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Onder redactie van

Hanno Brand
Ben Groen
Eric Hoekstra
Cor van der Meer

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Complexity in the Contact Zone: *Oeroeg* in English translation

JANE FENOULHET

SCHOOL OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES, CULTURE AND SOCIETY, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

The relationship between the two main characters of Hella Haasse's novella, the Indonesian village boy *Oeroeg* and the narrator, son of a Dutch tea plantation owner, can be seen as a microcosmic 'contact zone'. First used by Mary Louise Pratt in her book on travel writing, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, the term denotes a place or space where colonized and colonizing individuals and cultures meet and interact, highlighting 'conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict'.¹ In this essay, I want both to use this concept in its original sense, and to extend it to a different kind of contact zone – that of translation. Using the two English translations of *Oeroeg*, I will investigate the extent to which the conditions of inequality and conflict represented by Haasse in the novella are reproduced in translation. To what extent do the two translators transmit the colonial tensions depicted in the novella, and to what extent do they convey a postcolonial awareness, given that they were working some fifty to sixty years after *Oeroeg* first appeared in Dutch?

In the novella, Haasse's writing occupies an interesting position which both complicates the colonial and anticipates the postcolonial, and is for this reason best viewed as complex: neither obviously colonial nor explicitly postcolonial, it is written from the safe distance of Europe and maintains a fine balance amid the tensions. The two translators, however, have seen the effects of decolonization and may or may not be familiar with postcolonial developments. In 'Translating and interlingual creation in the contact zone. Border writing in Quebec' Sherry Simon argues that in the wake of great postcolonial migrations Western cultures are 'bonded spaces characterized by a plurality of codes and languages' so that the act of translation can no longer be entirely separate from the act of writing.²

1 M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York 1992) p. 6.

2 S. Simon, 'Translating and interlingual creation in the contact zone. Border writing in Quebec', in S. Bassnett and H. Trivedi (eds.), *Post-colonial Translation. Theory and Practice* (London and New York 1999) pp. 58-9.

Homi Bhabha's discussion of the hybridity of Rushdie's writing identifies a good example of this postcolonial mode of literary creation.³ Just where do Haasse's translators fit into this picture?

In the case of *Oeroeg*, I aim to map some of the force fields in operation, first in Haasse's representation of Indonesia before and just after the Second World War when it was still a Dutch colony, and second in the two English-language versions of the novella. The first of these, *Forever a Stranger*, which appears in a collection of stories by Haasse, is translated by Margaret Alibasah and appeared in 1996. It was followed in 2012 by Ina Rilke's version, *The Black Lake*. The main question I shall be posing is: How do these translations negotiate the representation of colonial tensions, given their distance both from the novella's setting and from its original publication date?

In order to explore this question, I will give a brief assessment of the complexities of Haasse's own position, in particular the distance in time between the narrated story and the time of narration, given that the latter was precisely a time of conflict and the start of the decolonization process. Although Indonesia in the late 1940s was still officially a colony of the Netherlands, the upheavals of the Japanese occupation during the war meant that the Dutch could not unproblematically re-assume power at the end of the war. Indonesian nationalism – as depicted in the novella – had been growing even before the war and sought to assert itself in the postwar chaos. Through the lives of the two boys, *Oeroeg* narrates the growing estrangement and hostility between the two cultures as the colonized gain in knowledge and confidence, seek to assert themselves, and come to blows with the colonizers. *Oeroeg* ends with the unequivocal demonstration of the impossibility of a relationship, not only between *Oeroeg* and the narrator, but also between Indonesia and the Netherlands. The novella appeared during the time when Indonesia had declared its independence but this had not yet been recognized by the Netherlands. Haasse's narrative of growing up in the Dutch Indies in the twenties and thirties was written from the perspective of personal loss, but also with some sense that the end-game was being played out. The distance is not only in time, but also space: Haasse was looking back to the country of her birth, childhood and youth from the colonial home country where she had gone to study.

There are important parallels between the narrator and author: both were born in the Dutch East Indies, both were the children of colonial administrators, both left the colony just before the war and were unable

3 See, for example, H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London 1994) pp. 225-226.

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to return for the duration of the war. Both experienced the loss of their country, their home – and their love of this country is symbolized by their love of the landscape. But the narrator character chooses to return at the earliest opportunity in order to support the Dutch effort to rebuild the colony, and also to search for Oeroeg, his lost brother – the human being with whom he had had the most constant relationship in his life. Haasse, on the other hand, made a new life for herself in the Netherlands.

