by the example of boyhood “heroes,” DD’s first stab at greatness was to volunteer for the Boer army in its war against Britain in South Africa between 1899 and 1902. A gifted writer, he sent enthusiastic battlefield reports to the homeland until his capture by the British in 1900. With other prisoners of war, he spent the rest of the conflict in a camp in Ceylon, where he read and wrote. Strikingly, he revealed himself to be a flaming Dutch patriot, enthusiastically celebrating Queen Wilhelmina’s birthday and writing of his pride in the Dutch nation. He even commemorated his brief military career by sketching a dashing image of himself on horseback.

Dashing he could be. DD’s first wife, Clara, daughter of Germans working in the Indies, entranced by his dark, burning eyes, married him in spite of her family’s

reservations about his being an “Indo boy.” The marriage foundered during DD’s exile in Europe and subsequent political (mis)adventures and imprisonments. DD was to marry twice more, and van der Veur wisely separates DD’s personal history from that of his political activities, even though there are constant overlaps, for his second two wives, both of them also Eurasians, played active roles in his later careers.

What turned a Dutch patriot into an Indonesian nationalist? In a novel published in the Netherlands, DD unveiled dreadful conditions among the inhabitants of the so-called “Private Lands” not far from Batavia. By 1908 he was writing of Indonesia’s need to be self-governing and autonomous from the mother country. Journalism and a devotion to muckraking made it a short step to political activity, first in *Insulinde* and *Indische Bond*, then through the founding, in 1912, of the *Indische Partij*, for which achievement DD is best remembered. Although all these organizations appealed in the first instance to the Indo population, DD had already shown his affinity for the tiny native elite, and he made sure that the *Indische Partij* was both the first secular nationalist organization and a multi-racial party in a society where racial divisions were locked into law, politics, and public life. (DD enabled all who put the Indies first to be admitted to *Indische Partij*, whether they were European, native, or Chinese.)

The party foundered on these racial divisions as the colonial government co-opted the Indo minority by granting it privileged “European” status, while at the same time this group began to resent as competitors the increasing number of educated natives. Even more, the charismatic DD’s love of extravagant, fighting rhetoric alienated the authorities, who more and more saw him as a dangerous, “violent” individual, even if his “violence” remained verbal. Along with two Javanese political allies, Soewardi Soerjaningrat (later Ki Hadjar Dewantoro) and Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, DD and his family were shipped off, without any judicial process, to exile in the Netherlands in September 1913.

A real contribution of van der Veur’s volume is that it follows the career of DD far beyond the first heady years of national awakening—and defeat. Readers can experience his exile in Europe and his nearly successful acquisition of a doctorate at the University of Zürich (he nevertheless sometimes used “Dr.” as a title). Then there is the puzzling (and sometimes hilarious) case of DD’s misappropriation of German espionage funds meant to purchase arms for Indian nationalists during World War I, culminating in his being called as a witness in a trial in San Francisco, California, in November 1917. His double name—not to mention his self-description as a “Javan”—perplexed judges and advocates alike.

This kind of notoriety was hardly to the liking of the colonial lion, and it repeatedly avenged itself. When DD returned to the Indies in 1918, the lion was ready to pounce. Van der Veur shows convincingly that, among other Dutch arbitrariness, the repeated application of preventive detention and of the “*haatzaai*” (hate-sowing or hatemongering) decree of 1914 (revised in 1918), which dealt with those who “aroused or furthered enmity, hatred, or disdain” against the government of the Netherlands or Netherlands Indies or “between different groups of subjects of the Netherlands or residents of the Netherlands Indies” (p. 400), was open to discriminatory interpretation. The colonial regime applied those provisions in all severity if presumed offences were against Europeans, while it punished lightly, if at all, those who stirred hatemongering against Indo or native populations. As for DD, who later wrote a

controversial history of East Asia, he was also to find that if one had written something the authorities thought derogatory, historical accuracy was no defense. It all sounds familiar from later times.

In 1923, with his political and journalistic careers prematurely ended by colonial regulations and repeated incarcerations, DD took an unusual step. He became a breeder of prize-winning German Shepherd dogs and founded a journal for colonial dog lovers; the magazine enjoyed considerable circulation and gave him an outlet for writing. His ideas on training emphasized love, patience, and attention to the natural abilities of his charges.

