Postcolonial memory in the Netherlands: meaningful voices, meaningful silences

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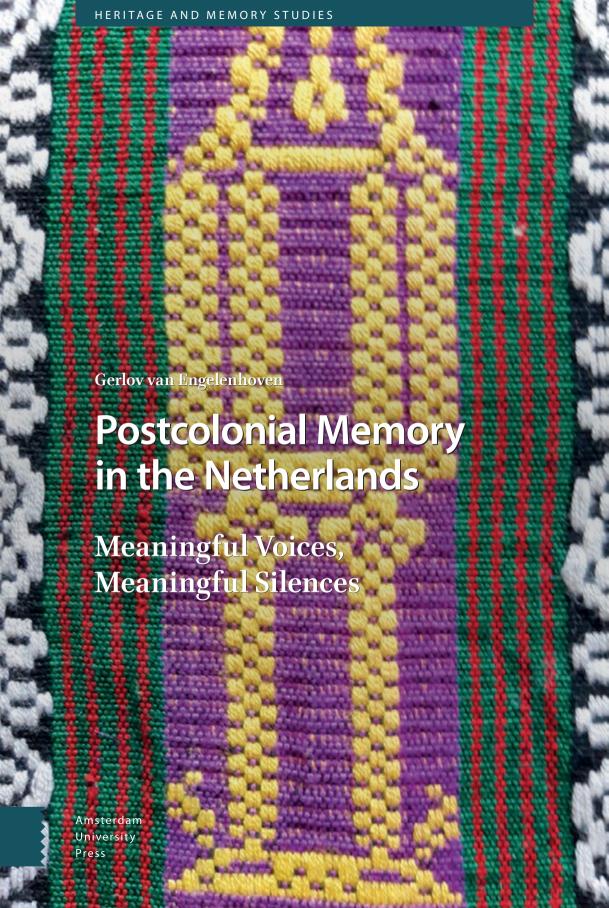Gerlov van Engelenhoven

Postcolonial Memory in the Netherlands

Meaningful Voices, Meaningful Silences

Postcolonial Memory in the Netherlands

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Acknowledgments

This book is based on the acknowledgment that silence has the power to express identities and relationships in ways that one's voice could not. As such, I am having trouble appropriately expressing my gratitude to everyone to whom I owe the completion of this project: words are simply not enough. However, this book is also based on the acknowledgment that silence is most effective when combined with a carefully aimed voice. Therefore, I would still like to thank a number of people explicitly, keeping in mind that there is always more to say, and better ways to say it.

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Introduction

Postcolonial memory in the Netherlands: Meaningful
voices, meaningful silences

Abstract
The term *postcolonial memory* refers to conflicts in contemporary society
about how the colonial past should be remembered. The question is often:
who has the right or ability to tell their stories and who does not? In other
words: who has a voice, and who is silenced? As such, these conflicts
represent a wider tendency in cultural theory and activism to use voice as
a metaphor for empowerment, and silence as voice's negative counterpart,
signifying powerlessness. In this chapter, I will depart from this tendency,
by arguing that voice and silence function not as each other's opposites, but
as each other's continuation, and that postcolonial memory is articulated
through the interplay of meaningful voices *and* meaningful silences.

Keywords: postcolonial memory; voice and silence; articulation; Dutch
colonialism; collective memory; cultural studies

This book is an exploration of the relationship between voice and silence
in case studies that concern *postcolonial memory* in the Netherlands. With
this term, I refer to discussions in contemporary society about how the
colonial past should be remembered. Often, perspectives differ tremen-
dously depending on the ethnic, national, religious, or socio-economic
background of whoever is doing the remembering. A central question of
postcolonial memory is: should we remember colonial history, with all its
concomitant implications such as slavery, genocide, and the appropriation of
land, as something that ended a long time ago; or should we remember it as
something that was never properly resolved, and has lasting repercussions
in the current era? In the Netherlands, answers to this question can diverge
depending on whether someone identifies as Dutch or, for instance, as
Moluccan or Surinamese. Furthermore, answers can diverge depending

on a variety of other parameters as well, including age, gender, religious, and political affiliation.

Such conflicts often revolve around *voice* and *silence*. The implicit or explicit topic of discussion tends to be: who has the right or ability to tell their own stories and who does not? In other words: who has a voice, and who is silenced? As such, postcolonial memory conflicts represent a wider tendency in cultural theory and activism to use voice and silence as opposing metaphors about empowerment. Phrases such as "we must raise our voices" and "we need to include more voices in this conversation" are examples of common invocations of voice as a metaphor for empowerment. In contrast, phrases such as "we will no longer be silenced" and "this silence must be broken" indicate how silence tends to connote voice's negative counterpart, signifying a loss or lack of power.

This common binary opposition of voice-as-power against silence-as-powerlessness simplifies the complexity of the articulation of postcolonial memory. Some voices do not liberate us from, but rather subject us to power: anything you say can be used against you. Conversely, silence sometimes speaks louder than words. Silence can indicate dignity, it can protect, disrupt, and reconfigure: silence can be deliberate, and it can be powerful. Whether or not someone's voice is powerful and how we should interpret someone's silence are issues that depend on context, and on our definitions of voice and silence as such: the dividing line between voice and silence depends on who is listening. Hence, the fundamental question that drives this book is:

How are voices and silences deployed in the articulation of postcolonial memory in the Netherlands?

This is a very open question. However, it is deliberately formulated as such, to allow for the consideration that the concepts of voice and silence can be interpreted in widely varying ways. Throughout this book, I will analyze four types of voice and four types of silence that I argue are prevalent in postcolonial memory. Each chapter is devoted to one pairing of voice and silence. The voices in question are:

(1) *deceptive*;
(2) *appropriated*;
(3) *repressive*;
(4) *disruptive*.

And their corresponding silences:

(1) *empowering*;
(2) *protective*;

(3) *resistant*;
(4) *disruptive*.

The purpose of this classification is to theorize voice and silence not as opposites, but as allied modes of articulation: I see their relationship not as a matter of *either/or*, but of *this/and*. Based on this premise, each chapter offers case study analyses of concrete conflicts about postcolonial memory in Dutch society, in order to show how postcolonial memory is articulated precisely through the interplay between what is voiced and what remains silent.

Having said that, I want to specify that all my chapters deal with the history of the Dutch colonization of present-day Indonesia. More specifically, all chapters focus to a greater or lesser extent on the history of the relationship between the Netherlands and the Moluccan community. Chapters 1 and 2 are both based on case studies taken from this postcolonial community's long relationship of conflict with its Dutch national context. Chapters 3 and 4 both focus on the controversial legacy of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, whose most infamous actions took place in Banda, an island group belonging to the Moluccan province in present-day Indonesia. However, these two chapters are less about the way in which this history shaped Moluccan identity than they are about how it shaped Dutch identity.

As such, this book focuses on only one major aspect of contemporary Dutch postcolonial memory: that which is constructed in relation to the history of the Dutch East Indies. The activities of the WIC (Westindische Compagnie: Dutch West Indies Company), which were primarily focused in the Americas, the Caribbean, and West Africa, remain outside the scope of this study. Therefore, important elements of postcolonial memory, such as the Dutch memory of their involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, are not discussed.

This decision to focus on memories related to Moluccan and Indonesian histories is motivated by my aim to offer an exploration that does not try to do too much in too little space and time. I do not at all claim to have mapped the entirety of conflicts about Dutch postcolonial memory in this book. Rather, I have chosen specific case studies that each take place more or less in the same historical and geographical realm, as a way to ensure my analyses cohere with one another. Moreover, my decision to focus on memories of the Dutch East Indies is also personally motivated: as someone who identifies as a third-generation Dutch-Moluccan myself, it has been particularly instructive to delve into the discrepancies between how my generation remembers the colonial past

in comparison to other generations of Moluccans in the Netherlands, and in comparison to non-Moluccan memory processes that have reached me via Dutch education, media, and cultural representations throughout my life.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will first provide theoretical context for the concept of postcolonial memory. Subsequently, I will offer an overview of all four chapters' central case studies and their corresponding voices and silences.