There are many tensions and estrangements in *Oeroeg* which can be explained by the contact zone of the tea plantation where the boys grow up. Neither the local servants nor the narrator's father approve of the close and seemingly equal relationship between the boys, or of Oeroeg's anomalous position in the household. The interpenetration of the two cultures in the boys' relationship is so great that the narrator's first language is Sundanese. Although the father-son relationship would have been more distant in those days, there is no doubt that the narrator's affection for Oeroeg is a significant factor in the almost complete estrangement between the 'I' character and his father. Oeroeg also leaves his birth family behind as he acquires an education, at the expense first of the narrator's father, then of Lida, the boys' Dutch landlady. As Oeroeg becomes part of the nationalist movement and embraces Islam, he is the one who makes it clear that the two young men are on opposite sides of the colonial divide. And although the narrator declares himself free of colonial attitudes, he displays a certain naivety:

Het 'koloniale' denken, in het naoorlogse vaderland zo vaak – al dan niet ten onrechte – bekritiseerd, was mij vreemd. Mijn verlangen om naar Indië terug te gaan en daar te werken, berustte in hoofdzaak op een diepgeworteld gevoel van saamhorigheid met het land waarin ik geboren en opgegroeid was.⁴

In what follows, I analyse the salient points of both the English translations of *Oeroeg*, looking at paratextual information, linguistic features – particularly the spelling and transfer of Indonesian words and names –, the structure of the text and its tone, the characters and their relationships, and the political dimension.

4 Hella S. Haasse, *Oeroeg*, (Stichting Collectieve Propaganda van het Nederlandse Boek 2009) p. 71.

Forever a Stranger translated by Margaret M. Alibasah

Paratextual information

This collection of stories appears in a series published by Oxford University Press devoted to the translation of (post)colonial literature, the 'Oxford in Asia Paperbacks'; the place of publication is Kuala Lumpur as well as Oxford. This creates a context for the translator which can be described as academic postcolonial studies, which may affect the translator's strategy in some way. The paratext positions the stories very carefully using a postcolonial frame of reference, i.e. the publication's perspective is that of post Indonesian independence. This means that the term 'Indonesian' is used rather than Dutch East Indies, and Haasse herself is positioned as a writer with postcolonial insight:

'On the surface, it is a story about a Dutch boy and his Indonesian friend whose childhood bond was increasingly undermined by race and class differences and ultimately destroyed by the Indonesian revolution. At a deeper level, it represents Haasse's attempt to come to terms with the realization that she had 'never been anything more than a foreigner' in the country she had so naturally loved as a child.⁵ The introduction to the stories makes sure that readers can identify Batavia as the post-independence Jakarta.

Names and spellings

There is an introductory 'Note on Spelling' saying that wherever Haasse has used 'old' spelling, this is kept, but the new spellings of the 'old' sounds prescribed in the 1972 legislation are listed, thus enabling the reader to make connections between the past and the present of Indonesia.⁶ The Indonesian words in old spelling, such as 'mandoer' and 'baboe' are given in italics with an English translation in brackets at the first occurrence. The 'oe' spelling of /u/ is also maintained in the case of the main character's name: Oeroeg. However, 'doekoen' is given modern spelling of 'dukun' in the text, and 'katjang' is spelt 'kacung' glossed by Alibasah as 'native boy' (whereas Rilke gives 'peanut, common term of disparagement for mixed race'⁷).

5 H. S. Haasse, trans. M. M. Alibasah, *Forever a Stranger and Other Stories* (Kuala Lumpur & Oxford 1996), back cover.

6 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. xii.

7 H. S. Haasse, trans. I. Rilke, *The Black Lake* (London 2012) p. 116.

Geographical names are given a mixed treatment: 'Priangan' replaces 'Preanger' whereas 'Soekaboemi' remains in the old spelling. Soerabaja is given a mixed treatment, retaining the 'oe' spelling but replacing Dutch 'j' with 'y', while Soendanees becomes Sundanese. The names of key places such as the lake Telaga Hideung and the plantation Kebon Djati are left in old Dutch spelling.