Beyond training dogs, DD also trained people, founding a school in Bandung in 1922. This developed in 1924 into the Ksatriyan Institute. Unlike the Javanist and culturalist program of Taman Siswa, founded in 1921 by his sometime political ally Ki Hajar Dewantoro (Soewardi Soerjaningrat), DD's program emphasized Dutch-language education. In 1927, he added commercial training at the secondary-school level, an innovation later imitated by the colonial government. The schools, always in need of money and qualified teachers, and under the skeptical if not hostile eyes of the colonial authorities, nevertheless left an impact, especially around Bandung, where hundreds profited from courses in business, journalism, and education. An interesting sidelight: Soekarno, then a student in Bandung, applied for and received a post as a mathematics teacher. His association with DD was even more important than his brief pedagogical career, however, and this special relationship with Soekarno is additional proof of DD's importance to the nationalist movement as a whole.

Something of a Germanophile, and, like many Asian nationalists, an admirer of Japan, DD was treading a dangerous path as World War II drew near. A 1937 prosecution and the loss of his permit to teach were just the first steps. The colonial government had already noted that some graduates of the Ksatriyan Institute learned Japanese and subsequently went to work for Japanese firms.

By the late 1930s, fear of Japan's threatening advances was widespread in the Indies, and the Dutch thought most Japanese were necessarily spies. DD, probably needing money for his schools, unwisely agreed to write reports on the economy of the Indies for a member of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce. As residents' fears grew after the German Occupation of the Netherlands in May 1940, DD's criticism of the colonial government to a foreign national was tantamount to treason. DD was arrested and exiled to a pestilential, isolated, and brutal patch of the remaining Dutch empire—Surinam's former agricultural settlement called Joden Savanne (Jewish Savannah), where he remained from August 1942 until July 1946. His fellow prisoners were the despised European members of pro-Nazi groups or simply individuals who were "dangerous" [to the regime], hardly pleasant company in the desolate prison camp.

Released to the Netherlands a year after the war's end, but broken in health, DD nevertheless managed to slip out secretly, traveling with false papers to Java, arriving in Yogyakarta in January 1947 to join the Indonesian Revolution. Welcomed by Soekarno, DD was too frail to take a leading role in the struggle, but his advice and understanding of the international situation were valuable and his speeches still had fire. DD took Indonesian citizenship, adopted Islam, and called himself Danudirdjo Setiabuddhi, finally breaking with his Indo identity. As for Soekarno, van der Veur

notes the parallels between Soekarno's oratorical style, dramatization of history, and political showmanship and that of DD's in his early career, as the quotation at the beginning of this review suggests.

The colonial government remained vindictive, even toward a dying man, arresting him in December 1948 along with other Indonesian leaders during the "Second Police Action." DD was briefly hospitalized, until Dutch soldiers ripped this "unsavory character" from his sickbed and moved him to a miserable jail, where his condition rapidly worsened. Only upon a physician's intervention was he released to house arrest in Jakarta and, finally, in February 1949, to Bandung, where the dying man, using morphine to dull his coughing, rejoined his wife. There he still found the strength, with her help, to write a memoir of his seventy years. He died on August 29, 1950, having seen Indonesia become an independent member of the family of nations, a fulfillment, after so many defeats, of his dearest goal.

Van der Veur, for whom writing this volume must have been a decades-long labor of love, followed many fascinating leads, including the testimony of DD's friends, surviving family members, and adversaries. The bibliography of DD's writings contains over nine hundred items (many previously unknown), published and unpublished, and van der Veur quotes liberally from them. In addition to shedding light on DD's political and social ideas, DD's writings depict his religious thinking and his ideas about Indonesian history and the corruption of European culture. Sometimes the details that van der Veur relates, while enlightening, may distract from the main theme. Why, for instance, the background information on the first, seventeenth-century settlers of the Joden Savanne? Or the details of Indo suffering and collaboration during the Japanese Occupation, when DD was absent from Java during this time and had really moved beyond purely Indo interests? In general, however, the author does a fine job of integrating into the main story such intellectual excursions (which are themselves interesting), and he makes their relevance more than plausible—even the dog stories. Van der Veur has left no stone—and no archival paper—turned in his research. As the author promises, readers "may find DD interesting, challenging, strange, or difficult to follow, but never dull." To call this book a definitive study would be a great understatement.