Postcolonial memory

Conflicts about postcolonial memory have become increasingly prominent since the 2010s, in the Netherlands as well as globally. These conflicts often focus on questions about the representation of the colonial past both in tangible and intangible ways. To clarify, I will provide a few examples of conflicts in each of these two ways. One central example of a conflict over *tangible* postcolonial memory is the ongoing controversy around references to Jan Pieterszoon Coen through statues in Dutch public space. Coen was a seventeenth-century colonial merchant who established the spice monopoly of the VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie: Dutch East India Company), which brought considerable wealth to the Netherlands. However, he established this monopoly by taking possession of the Banda islands: an action that entailed massacring 14,000 Bandanese people and setting fire to a majority of their plantations. His glorified presence in Dutch public space has thus often caused heated debates about the way in which he should be remembered in contemporary society: as a hero or as a villain. Similar conflicts can be identified outside the Netherlands: for example, Cape Town's Rhodes Must Fall movement in 2015, or the surge in Black Lives Matter activism against colonial statues across the world in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

These are examples of postcolonial memory conflicts that focus on tangible cultural heritage. Additional to such conflicts, postcolonial memory is also debated with regard to *intangible* cultural heritage. A central example of this latter form is the ongoing discussion in Dutch society around the term "Golden Age" as a reference to the seventeenth century. In 2019, the Amsterdam Museum officially decided to stop using this term, because it represents the seventeenth century as an era of welfare and triumph, thereby ignoring its problematic basis in colonialism. Depending on perspective, this era could also be remembered as a history of "poverty, war, forced labor,

and human trafficking" ("Amsterdam Museum neemt afscheid van 'Gouden Eeuw'").[1] Therefore, the museum no longer refers to it as the Golden Age, favoring the more neutral term "seventeenth century" as a way to allow for the inclusion of diverse, both positive and negative, memories of the colonial past. Again, similar discussions can be identified outside of the Netherlands: for example, the ongoing controversy over Columbus Day (12 October) in the Americas and elsewhere. This holiday celebrates the day on which Columbus "discovered" the "New World" in 1492, by initiating the colonization and oppression of its native populations.

The abovementioned cases are examples of postcolonial memory conflicts because they are discussions in which different memories of the same colonial past are negotiated. Sometimes these discussions lead to a new status quo, like the Amsterdam Museum's official rejection of the term "Golden Age." Sometimes these discussions find no satisfying conclusion, and instead are opened up time and again, like the discussion about Coen's glorification in Dutch public space. This conflict began in the late nineteenth century, when his statue in Hoorn was erected, and has yet to find closure. Often, these ongoing disagreements become heated and involve physical altercations. Coen's statue has frequently been the target of paint bombs and spray-painted slogans over the years. A protest against the statue that took place on 19 June 2020 escalated into violence between protesters and police, resulting in the arrest of seven suspects ("Opnieuw aanhoudingen").

Some of these memory conflicts even turn into legal disputes. A major example of this in the Dutch context is the 1977 train hijacking in the village De Punt, which was carried out by second-generation Moluccans. The hijacking was a radical protest against their disadvantaged position in Dutch society, took twenty days, and ended when the military intervened, resulting in the deaths of six hijackers and two hostages, all killed by bullets fired by the military. In 2014, family members of the hijackers who were killed started a lawsuit against the Dutch state, accusing it of having ordered the military to execute the hijackers. The court ruled in favor of the state in 2018, but throughout the duration of the lawsuit, the question of how to remember the hijackings made headlines on a near-daily basis.

The lawsuit itself and the media coverage about it are examples of a postcolonial memory conflict, because the question discussed is: how should we remember the hijacking of 1977? Was it an act of domestic terrorism against the state, or was it a justifiable action by a postcolonial community that suffered marginalization in the Netherlands: a position

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1   My translation from the Dutch original: "armoede, oorlog, dwangarbeid en mensenhandel."

that becomes still harder to ignore when placed within the larger history of Dutch colonization of the Moluccan islands since the early seventeenth century? In other words, do we remember the colonization of the Moluccan people as a finished chapter of Dutch history, or as an ongoing issue that still impacts society up until today?

What becomes clear when considering these examples is that discussions about postcolonial memory concern the past as much as they concern the present. As memory scholar Astrid Erll puts it, "collective memories are never a mirror image of the past, but rather an expressive indication of the needs and interests of the person or group doing the remembering in the present" (8). Conflicts about how to remember the past often become tense because decisions about such memories have implications for people's present-day collective identities: "Things are remembered which correspond to the self-image and the interests of the group" (17). Discussing the legitimacy of our memories of the colonial past influences the way in which we perceive our postcolonial present. In the case of the Netherlands, remembering Jan Pieterszoon Coen as a national hero implies that in the present the Dutch still take pride in their colonial past, whereas remembering him as an aggressor implies a more critical awareness of that past. Remembering the hijackings as an escalation of an unbalanced relationship between the state and one of its postcolonial migrant communities implies the acknowledgment that the trauma of colonialism has not yet been sufficiently addressed. Remembering the hijackings as an unexplainable transgression foregoes such acknowledgment.

To Erll, postcolonial memory is thus one form of *collective memory*: a process of remembering that impacts collective identity, and that, to great extent, takes place in and through culture. Issues of collective memory are settled through media representation, public deliberation, and education curricula, as well as through cultural representations such as documentaries, novels, or museum exhibitions. Erll traces the concept of collective memory back to the work of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s. Halbwachs theorized collective memory as the process of negotiating a shared remembrance of the past between individuals and the social frameworks to which they belong. The term "social framework" could refer to something as small as the direct family, as big as the nation-state, or anything in between. According to Halbwachs, "individuals exist not in isolation but in a series of interlocking communities – families, religions, regions, professions, civil society organizations – that contour their social identities and consequently their practices of remembrance" (Rothberg 362). Constructing a shared memory of the past may strengthen a sense

of collective belonging and it may help justify a particular status quo in the present.

In his own time, Halbwachs's work did not yet have much impact, but this changed in the 1980s. Historians Benedict Anderson and Pierre Nora returned to his concept of collective memory and developed it into theories relevant to their context of late–Cold War nationalism. To Anderson and Nora, nationalism is a process of myth-making, in which collective imaginations of national community are institutionalized via certain cultural practices. These include national media and literature, which Anderson is most interested in, as well as sites of memory, such as national monuments and public art, which is what Nora focuses on. From the 1990s onward, archaeologist Jan Assmann and literary theorist Aleida Assmann further expanded the concept of collective memory into several distinct forms. According to them, the two main forms are *communicative memory*, which is "non-institutional" memory that is negotiated "in everyday interaction and communication," and *cultural memory*, which is institutionalized through "monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions" (Jan Assmann 111).

Whether understood as everyday conversations between individuals, or as institutionalized practices initiated at the level of government, cultural archive, or education curriculum, collective memory thus refers to a process of inclusion and exclusion: it draws boundaries between those who share the same imagination of the past and those who do not. When it comes to postcolonial memory specifically, such processes of inclusion and exclusion can result in the marginalization of people with a postcolonial background, and the erasure or denial of their identities. Conflicts about postcolonial memory in Dutch society thus occur when there is a discrepancy in society about how the colonial past should be remembered in the present: for example, as positive or negative; as something that is entirely in the past or as something that still lingers on in the present.

As mentioned at the start of this introduction, this book's focus is on the emphasis that is often placed in such conflicts upon "voice" as a metaphor for empowerment, and "silence" as voice's negative counterpart, signifying a loss or lack of power. For example, the Amsterdam Museum explained its official rejection of the term "Golden Age" as a way to open up space for new voices "that are not being heard yet" ("Amsterdam Museum neemt afscheid van 'Gouden Eeuw'").[2] A central slogan used in Black Lives Matter's protests against colonial statues is "Break Silence" ("Broken Silence"). I

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2   My translation from the Dutch original: "die nog niet gehoord worden."

certainly acknowledge the importance of adding voices to conversations about contested pasts, and of breaking the silence around topics such as racism. Nevertheless, I argue that, depending on the case study, some voices may indeed function as tools for empowerment, but others function as tools for deception, appropriation, or repression. Similarly, some silences may indeed indicate powerlessness or complicity, yet others may be powerful forms of protection, resistance, or disruption. The overview below will show how each chapter will contribute to the development of this premise.