Structure, style and perspective

Alibasah's version of the story is structured by location into four sections: Kebon Djati; Soekaboemi; Batavia; Return. These sections are further broken up by the use of three asterisks which are sometimes used to signal time breaks in the narration. The aftermath of the accident in which Oeroeg's father drowns in the lake provides several examples. For instance, in a space of four pages, '***' marks the time that has elapsed between the accident in which Oeroeg's father drowns in the lake and the narrator waking up at home; it also marks the gap between the narrator's father telling him what had happened and the narrator's ensuing fever; and signals a much bigger gap between the news of Oeroeg's impending departure and the time of writing, which leads into the new phase of the boys' relationship.⁸

On the whole Alibasah's paragraph divisions stay close to those in the Dutch text, and she does not shy away from large blocks of text. This recreates a particular visual effect for the reader and constructs her as not easily intimidated by too much continuous prose. A descriptive analysis of the style and tone also suggest that Alibasah's strategy has been to stay close to the Dutch text and recreate its distinctive voice; register and language use generally seem to indicate a decision to stick close to Haasse's sentence structure and word choice. As a result, Alibasah's version can sometimes be unidiomatic: for example, 'There is no need to go into detail. For Lida, this was a blow in the face.⁹ to render 'een slag in haar gezicht'.¹⁰ She also reproduces a slight vagueness and repetition, as in 'What caused the distance was that Oeroeg was indefinitely "different" – it was the subtle difference in his behaviour and his nature, in his 'aura', I would say if I could put it into words.'¹¹

8 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', pp. 19-22.

9 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 64.

10 Haasse, *Oeroeg*, p. 60.

11 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 66.

The tone of Alibasah's version comes across as cool and measured so that there is a contrast between the intimate subject matter and the manner in which it is related. This makes it especially important to analyse both the narrator as storyteller and as character, as well as being attentive to perspectival nuance. Does the perspective remain constantly that of the boy or young man who is writing about his relationship with Oeroeg? Or of the slightly older man looking back across the distance of time? Or does it mix the different selves of the narrator – the child of colonials, the exile, the returnee? And does the perspective remain solely with the narrator or do other characters 'bleed' into the tone of the narration? Such questions will guide my comparison of both translations and some aspects of the narration will also emerge from the following section in which I look at the character of Oeroeg and his portrayal.

The portrayal of the two main characters

It almost goes without saying that Oeroeg is seen through the narrator's eyes, but it is worth remembering that both are being depicted by the author, now mediated through the words of a translator. Here complexity takes the form of multiple layers: the portrayal of Oeroeg tells readers as much about the narrator as about the character who is the focus of his narrative, but may also reveal something of the author and translator, or co-writer. For example, despite the narrator's protestations of friendship and innocent equality with Oeroeg, the descriptions are nevertheless coloured by Western ideas about oriental natives. Oeroeg's physique is emphasized – he is sinuous, using his toes to balance, well-adapted to the jungle. Also, the narrator confidently states that 'Oeroeg was passive. He accepted the course his life had taken...' without linking this to the powerlessness of the colonized.¹² A translator can choose to play such things down to soften their impact, and the subtle decisions taken by Alibasah only become legible through comparison with the work of Rilke. Nevertheless, Alibasah keeps something of the rather stereotypical descriptions, so that the narrator is being clearly positioned as a Westerner. Oeroeg is even viewed as inherent in the narrator's sense of the local landscape: 'It seemed absurd that Oeroeg was not here. It occurred to me that perceiving this mountain world with my senses was not even possible without Oeroeg's presence. The landscape was not complete without him.'¹³

12 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 63.

13 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 69.