Voices and silences: overview of chapters

Chapter 1 is an exploration of voices and silences with regard to the articulation of Moluccan identity in the Netherlands. The chapter starts with a personal case study: that of my grandmother, who was part of the Moluccan community's first generation. With her parents and siblings, she arrived as a twelve-year-old in Rotterdam in 1951, two years after the Netherlands officially acknowledged the independence of Indonesia (1949), and one year after the Moluccan province's declaration of independence was denied by the Indonesian state (1950). As will become clear in the story I will tell, my grandmother refused to talk about her pre-migration past throughout her entire life, leaving many details of her history uncertain, much to the puzzlement of her husband and son: my grandfather and father.

In my analysis of this family history, I will argue that this type of silence is often read as an indication of trauma: an *inability* to speak. Understanding someone's silence in this way implies that silence is a condition that one should be healed from. My counter-reading will suggest a more empowering understanding of my grandmother's silence: as a deliberate act of not speaking, not an inability but a *refusal* to engage in conversation about something she deemed too personal to share. Understanding someone's silence as refusal implies that silence can be an expressive choice which should be understood *not in opposition to, but in addition to speech*. In this interpretation, voice and silence are not a matter of *either/or*, but of *this/and*.

Based on this case study, I will revisit one of postcolonial theory's fundamental questions, "Can the subaltern speak?" (posed by literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), and ask a follow-up question: "Does the subaltern *want to* speak?" To me, the second question is relevant to ask, because it allows for the possibility of agency in someone's silence, and it releases silence from its deterministic definition as a condition that people suffer from and have to be liberated from. Based on my take on

Spivak's theory, I will place my grandmother's silence in the larger context of the Moluccan community, through an analysis of *adat*, a concept which the community deems central to its collective identity. This originally Arabic term means "custom" or "habit" and was introduced by Islamic merchants in the Moluccan islands in the thirteenth century. I will argue that the contemporary Moluccan community has reappropriated the term as an identity marker that incorporates silence into its basic functioning. Through this comparative analysis between my grandmother's individual case and the collective case of adat, I will argue that Moluccan identity is articulated through the interplay of what is expressed and what remains silent. In this book's larger focus on postcolonial memory, this chapter's function is to introduce silence, alongside voice, as a deliberate and constitutive element of the individual and collective processes of remembering the past.

Chapter 2 continues this emphasis on Moluccan collective memory but broadens its scope to national history. Here, the focus is on the train hijackings that took place in the Netherlands in 1975 and 1977. The 2014–2018 lawsuit relating to the second train hijacking brought renewed attention to this history: the hijackings were discussed on a daily basis in both traditional and social media. The central question of these discussions was whether or not the hijackings should be understood as justifiable actions. In my analysis of this case study, I explore the strategies involving voice and silence that are deployed in these discussions. Because the hijackers carried out their actions on behalf of the Moluccan separatist struggle, the media have often framed them as *the voices of their community*. By framing them as such, not only are the hijackers understood as central representatives of Moluccan collective memory, but – vice versa – Moluccan collective memory is also reduced to the way in which the hijackers expressed it.

As such, my aim is not only to analyze how the voices of Moluccan activists were silenced or amplified, but also how they came to be appropriated and collectivized: how did their voices come to represent the Moluccan community at large, and to what extent did the hijackers, or the community itself, have a say in this process? Who decides upon the status of their voices? Near the end of the chapter, I will analyze attempts by surviving hijackers to detach their voices from the elevated significance they received, by retreating into silence: if speaking up sometimes can entail giving one's voice away, then remaining silent can be the process of holding onto one's voice.

In *Chapter 3*, I discuss the statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, which stands on a public square in the Dutch city of Hoorn. The statue was placed in 1893,

as part of a larger program intended to strengthen Dutch national identity, by honoring national heroes with monuments. Coen was selected for this program because of his role in establishing the Dutch monopoly on the global spice trade in the early seventeenth century. Due to the violence of his actions, his heroic status has always been controversial. Since Coen's statue was erected, the city of Hoorn has systematically refused to engage with recurrent arguments in favor of removing it. However, after the statue fell from its pedestal during a construction accident in 2011, these voices could no longer be ignored.

In an attempt to work around this conflict, the municipality decided to add a new paragraph to the inscription of the renovated statue. This new paragraph mentions the fact that Coen's legacy is controversial and that not everyone agrees that he deserves a statue. Apart from this addition to the inscription, the municipality also organized an exhibition in Westfries Museum, located at the same square as the statue. Like the inscription itself, the exhibition was aimed at creating an inclusive space, where both supportive and critical voices could negotiate the contested memory of Coen's actions in Banda. As such, it seems as if the voices of those who were against the statue are now appropriately represented in public discourse. Yet the municipality granted the opposition a voice only as a way to legitimize its decision to keep ignoring what that voice had to say: the statue was renovated in direct disregard of the opposition's wishes. This chapter thus provides an analysis of this paradoxical interplay of voice and silence in the negotiation of postcolonial memory, in which being granted a voice actually means being silenced.

Chapter 4 is a study of the activist group De Grauwe Eeuw's protest actions in 2016–2018. In these years, the group frequently made the national news by spray-painting slogans such as "genocide" and "stop colonial glorification" on colonial monuments, including Coen's statue. However, despite their outspoken presence in public space, the activists are uncharacteristically silent in the mainstream media. They refuse all participation in interviews with national newspapers or television channels, claiming that speaking to these established discourses is tantamount to not speaking at all. They argue that such coverage would result in the silencing of their political voice, because it would be filtered through the media's predetermined position with regard to Dutch postcolonial memory.

In other words, if Chapter 3 discusses how voices of dissent can be silenced exactly through their inclusion in public discourse, Chapter 4 looks at this situation from the other side: by refusing to speak to the mainstream media, De Grauwe Eeuw protects its voice from being silenced. However, as will be

discussed in the second half of this chapter, their active use of silence is not without its particular risks. By studying the ways in which the media have criminalized these activists, to large extent based on their refusal to speak out about their actions publicly, I will suggest that silence, like voice, has its limitations as a strategy of postcolonial memory articulation.

Within Jan Assmann's classification of collective memory types, Chapters 1 and 2 thus concern *communicative memory*, whereas Chapters 3 and 4 concern *cultural memory*. That is to say, the first two chapters are about non-institutional negotiations of collective memory that are made through *self-representation* (Chapter 1) and *media representation* (Chapter 2); and the last two chapters are about institutionalizing collective memory in *public space* (Chapter 3), and about protesting such institutionalization through *social activism* (Chapter 4).

Taken together, these four chapters are aimed at nuancing the traditionally rather limiting binary opposition between voice-as-power and silence-as-powerlessness, through my analyses of different conflicts about postcolonial memory in the Netherlands. In each of these analyses, voices are critically revisited: to what extent does giving, receiving, or taking up voice always result in more power; to what extent does speaking up always entail being listened to? Meanwhile, silences are also critically revisited in each chapter: how can we approach silence not as an absence but as a presence, not as an indication of a lost or hidden meaning, but as itself productive of meaning? Under which circumstances can silence be more empowering than voice?

These questions are relevant for many other situations than the ones I discuss as well. Therefore, I hope that this book reads as an invitation for others to add their own insights about meaningful voices and silences in the articulation of postcolonial memory. Indeed, I would like the central takeaway of this book to be that the overlapping fields of postcolonial theory and memory studies are both deeply *logocentric*: they are focused on speaking up, speaking out, discussing, declaring, expressing, and enunciating. Once we start seeing silences as particular forms of expression alongside the more obvious verbal forms, we can start developing ways of listening to one another beyond what is explicitly voiced. Therefore, I start this book from the consideration that the struggle of postcolonial memory is more intricate than a battle for the loudest voice. In what follows, I will show that voice and silence function not as each other's opposites, but as each other's continuation, and that postcolonial memory is articulated through the interplay of meaningful voices *and* meaningful silences.

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1 Two cases of Moluccan identity articulation

Deceptive voices and empowering silences in individual and collective self-representation

Abstract

This chapter is an exploration of the deceptive voices and empowering silences with regard to the articulation of Moluccan identity in the Netherlands. It starts with a personal case study: that of my Moluccan grandmother, who refused to talk about her pre-migration past throughout her life. I will place this case study in the larger context of the Moluccan community, through an analysis of *adat*, a concept which the community deems central to its collective identity. I will interpret this term as an identity marker that incorporates silence into its basic functioning. The purpose of this comparative analysis is to argue that both voice and silence are deliberate and constitutive elements of the individual and collective processes of remembering the past.

Keywords: Moluccan community; cultural identity; voice and silence; postcolonial memory; subaltern; articulation

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the deployment of deceptive voices and empowering silences in the articulation of postcolonial memory through individual and collective self-representation. The analysis starts with a personal case study: that of my grandmother, who was part of the Moluccan community's first generation. With her parents and siblings, she arrived as a twelve-year-old in Rotterdam in 1951, two years after the Netherlands officially acknowledged Indonesia's independence (1949), and one year after Maluku's appeal to independence was denied by the Indonesian state (1950). As will become clear in the

story I will tell, my grandmother refused to talk about her pre-migration past throughout her entire life, leaving certain details of her history uncertain, much to the puzzlement of her husband and her son: my grandfather and my father.

In my analysis of this family history, I will argue that this type of silence is often read as an indication of trauma: an *inability* to speak. Understanding someone's silence in this way implies that silence is a condition one should be healed from. My counter-reading will suggest a more empowering understanding of my grandmother's silence: as a deliberate act of not speaking, not an inability but a *refusal* to engage in conversation about something she deemed too personal to share. Therefore, the central question that I will explore with regard to her story is: *under which circumstances can voice be interpreted as a deceptive form, and silence as an empowering form of cultural self-representation?*

I will answer this question by placing my grandmother's story in the larger context of the Moluccan community, through an analysis of *adat*, a concept which the community deems central to its collective identity. This originally Arabic term means "custom" or "habit" and was introduced by Islamic merchants in Maluku in the thirteenth century. It was used as a way to refer to indigenous customs that could not be incorporated into Islamic law. I will argue that the contemporary Moluccan community has reappropriated the term as a collective identity marker that incorporates deceptive voice and empowering silence into its basic functioning.

In what follows, I will first tell the story of my grandmother's silence. This story will include relevant historical context about the establishment of the Moluccan community in the Netherlands. I will then analyze the story as an indication of how voice can be deceptive rather than empowering, and how silence can be a form of empowerment rather than of powerlessness. Finally, I will place this personal case study into the larger context of Moluccan collective identity, through my exploration of adat as an identity marker that relies upon the joined strategy of deliberate voices and silences. With an eye on this book's focus on postcolonial memory, this chapter's function is to analyze the process of remembering as a form of individual and collective self-representation, and to introduce silence, alongside voice, as a deliberate and constitutive element of this process.

The case of my grandmother

In 1980, when my father turned eighteen, my grandfather's birthday present to him came in the form of two plane tickets to Ambon: one among the

approximately 1,000 islands that together constitute the Indonesian province of Maluku. One of the tickets was for my father, the other for his mother, my grandmother. There was no third ticket for my grandfather himself. Due to his fear of flying, he saw no opportunity to join his wife and son on their trip, which was meant as an exploration of their roots.

My grandmother was part of the first generation of the Moluccan community in the Netherlands. Her migration history had begun in the first stages of Indonesian independence from Dutch colonial rule.[1] Her father, my great-grandfather, had been one of 3,500 Moluccan soldiers of the KNIL (Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger: Royal Dutch East Indies Army). The KNIL was tasked to suppress the Indonesian National Revolution (1945–1949). The revolution started with the one-sided declaration of Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945 and ended with the transfer of sovereignty of the Dutch East Indies to the Republic of the United States of Indonesia on 27 December 1949. This federal state structure lasted only a few months and was succeeded by the unitary Republic of Indonesia on 17 August 1950.

As so-called "ethnic soldiers" of the Dutch army (Steijlen, "Tjakalele at Full Moon" 2), the Moluccan KNIL soldiers had fought *against* Indonesian independence during the revolution. Their alliance with colonial power was motivated by the separatist objective to establish a Moluccan republic, independent from Indonesia. However, this objective was never reached. The declaration of the RMS (Republik Maluku Selatan: Republic of South-Maluku), which took place on 25 April 1950 on the Moluccan main island, Ambon, led to Ambon's invasion and subsequent occupation by the Indonesian army on 28 September 1950. After two months of armed conflict between Indonesian and Moluccan troops, the separatist movement was officially defeated in November 1950. Meanwhile, the Dutch government had been in the process of disbanding the KNIL since the transfer of sovereignty in 1949. Because of their separatist position, the Moluccan KNIL soldiers refused to be demobilized in Indonesian territory. Because of the Indonesian occupation of Maluku, they also refused to be demobilized there. The Dutch government therefore decided to demobilize and subsequently house them in the Netherlands, a solution that was initially meant to be temporary.

Thus, the 3,500 soldiers and their families, a grand total of 12,500 Moluccans, arrived in the Netherlands between March and June 1951. On arrival, they were housed in migrant camps, pending return to Indonesia. However,

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1   My historical overview of the Indonesian independence struggle and the subsequent Moluccan migration is based on Fridus Steijlen, *RMS: van ideaal tot symbool. Moluks nationalisme in Nederland, 1951–1994.*

because of continuing political unrest in Indonesia, as well as the ultimate failure to establish the RMS, their exile was indefinitely prolonged. In 1958, the Indonesian government passed Law No. 62 on the Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia, requiring Indonesian citizens to reconfirm their loyalty to the country. Most Moluccans in the Netherlands refused to do this, and therefore lost their Indonesian citizenship. They became eligible to apply for Dutch citizenship only from 1976 onward, after almost two decades of living in a condition of statelessness.

Among this first generation of migrants was my great-grandfather, who brought along his family, including his then twelve-year-old daughter: my grandmother. As far as her husband and son knew, my grandmother was born on Ambon, specifically in the Ambonese village of Leti. Therefore, during their trip to Ambon in 1980, my father was especially looking forward to visiting this village. However, his mother seemed reluctant. For the majority of their trip, she refused to go out, and instead preferred to stay in the hotel room while my father explored the island by himself. Whenever he would ask his mother to bring him to Leti, or at least give him directions, she would respond in vague terms, or promise to go there with him another day, or claim that she was not feeling well.

When their stay on Ambon was coming to an end, my father's patience ran out and he insisted on visiting Leti, as it was unclear if they would ever return. To his surprise, his mother began to cry. Their conflict was overheard by a passerby, who involved himself in the conversation, asking them what was going on. From this passerby, my father finally learned that Leti was not an Ambonese village at all, but rather an island elsewhere in Maluku, around 500 kilometers south of Ambon. This is how, at the end of their stay on Ambon, my father discovered that they had traveled to the wrong island, and that his mother had remained silent about this. Although the truth about Leti had as such been revealed, this still did not end my grandmother's refusal to talk about it. According to my father, my grandmother even quietly approved of him talking to the passerby: it gave her the opportunity to persist in her silence about the topic. In a way, the man functioned as a mediator between my father and my grandmother, providing the former with the information he sought, while granting the latter's wish not to talk about it. My grandmother in fact never broke her silence about this topic, for the rest of her life.

When I discussed the details of this story with my father in the context of writing this book, he emphasized that his mother had never directly claimed that she was from Ambon. Rather, she had always said she was from Leti, but had never specified where that was. Because 90% of the Moluccan

migrants in the Netherlands indeed came from Ambon (Amersfoort 171), the term "Ambonese" was initially used to refer to the entire community, by Moluccans and Dutch alike. From the 1970s onward, the term "Moluccans" became more common, but referring to the community as "Ambonese" never completely disappeared. As such, the idea that my grandmother was from Ambon, like most other Moluccans in the Netherlands, and that Leti therefore must be an Ambonese village, was a product of my father's and my grandfather's conjecture. Nevertheless, my grandmother never refuted or corrected this idea, and even went along with it to such an extent that she agreed to a trip to Ambon. Moreover, she tried to hide the confusion about Leti as long as possible, by coming up with excuses in order to stall my father's plans to visit the "village," rather than admitting that Leti was its own island several hundred kilometers south of Ambon.