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During the narrator's last visit to Soerabaya before leaving for Europe Oeroeg is described as this 'serious young Indonesian, more mature than I, filled with a new and this time entirely harmonious self-confidence', also as wearing his *pici*, the cap that Muslims wear, so it is clear to the reader that he has become politicized for the national(ist) cause which also involves embracing Islam.¹⁴ This is a clear positioning of Oeroeg which goes well beyond Haasse's own description of the 'jonge inlander'¹⁵ and which has the effect of locating the narrator as looking back from a post-independence, seemingly postcolonial perspective. This perspective is maintained in the final depiction of 'an Indonesian, in dirty khaki shorts, with a headcloth of batik material wound sloppily around his dishevelled hair. He shot a fierce, blind glance at me.' This final description of the young Indonesian whom the narrator takes to be Oeroeg until the final moment of doubt, is of someone whose appearance is a visible representation of the contact zone: 'Around his right arm was a dirty rag on which the mark of the red cross could still be seen. The kris in his belt, the *kain* (cloth) wound round his head Sundanese-style—his khaki shorts, American fashion, and his revolver, perhaps inherited from the Japanese—what more was there to learn about the stages through which he had passed?'¹⁶

In Alibasah's version, there is a tension between the narrator's observations and his knowledge: he comes across as naïve, for example when he is mystified by the new set-up in Soerabaya, including Lida's presence in this non-Dutch household. As we saw above when discussing the jumps in time, the perspective does oscillate between that of the narrator at the time of writing and as he was at the narrated time. At the start of the visit, Alibasah's narrator does not explicitly mention Indonesian nationalism and its aim of getting the Dutch out, presumably because the narrator was completely ignorant about it, though he quickly realizes that he is now the enemy. And although Oeroeg goes on to explain about the nationalist cause, the narrator's response is still naïve: he feels defensive because he had never been in this agonistic position before, but is unable to marshal any arguments. Perhaps this can be seen as evidence of the over-confidence or denial of the Dutch who did not educate the next generation in the new state of affairs.

The narrator's motivation for going back to Indonesia after the war seems confused in Alibasah's version: 'The chaotic situation there, the strange relationships that the Japanese Occupation had left behind, did not daunt

14 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 73.

15 Haasse, *Oeroeg*, p. 67.

16 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 83-84.

me. I had not a moment's doubt that these difficulties would be of a temporary nature. The 'colonial' way of thinking — so often criticized (sic) in my country after the war, whether or not unjustifiably—was alien to me. My desire to return to the Indies and to work there was based mainly on a deeply rooted feeling of belonging to the country where I had been born and brought up.¹⁷

In what follows I analyse Rilke's translation using the same categories, and where relevant, I shall compare her version with Alibasah's.

The Black Lake translated by Ina Rilke

Paratextual information

The cover with its reproduction of a batik butterfly pattern emphasizes a traditional oriental aesthetic while removing its traditional decorative function. The back cover contains an extract from the *Guardian* review of *The Tea Lords* which stresses Haasse's position as a Dutch writer and the difficulties her work has had in making the transition into English. Underneath, the translator's name appears in small print. The inside cover explicitly positions the work as 'a masterpiece of the literature of the colonial experience' so that it might be expected that the translation would support and inform such a reading.

Names and spellings

At the back of the book is a glossary which explains the old Dutch spelling as a result of the lack of a 'standard spelling of the strain of Malay spoken in the East Indies at the time'.¹⁸ The use of the term 'East Indies' for Indonesia confirms the historicist perspective of the translation as providing an insight into the Dutch colony as it was then. It states clearly that 'the old Dutch spelling of place names and vernacular words has been retained.' Interestingly, this approach serves to remove many of the tensions of the contact zone placing the colony and its depiction firmly in the past. The glossary lists Indonesian words included in the text with an English explanation. These words are in old Dutch spelling and are clearly identifiable in the text as they are in italics.

¹⁷ Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 79.

¹⁸ Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 115.

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
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The effect of consistent use of old Dutch spelling in the English version is very interesting since it mimics colonialism in the sense that it denies the reader direct access to the people and places of the 'Indies': everything is mediated through Dutch.

Structure, style and perspective

The Black Lake is presented as a continuous piece of writing. The main structuring device is a leaf motif used to indicate and emphasize the time gap between the narrated events and the narrator's perspective. The first occurrence marks the point where the narrator switches back to the past tense after a momentary reflection in the present tense: 'It may be something to do with what I felt was his inescapable, unfathomable otherness, that secret of spirit and blood which posed no problems in childhood or youth, but which now seems all the more confounding.  Oeroeg was the eldest son...'¹⁹ It is worth noting here that neither Haasse nor Alibasah uses this device, so it is clear that it adds a new and particular dimension to the novella and contributes to the sense that the past is separate from the present.