Thus, one way or another, my grandmother must have felt that she could or should not speak about her origin. The fact that she preferred traveling with her son to a more or less random destination instead of telling him the truth indicates how strong her reluctance was to return, or even refer, to her actual place of birth. Moreover, her tears, which came when the truth finally came out, suggest that this moment was somehow painful for her. This is further confirmed by her continued refusal to break her silence about the topic even after the confusion about Leti had been settled. One could speculate about the reasons behind my grandmother's silence. For instance, it could indicate a trauma, war-related or otherwise. It could be understood as a form of mourning over the loss of her homeland. Perhaps the silence was an articulation of her in-between position as an involuntary migrant who was lost between nationalities, identifying neither as Dutch, nor as Indonesian. It could even be interpreted as a symptom of an intercultural communication problem between my Moluccan grandmother, her Dutch husband, and their mixed-background son.

However, the purpose of telling this story is in fact *not* to interpret the reasons behind my grandmother's silence. After all, the answer could be sought anywhere from the widely symptomatic, which would interpret her silence within the context of her migration history, to the deeply personal, which would interpret her as someone with particular reasons not to revisit her past. Neither of these directions would be satisfying, considering the fact that it would be impossible to confirm any hypothesis. Moreover, my grandmother's refusal to talk about Leti was so complete that my father was eventually dependent upon a passerby to point him toward it. To inscribe her silence with meaning now, within the context of this text, would be to go against her own wishes: I would risk *speaking for her*. My grandmother

wished to remain silent and she must have had her reasons for that. It would be inappropriate to attempt to uncover those reasons. Therefore, rather than approach her silence as an indication of a hidden meaning that should be exposed, my intention is to study the silence as such, and for itself, *without* speculating about the reasons behind it, so as not to appropriate or override it, or erase it as silence.

Indeed, my grandmother's insistence on remaining silent recalls Ludwig Wittgenstein's well-known aphorism: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (108). According to philosopher Jane Geany, the aphorism both indicates "a loss of confidence in the power of language to represent" and suggests that there are "certain kinds of experience that transcend language" (xiii). Correspondingly, my grandmother's silence could be taken as an indication that whatever she was not speaking about perhaps *could* not be expressed in words. Perhaps it could only be expressed through silence. With that in mind, I am aware that reproducing the story of my grandmother's silence in this text, while insisting that her silence itself should not be erased, constitutes something of a paradox: one that extents to the entire premise of this book. That is, my aim is to discuss silence *without undoing it as silence.* In order to do that, I approach silence not as an absence, but as a presence, and not as an indication toward a hidden or lost meaning, but as something that is itself productive of meaning.

As such, the story of my grandmother may serve as a point of entry into this chapter's central emphasis on *deceptive voices* and *empowering silences* in the *articulation of Moluccan identity.* Basic definitions of the terms "deceptive voice," "empowering silence," "articulation," and "identity" can be derived from the story. My grandmother willfully remained silent about a certain aspect of her identity. Her silence was *empowering* in that it was a conscious strategy, which she deployed in order to have control over how much others knew about her. At the same time, her silence was not all-encompassing, because she did, in fact, use her voice, but only in order to create a *deception.* That is, during the trip to Ambon, she used her voice to distract my father from finding out about her silence. She came up with excuses not to visit Leti, only so that my father would not realize that she was keeping quiet about what and where Leti really was. If the truth about Leti was obscured by my grandmother's silence, then her silence itself, if you will, was obscured by her voice. In short, my grandmother's ways of not speaking about her past, or speaking about it in a selective way, combined a deceptive use of her voice with an empowering use of silence.

Therefore, her story is a particular and individual example of what I mean with the "articulation of identity," a practice which later on in the chapter,

when I discuss adat, will also be analyzed as a collective endeavor. My use of the term "identity" corresponds to great extent to the way in which it is usually understood within the field of cultural studies, as outlined by Stuart Hall:

> identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we came from", so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (4)

This definition indicates that the construction of identity is an ongoing and interactive process that includes both how one sees oneself, how one sees others, and how one is seen by others. In other words, identity is a matter of contestation. To interpret my grandmother's silence within the context of this definition, means to understand her silence not as non-participation, in which she fails to express "who she is" or "where she came from," but as an active form of self-representation, in which she takes control over "who she might become."

This approach is anti-essentialist in that it does not understand identity as referring to a "stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change" (Hall 3). Rather, it is understood as a discursive practice: that is, identities are "produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies" (4). As such, Hall defines identity construction not only as contextual, but also as *enunciative*, that is, as something that must be declared, expressed, voiced. This is where I depart slightly from his approach. While I do not disagree with his emphasis on enunciation when it comes to identity construction, I propose to keep my grandmother's story in mind, in order to suggest that the construction of one's identity can be equally dependent on that which is actively *not* enunciated.

This is where my use of the term "articulation" comes in. Hall understands identity to be a matter of articulation, in the sense of "an 'articulated' lorry: a lorry where the front and back can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage that can be broken. An articulation is thus [...] a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time" (qtd. in Grossberg 53). In other words, Hall's reference to articulation is in order to emphasize the relational and dynamic aspects of identity. I agree with this

application of the term, but would like to add one that more directly refers to the question of identity's particular relationship to enunciation. In its most basic Oxford English Dictionary definition, "to articulate" means "to set out in articles; to particularize, specify" ("articulate, v.I.1"). This aspect of particularization remains central in definitions of the term that are speech-related: "to express distinctly"; "to modify (vocal sound, a pulmonary airstream, etc.) so as to produce a speech sound, a word, etc." ("articulate, v.II.5; v.II.6").

According to this definition, articulation refers not only to the production of speech or sound, but it specifically indicates that this sound is divided into distinct particles. As such, to articulate words well is as much a matter of voice as it is of silence: without the appropriate use of silences, vocal sounds cannot be modified so as to express something distinctly. Similarly, in the sense of a well-articulated argument, good articulation depends on a balanced interplay between what is said and what is not said. Thus, when I propose to see identity construction as a matter of articulation rather than enunciation or any of its other more directly voice-focused synonyms, it is to suggest that voice and silence both play their parts in the construction of one's identity. This suggestion will be further developed in the next section.

Does the subaltern want to speak?

My grandmother's story resonates with, but also immediately departs from, the well-known question which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asks in her article of the same name, "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In her text, she focuses on Hindu women during British colonialism, and argues that they were doubly oppressed: as women in a sexist society and as colonized subjects. The women had no voices of their own, in the sense that their position in society was exclusively represented through two other, dominant discourses: Indian patriarchy and the British colonial regime. According to Spivak, this lack of a voice is the defining feature of the subaltern. It indicates a condition of marginalization that is discursive – that is, which can only be countered by finding a means of self-expression – as Spivak declared in a follow-up text: "If the subaltern can speak then, thank God, the subaltern is not a subaltern anymore" ("The New Historicism" 283). My grandmother, as an involuntary, postcolonial migrant living in the country of the former colonial oppressor, could be interpreted as occupying a subaltern position. And, as it appears, she could not, or at least did not, speak about her pre-migration origin. To this extent her story corresponds to Spivak's theory.

Yet there are two important differences between my grandmother's silence and that of the theoretical figure of the subaltern, which become apparent when considering that Spivak's theory is often understood as an incentive to "solve" the subaltern's silence, by "giving voice, listening to the voiceless, speaking up, speaking back, and the like" (Slotta 1). If the subaltern ceases to be subaltern when she finds a way to speak, then my father's insistence on my grandmother talking to him should be interpreted as a moment of her empowerment. However, what happened in that instance indicates otherwise. Not only did my grandmother cry when her past was finally brought up, she also refused to speak about it more than absolutely necessary. She never elaborated on her reasons for remaining silent about her past, nor did she ever provide any further details about her life before the migration.