Style and tone create a calm mood as if the tensions and conflicts of the contact zone are carefully contained in the past and are part of a closed period of history while at the same time using quite marked language especially in the depiction of colonial characters and colonial settings. This also serves to construct the character of the narrator in a particular way which comes across as slightly pompous, reminiscent of the confident tone and conscious style of a male English writer of the period in which the novella is set, such as Evelyn Waugh. I will give an example from Rilke's translation and then contrast it with the same passage in Alibasah's text:

'My father confronted me with a fait accompli. He took me with him in the car to Soekaboemi, where he stopped in front of the house of the person whom I shall call Lida for the rest of my days. Lida was a woman of indeterminate years. With hindsight, I take her to have been between thirty and forty at the time. She was one of those women whose appearance remains constant from adulthood to middle age and beyond. She was of medium height, rather thin and wore her pale blond hair in a short bob...'²⁰

19 The symbol used here is not exactly the same as the one used in the text. Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 2.

20 Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 55.

My father presented me with a *fait accompli* by taking me on a drive with him to Soekaboemi, to the home of a person who for the rest of my life I shall call Lida. Lida was a woman of indeterminate age. At the time I am telling about now, I take her to have been between thirty and forty. She was one of those women who, from adulthood to ripe old age, never change outwardly. She was of medium height and rather thin; she had ash-blond hair that she wore short and straight...²¹

In the second version, the narrator seems less accomplished and knowing, and the tone is less self-consciously literary.

In my discussion of Alibasah's translation, I considered subtle perspectival shifts, and asked whether the perspective was purely that of the young man looking back from a point in time after the narrative's conclusion, or whether it sometimes seemed to be located with the narrator's former self, or was coloured by other factors. The example from *The Black Lake* quoted above can also be read as giving the narrator an older, more mature voice than he has in 'Forever a Stranger'. Here is one more small example: 'Lida refrained from making any comment, but it was obvious that she took a dim view of my father's actions.'²² The tone is almost schoolmasterly and contrasts with Alibasah's version: "Lida refrained from making any comments, but it was obvious that she was very critical of the way my father did things."²³ which uses unmarked language and allows a certain ambiguity of perspective. The narrator could be older, but still quite naïve, but he certainly comes across as less knowing, and younger in mind.

The portrayal of the two main characters

I have already suggested above that the language used by Rilke gives the narrator a different voice, thus constructing an older, more knowing character. This is in keeping with my other observation that the translation strategy appears to be a historicizing one, placing the colony and events in it firmly in the past. I believe that this impression is strengthened by or may even derive from the way the narrator is constructed. Since the novella is told in the first person, I would expect this shift in the narrator's persona to have some kind of an impact on the way Oeroeg comes across, and therefore on the relationship between him and the narrator. I will begin by looking at the physical descriptions of Oeroeg, comparing these

21 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 41-2.

22 Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 66.

23 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 49-50.

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with Alibasah's where this is informative. For instance, Rilke's comment that 'Oeroeg was a naturally passive creature.'²⁴ makes Alibasah's appear restrained in comparison: 'Oeroeg was passive.'²⁵ Comparison enables me to see that while Alibasah confines herself to a neutral statement which in the light of what follows can be seen as a comment on his response to life's vicissitudes, Rilke's version clearly constructs him as the colonized 'other' who, as a 'creature', is possibly less than human. If I now turn to the question of Oeroeg's relationship to the landscape, this reinforces the suggestion that he is less than fully human: 'There was something deeply incongruous about being there without Oeroeg. It seemed to me that my senses were dulled by his absence, that the landscape was incomplete without him.'²⁶ In this essentialist portrayal Oeroeg is 'like most natives'²⁷ and is inseparable from the locality. This aspect is either played down or avoided by Alibasah, whose translation makes it clear that Oeroeg's absence affects the narrator's perception of 'this mountain world', whereas Rilke has omitted this particular phrase. The effect is a subtle one. The omission by Rilke of Haasse's 'bergwereld' has the important effect of removing the otherworldly feel of the lost childhood world. And although the two boys are now estranged, in the magical mountain world, which has stayed the same, the narrator feels the absence of Oeroeg more acutely. In both translations, Oeroeg is connected with the landscape, even forming part of it, but Rilke's version has a concreteness that seems to construct Oeroeg and other natives as inseparable from the physical environment whereas in Alibasah's version both form this lost world together.