Therefore, the first difference with Spivak's subaltern is that at least part of my grandmother's silence was not a matter of inability, but of refusal: *she did not want to speak*. The second difference is that she, in fact, *did have a voice*, which she used to deceive her son into believing that she was not keeping anything quiet. Therefore, contrary to Spivak's voice, which is used as a metaphor for empowerment through self-expression, my grandmother used her voice *to avoid self-expression.*

As such, this story complicates the common dichotomy between voice and silence in three different ways. First, it demonstrates that silence does not have to indicate a lack of identity, but can also indicate a strategy of protecting one's identity. Second, it shows that voice is not only instrumental in declaring aspects of one's identity, but it can also be instrumental in concealing such aspects. Third, voice and silence do not have to oppose each other, but instead may work together, or at least coexist. These considerations refute the common logocentric idea that voice is to be preferred over silence, or that silence is to be understood as merely the absence of voice. In fact, both voice and silence can have different functions depending on how they are deployed as self-representation strategies in different situations.

These conclusions resonate with the work of a growing field of political and cultural theorists who are skeptical of the ubiquity of voice in postcolonial studies and other theoretical discourses that focus on matters of identity and representation. Their work is instead oriented toward analyzing the functions of silence, both in its departure from and in its cooperation with voice. In the following two sections, I will position my own approach to voice and silence as allied modes of identity articulation within the context of this growing field.

Rethinking voices

In a text called "Could the Subaltern Remain Silent?", philosopher Roi Wagner critically revisits the silence of Spivak's subaltern. He remarks that Spivak's subaltern *can*, in fact, speak, but not in a way that is recognized or accepted as meaningful by her discursive context. According to Wagner, when Spivak states near the end of her text that "the subaltern cannot speak" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 308), what this means is that "The subaltern cannot speak wherever her speech is mediated through interpretation and replication mechanisms that foreclose her exercise of power through speech" (Wagner 3). In other words, Spivak does not conceptualize the subaltern as someone who is literally unable to speak. Rather, the subaltern does speak, but their voice is not acknowledged as legitimate.

Furthermore, the problem of the subaltern's so-called speechlessness is actually not so much their assumed silence, but rather the fact that their apparent lack of voice is filled up by other, dominant voices, who are *speaking for them*. In the case of Spivak's example of the Hindu women, their voices are overridden by the dominant voices of Indian patriarchy on the one hand, and British colonialism on the other. This, again, is not to be taken literally: the Hindu women are not understood as literally silent while others speak. Instead, they are conceptualized as not being allowed the development of their own discourse through which they could express their sense of self. Rather, the only discourses they are allowed access to are those of their patriarchal and colonial oppressors. In this interpretation, the subaltern's speechlessness is thus no silence at all, but a condition of being allowed to speak only with voices that are not their own.

These considerations may seem obvious, but they are worth pointing out because they show that the theory of the subaltern is preoccupied with voice: powerlessness is presented as a condition of being forced to submit to the voices of others, and the key to empowerment is imagined as the finding or developing of a voice of one's own. In other words, the oppression is both caused, and envisioned to be solved, by voice. In this logocentric understanding of power, there is no place for silence, other than as a reference to one's loss of voice in the face of other parties' more dominant voices. This approach to silence is therefore necessarily negative: silence here signifies the failure of voice.

This binary understanding of voice as a metaphor for empowerment, and silence as its negative counterpart, is not only present in Spivak, but could in fact be identified as a fundamental principle of many other cultural and political theories as well. In the preface of their edited volume *Political*

Silence: Meanings, Functions and Ambiguity, political theorists Sophia Dingli and Thomas N. Cooke argue that in many theories about power and identity, the notion of silence "has come to imply the absence of voice in political life and, as such, tends to be scholastically prescribed as the antithesis of political power and political agency" ("Political Silence" i). As a result, when silences are analyzed, if they are at all, "they are usually rendered synonymous with notions of defeat, lack, absence, or even as the end of politics, power, and agency" ("Political Silence, an Introduction" 1). Examples they provide include the poststructuralist interest in "writing madness back into our discourse, thus recovering the voice of the insane, who had been silenced by the discourse of Reason," and feminist theorists examining "the silencing of women by phallogocentric discourses" (6–7).

    To this one could add one of the most literal slogans available within this negative perspective on silence: ACT UP's AIDS awareness motto "Silence = Death."[2] In "The Plague of Discourse," literary critic Lee Edelman argues that this motto also implies its opposite, that is "that Discourse = Defense, that language, articulation, the intervention of voice, is salutary, vivifying, since discourse can defend us against the death that must result from the continuation of our silence" (292–93). As such, "if that slogan challenges those in the communities most affected by AIDS to defend themselves, it does so by appealing to defensive properties that it implicitly identifies as inherent in discourse" (292). Although the slogan has been helpful with regard to lifting the taboo on AIDS, it has overlooked the fact that breaking this silence often entails exposing vulnerable subjects to "abjection, censure or regulation" (Brown 86). Political theorist Wendy Brown concurs with Edelman's hesitance to understand breaking silence as the prime path toward inclusion, when she argues that, "while to be invisible within a local discourse may occasion the injuries of social liminality, such suffering may be mild compared to that of radical denunciation, hystericization, exclusion, or criminalization" (87).

    These examples indicate that silence is often not understood as an empowering act, but as an imposed situation that one must overcome through active participation in discourse: that is, through speaking up. In "Silent Citizenship in Democratic Theory and Practice," political theorist Sean Gray argues that this common perspective may actually be detrimental to the empowerment of marginalized subjects: "in aiming to overcome silence by encouraging speech, democratic theorists ignore the fact that sometimes *what* citizens say is precisely the issue [...]. Where speech is distorted, talking

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2   I am grateful to my friend and colleague Looi van Kessel for this insight.

things out may merely reproduce distortion" (7–8). In other words, theories that overemphasize the emancipatory qualities of voice ignore that the cause for the subaltern's marginalization often lies not with the quality of their voices as such, but with the surrounding discourses that refuse to acknowledge their voices as legitimate, or distort and appropriate these voices until they resemble their own. Therefore, encouraging marginalized people to speak up within the very discourses that marginalized their voices in the first place "unfairly biases the democratic process in favor of those citizens who already have strong capacities for speech" (7–8). The subaltern's voice is more likely to perpetuate rather than undo their position at the margins, as they are expected to compete with voices that, unlike theirs, do already enjoy legitimacy.

Wendy Brown agrees with Gray that much political and cultural theory shows a disproportionate amount of faith in the liberating qualities of speech, and diagnoses this as a form of "compulsory discursivity" (85). She elaborates:

> Expression is cast either as that which makes us free, tells "our" truth, and puts our truth into circulation, *or* as that which oppresses us by featuring "their" truth [...]. Though one side in the debate argues for more expression on our part [...] and the other argues for less on "their" part, both sides nonetheless subscribe to an *expressive* and *repressive* notion of speech, agreeing on its capacity to express the truth of an individual's desire or condition, or to repress that truth. Both equate freedom with voice and visibility, both assume recognition to be unproblematic when we tell our own story, and both assume that such recognition is the material of power as well as pleasure. Neither confronts the regulatory potential in speaking ourselves, its capacity to bind rather than emancipate us. (85–86)

In this citation, Brown points toward the claustrophobic logocentrism that marks the common understanding of power and freedom. Voice has become an overarching metaphor for power, referring to both the cause of, and the solution to, domination. That is, voice is reduced to its *repressive* and *expressive* capacities. However, as she argues at the end of the citation, by understanding voice exclusively as overpowering or as empowerment, a third possible effect is glossed over entirely, namely, voice as a way to *subject to power* – to paraphrase part of the Miranda Warning: "Anything you say can be used against you."

Brown terms this regulatory effect of voice "recolonization," defining it as a situation "in which potentially subversive discourse, born of exclusion

and marginalization, can be colonized by that which produced it, much as countercultural fashion is routinely commodified by the corporate textile industry" (89). As such, she departs slightly from Gray's approach with regard to the overestimation of voice in theories on empowerment. Whereas Gray argues that the problem with the voice of the marginalized is that they are expected to compete within discourses that are biased against them, Brown emphasizes that, even if certain subjugated voices do achieve recognition as belonging to subversive discourses, they risk becoming annexed by the dominant discourses they were supposed to counter: "These efforts suggest how the work of breaking silence can metamorphose into new techniques of domination, how our truths can become our rulers rather than our emancipators, how our confessions become the norms by which we are regulated" (91).

These arguments reconsider the practice of speaking up as a form of subjugating oneself to discourse, while defining discourse itself as a system that regulates rather than liberates. By doing this, they also allow for a reconsideration of silence in its particular relation to discourse. If voice is taken as an instrument to enter, or be entered by, discourse, then silence can be understood as "that which discourse has not penetrated, as a scene of practices that escape the regulatory functions of discourse. It is this latter function that renders silence itself a source of protection and potentially even a source of power" (Brown 88).

Rethinking silences

An example of silence as protection and power can be found in art historian Jonathan D. Katz's text "John Cage's Queer Silence." John Cage is perhaps best known for his composition *4'33"*, during which the performer of the piece is supposed to remain silent for the duration of 4 minutes and 33 seconds. The piece is but one of many of Cage's compositions that touch upon, or somehow perform, silence. According to Katz, Cage's interest in silence must at least in part be analyzed by relating it to his life as a closeted homosexual within the homophobic culture of Cold War–era American society. Cage understood that his full acceptance within a culture that was intolerant of his sexuality depended on his not speaking out about it. To that extent, Cage's silence can indeed be understood as a "source of protection" (Brown 88).

However, Katz stresses that "nearly everybody in the art world who knew him knew of his lifelong relationship with Merce Cunningham, and some

even knew about the other men in his life. His sexuality was an open secret within the avant-garde" (231). Apparently, Cage did not intend to protect his sexuality entirely from public detection. In fact, if concealment were the objective, argues Katz, not silence but voice would have been the most effective instrument: "To be homosexual in a homophobic culture was forcefully to realize that conversation was not always about expression, that it might be about the opposite: dissimulation, camouflage, hiding" (238). This remark recalls the deceptive quality of voice that was discussed in the context of my grandmother's story: voice not as a means of self-expression, but as a means to *avoid* self-expression.

Cage, however, did not so much hide or camouflage his sexuality, as *refuse to publicly declare it*. From the 1940s onward, this type of refusal became a central topic in his public performances. For instance, in his "Lecture on Nothing" he declared that "I am here / and there is nothing to say," and "Nothing more than / nothing / can be said" (qtd. in Katz 239). Through these and similar performances, "Cage became notable precisely for his silences – clear proof of the unsuitability of silence as a strategy of evasion" (Katz 238). As such, Cage took a paradoxical approach to self-expression, in which his aim was to voice silence, or to make his absence from discourse present within discourse. His silence was therefore not a passive form of retreat, but an active form of defiance.

Katz prefers such silent defiance over vocal defiance for reasons that recall Brown's argument about "recolonization" (Brown 89). Silence, states Katz, "avoids the recolonizing force of the oppositional: what permits the dominant culture to consolidate its authority by reference to the excluded other" (245). Rather than weaken the dominant discourse, "opposition may simply reproduce the binary logic through which domination writes itself" (245). In contrast to this, silence, understood as an active refusal to submit to discourse, offers "the prospect of resisting the status quo without opposing it" (243). In short, silence does not only defy the dominant discourse by overtly refusing to submit to it; it also denies that discourse the possibility of recolonizing the defiant subject's position, because that position is not declared in words or definitions to which it could be bound.

This approach to silence is far removed from its common conceptualization as a lack of agency which was discussed before, in relation to Spivak's and similar theories. Rather than as a reference to an absence, Katz describes a silence that is performed actively. This understanding of silence as an action, instead of as a condition, is perhaps less obvious in the English language than it is in other languages. For instance, the Dutch verb *zwijgen*, or in German, *schweigen*, already implies something that one *does*, just like speaking. These

verbs have no appropriate translation in English other than "to be silent." This phrase, however, presents silence as a condition: either as a situation in which one dwells, or as an infliction one suffers. The only verb that the English language does have with regard to silence is "to silence (someone)," meaning to force another to be silent. Silence, in English, can therefore be understood as a repressive action done to others, but not as an agentive act of self-representation one does deliberately to and with oneself.

Yet according to Dingli and Cooke, the conceptualization of silence as a deliberate action is vital to understanding silence as political. According to their definition, silence happens when someone "refuses to validate, confirm, or verify […] another actor's pursuit of power or attempts to execute power" (2). In other words, the act of silence produces a situation of discord in which existing power positions are destabilized and can therefore be reordered differently: "silences offer the political possibility of (re)collectivism, (re)inscription, and (re)configuration" (3). What becomes apparent in this definition, is that silence is not only something that one does, but it also *does something*. Put differently, silence is understood here not as a condition that has meaning, but as an action that produces meaning.

In "Silence as Resistance to Analysis," educational scientists MacLure et al. explore what they call this *performative* quality of silence through the discussion of a case study which partially resembles the story of my grandmother, because it discusses a situation in which someone refuses to speak. The case concerns a kindergarten class in which one of the children, Hannah, "never responds when the teacher calls out her name during the morning ritual of 'taking the register'" (492).[3] Hannah's silence gives rise to her parents' concern as well as that of the school. Several strategies are attempted to break her silence. None are successful. Her case is eventually committed to psychological research. Analysis of her behavior results in a wide range of explanations as to the reasons behind her refusal to speak, none of which can be confirmed, because Hannah persists in her silence. Unanswered questions include: "What did Hannah's silence 'mean'? Was the resistance intentional or not? Was she able to reply but choosing not to? Or had she somehow become paralyzed?" (493).

All of these questions could also be asked with regard to my grandmother's silence. And as with Hannah's case, these questions cannot be resolved in any conclusive way. As such, both Hannah's and my grandmother's stories have in common that they constitute silence as an obstacle that upsets the regular flow of discourse. Any analysis one could make of the reasons for my

3   Maclure et al. indicate that "Hannah" is a pseudonym (499).

grandmother's silence must inevitably remain unconfirmed and incomplete. Her silence, like that of Hannah, can therefore be understood not as an indication of an absent meaning to be restored, but as an active obstruction of such meaning-making. Thus, in both of these cases, I understand silence to be a disruptive mechanism that has the power to undermine and redirect the regulatory power of normative discourses.

The above considerations constitute the central approach to voice and silence which I take throughout this book. That is, I understand silence not as the negative counterpart of voice, nor as an absence of or from discourse, but as an agentive act which is present within discourse, and which may be performed in order to change and disrupt discourse. As such, I understand silence not as the failure of voice and thus of self-representation, but as an alternative to voice and thus an alternative form of self-representation.

By suggesting these reconsiderations of voice and silence, my intention is not to deny that speaking up may have an empowering effect in certain situations, but rather to stress that voice is not always a reliable instrument, due to the fact that there may be different effects based on who is speaking to whom in which context. Some voices may indeed be instruments of empowerment, but others may be instruments of deception or manipulation, and still others may be instruments of obedience or complicity. As for silence, the aim is not to deny that silencing happens, or that one's silence can be an indication of being powerless. Rather, the objective is to open up silence's definition to alternative functions, some of which are resistant to power, or even empowering.

In the following section I will use this approach to analyze adat, a concept which the Moluccan community considers to be a core element of its collective identity. Whereas my grandmother's case concerned *individual* self-representation, the case of adat concerns *collective* self-representation. As will become clear, what the case of adat has in common with that of my grandmother is that in both cases voice and silence are deployed as complementary, rather than opposite modes of articulation.

The case of adat

During the 2015 edition of the Amsterdam-based film festival CinemAsia, one of the features was the short film documentary *Untuk Selalu*.[4] This documentary is a series of interviews about cultural identity with

4   *Untuk selalu* is Indonesian for "forever."

third-generation postcolonial migrants in the Netherlands. During his interview for this film, artist Dominique Latoel is asked which main elements define his identity as a Moluccan in the Netherlands. He answers: "the strength and identity are *hidden in the adat*, which forms the right to exist of the Moluccan people and of myself as an individual" (*Untuk Selalu*; my emphasis).[5]

This remark exemplifies adat's invocation as an undetermined concept that is nevertheless central to Moluccan identity. Latoel presents Moluccan identity as something that is both *expressed by* and *hidden within* adat. To present this type of concealment, he uses the Dutch passive construction *verscholen liggen in*, which could also be translated as "to lie sheltered within." He elaborates that adat is that which forms both his individual right to exist, and that of the Moluccan community collectively. His remark therefore indicates that the concealing or sheltering aspect of adat forms the foundation of their strength as a people, that it protects the community's identity, and that it legitimizes its existence. Yet, while he points out all these functions of adat, he does not provide a definition of the term as such. What adat *does* is clear, but what it *is*, and how exactly it does these things, remains unspecified. In short, he explicitly connects Moluccan identity to adat, but does so in a way that invokes the idea of a secret: something that is hidden from view or kept silent. Therefore, Latoel's remark resembles my grandmother's way of relating to her past, in that it combines showing with hiding, making present with leaving absent, speaking out with remaining silent.