Turning now to the description of Oeroeg in Soerabaya which has already been cited above in Alibasah's translation, Rilke has: 'an earnest-looking young man, more mature than I was, a native East Indian exuding a new air of comfortable self-confidence.'²⁸ Rilke, and thus the narrator, adopts a patronizing tone of the blinkered colonial traditionalist. This is in contrast to Alibasah's picture which describes Oeroeg's transformation with respect. There are a great number of possible examples which illustrate this point, but I will suffice with the short phrase 'de beweeglijke jongen'²⁹ which Alibasah chooses to render as 'the smart young boy'³⁰ and Rilke as

24 Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 84.

25 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 63.

26 Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 91.

27 Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 6.

28 Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 98.

29 Haasse, *Oeroeg*, p. 667.

30 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 73.

'the loose-limbed lad'³¹ which is again reminiscent of Western ideas of the native. Conversely, Alibasah seems to play up the tensions and conflict created by Oeroeg's exceptional position in the narrator's family. In a depiction of the servants' reactions, she moves from 'ridicule and resistance' to 'sabotage'³², while Rilke has 'frowned on', 'ridiculed' and 'resistance'³³. The final portrait of Oeroeg encapsulates my characterization of the differences between the two English versions as far as the treatment of Oeroeg is concerned. I have already noted that Alibasah describes the resistance fighter from a postcolonial perspective by according him the status of 'an Indonesian' where Haasse has 'een inlander'. This is in complete contrast to the choice made by Rilke: 'a slight, swarthy figure'.³⁴ Although the depiction of Oeroeg is so different in the two English versions, and although I have suggested that there are significant differences in the narrator's voice, the latter's fundamentally in-between position as native to Indonesia but no longer belonging there is the same in both translations. He describes colonial thinking as 'alien' (Alibasah) to himself or as 'not something I identified with' (Rilke), and yet by returning after the war, his actions position him with the Dutch oppressor refusing to cede power.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I will reflect on the different ways in which Margaret Alibasah and Ina Rilke have transposed the title of *Oeroeg*. Both have chosen to abandon the character's name which would be impossible for an English reader to grasp – s/he would not even know how to pronounce it. Alibasah's choice of 'Forever a Stranger' highlights the multiple theme of estrangement between the narrator and Oeroeg as well as between the narrator and the country of his birth with all the feelings of loss associated with it. On a more political level, the estrangement between the father as a representative of colonialism and his rather baffled son, and between that same son and the militant Oeroeg also point to a dynamic relationship between past and present. By resisting a Western, orientaling and essentializing portrayal of Oeroeg, this version of the Dutch story creates the possibility of a postcolonial reading. The colonial world still resonates through the acts of writing and reading.

31 Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 98.

32 Haasse, 'Forever a Stranger', p. 26.

33 Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 34.

34 Haasse, *The Black Lake*, p. 111.

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The Black Lake refers to a part of the Java landscape that the narrator longs for, is separated from, and to which he returns. It is also the site of the accident which killed Oeroeg's father. Symbolically, it suggests danger and a threat to an idyllic way of life. In this way, I suggest, it emphasizes the colonial past where decolonization is a threat to an established way of life, and provides more of a nostalgic colonial perspective. The past is safely closed off in 'frozen time', the phrase used by philosopher Rosi Braidotti to contrast the functioning of colonial time with that of postcolonial time which, like the contact zone, is a zone of transformations.³⁵ In both cases, the titles link up with the closing passage of the story: Rilke's with the narrator's realization that he never knew Oeroeg in a deep way – the reflective surface of the lake represents the barrier between colonizers and colonized and between past and present. Alibasah, on the other hand, links to the narrator's final question which places the returnee in an uncertain position as a reluctant stranger in the country where he was born. The contact zone with its tensions and conflicts provides a rich setting in which to explore the differential impact that translators can have on a work of literature. This exploration of the two English versions of *Oeroeg* supports Sherry Simon's suggestion that translation is not a separate activity from writing, but an act of co-creation.

35 I am grateful to Stefanie van Gemert for pointing out the concept of 'frozen time' in Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, p.60.