This ambiguous approach to self-representation through references to adat is common among the Moluccan community, although adat's unspoken or invisible aspect is not always equally explicit. For example, in an article of the Christian newspaper *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, journalist Jacob Hoekman interviews members of a Moluccan church in Dutch town Assen about their experience as Moluccans in the Netherlands. As in Latoel's interview, the term adat is mentioned with emphasis. However, unlike Latoel's approach, the church members do not so much keep adat's definition quiet, as provide the concept with an affluence of possible definitions. Hoekman summarizes it as follows: "This term refers to time-honored traditional Moluccan institutions, customs, morals and folklore. In short: the adat prescribes Moluccans how they are supposed to live, and as such forms the undisputed core of

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5   My translation from the Dutch original: "De kracht en de identiteit liggen verscholen in de adat, die het bestaansrecht vormen van het Molukse volk en mij als individu."

Moluccan identity" (Hoekman).[6] This description of adat, though different from Latoel's, still has the same effect: adat is presented as something that could refer to any aspect of Moluccan identity, and as such, it remains unspecified. This is also expressed by Hoekman's rhetorical question which he asks himself later on in the article: "Are there, in fact, things that do *not* concern the adat?" (Hoekman).[7]

These two examples may serve as the two extremes that delineate the scope of adat's lack of definition within the Moluccan community. The term is either emphatically left undefined or is presented as a concept that could mean anything. The latter approach is also noticed by anthropologist Birgit Bräuchler, who describes adat as "originally a holistic concept that cannot be disconnected from any societal sphere" and adds that "there is no single translation or definition for the word, [...] it pertains to all aspects of community life" (44). According to legal scholar Jacqueline Vel, "the concept is perceived so naturally that it is like asking a fish to define water" (66). In short, adat is a concept that cannot be reduced to any single definition.

To understand the particular way in which adat is used as a marker for Moluccan collective identity, it is useful to trace the term back to its origins. It was originally a legal concept introduced by Islamic merchants in the thirteenth century. Political scientist Daniel S. Lev argues that the word was used as a way to refer to indigenous customs that could not be incorporated into Islamic law: "Adat law in Indonesia, as in other Islamic countries, tends to be defined precisely in contrast to Islamic law [...]; it is originally an Arabic word that refers to local custom" (27). Therefore, in its early use, adat was not a particular system of law, but rather denoted that system's undetermined opposite: customs or traditions that were tolerated alongside, but not seen as part of, Islamic law. Lev's description of adat as law's undetermined opposite is significant for two reasons. First, it shows that adat was initially not an instrument for self-representation, which is what it has become in the present day. Rather, it was a general label used by foreign merchants to categorize local customs that could not be incorporated into their own law system. Second, and directly following from this, Lev's description provides a basic explanation of adat's elusiveness with regard to fixed definition. Because adat referred to all things beyond the accepted law, its specific definition could take virtually any form depending on context.

6   My translation from the Dutch original: "Dat begrip duidt op de aloude traditionele Molukse instituties, gebruiken, zeden en folklore. Kortom: de adat vertelt je als Molukker hoe je dient te leven, en vormt dan ook de onbetwiste kern van de Molukse identiteit."

7   My translation from the Dutch original: "Waar gaat de adat eigenlijk niet over?"

This understanding of adat as an unspecific reference to customs not incorporated by central law continued up until the early twentieth century, when Dutch colonial jurists first began to study the phenomenon: "For some, adat law meant any Indonesian law not derived from Dutch or Islamic sources. Others would have disqualified Hindu sources, too. For some, it meant the unwritten law of Indonesia. For others, adat law signified folk law, as opposed to the laws of sultans" (Burns 93). In short, adat could refer to any collection of rules and customs not belonging to whichever system of formal law was in place. To many colonial scholars, adat's apparent incoherence was a reason to discredit the phenomenon as irrelevant to Dutch law, as is showcased in legal scholar Peter Burns's reference to a joke that was common among jurists of the early twentieth century: if you want to know what adat is, "take a concept or a major principle of Dutch law, and inscribe in it the word, 'not'" (83). The premise of the critique was that adat as such did not exist, but was a negating term, describing disparate phenomena in terms of what they were not.

Famously, Dutch jurist Cornelis van Vollenhoven (1874–1933) disagreed with this common conception of adat as a term devoid of meaning, and instead theorized it as a pan-Indonesian system of customary laws. His perspective functioned to great extent as a self-fulfilling prophecy. His school of thought, known as the Adat Law School, became the basis of several grand-scale transformations of the legal system in the Dutch East Indies throughout the early twentieth century, as well as in post-independence Indonesia ever since.[8]

In order to understand the contemporary function of adat for Moluccans in the Netherlands, it must be analyzed within the context of their community's migration history. The first generation's arrival in the Netherlands in 1951 was a result of their separatist struggle toward the establishment of an independent state. The RMS was unilaterally proclaimed on Ambon, on 25 April 1950. The political leaders who were responsible for this proclamation had based their actions on a separatist interpretation of adat. For instance, the RMS Minister of Defense, Alex Nanlohy, "had developed an adat-based Ambonese nationalism, as much anti-Dutch as anti-Javanese" (Chauvel 367).[9] In other words, Nanlohy's interpretation of adat functioned

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8   For a detailed exploration of the legal history of adat, see Gerlov van Engelenhoven, "From Indigenous Customary Law to Diasporic Cultural Heritage: Reappropriations of Adat throughout the History of Moluccan Postcolonial Migration."

9   Because Ambon is Maluku's central island, and the location from which the RMS was proclaimed, the terms "Ambonese" and "Moluccan" were used interchangeably at the time. "Javanese" here refers to Java in West Indonesia, one of the main islands from which the Indonesian nationalist movement was organized.

as the basis for Moluccan separatism, setting Moluccans apart both from the Dutch colonial past and from the Indonesian independence ideology that was developing on Java.

When the first generation of Moluccan migrants traveled from Indonesia to the Netherlands in 1951, their separatist understanding of adat traveled along with them. Anthropologist Dieter Bartels emphasizes that the first generation consisted of KNIL soldiers and their families, who "had left their home villages in their teens and twenties," and that about "one-tenth of them had been born outside the Moluccas," in barracks stationed elsewhere in Indonesia (30). In other words, these soldiers, though ethnically Moluccan, had been separated from their place of origin early in life, and had been stationed in different locations across Indonesia in the service of the KNIL. As indicated by the one-tenth which Bartels mentions, it was not uncommon for these soldiers to have come from a longer lineage of soldiers, as a result of which many of them had never even been to Maluku, but instead had been born and raised in army barracks elsewhere. According to political historian Richard Chauvel, "This type of internal recruitment seems to have been preferred by the authorities" because "the soldiers' sons were already socialized into the military way of life, thus minimizing the training requirements" (50).

These considerations indicate that the first generation of Moluccan migrants already experienced a sense of displacement long before they were housed in migrant camps in the Netherlands: "the soldiers formed a distinct part of Ambonese society, isolated from *negeri* and urban society in Ambon as well as the host societies in garrison towns throughout the archipelago" (Chauvel 397).[10] This sense of isolation merely became more permanent as "The *tangsi* society of the Indies garrison towns was transplanted to the unfamiliar environment of provisional camps in the Netherlands, surrounded by but isolated from Dutch society" (396).[11] In reaction to their isolation and displacement, the first generation "assigned an almost sacral value to old customs" even if, as a result of their military career, "they had not (yet) developed a deeper insight into the backgrounds of Moluccan culture" (Habiboe, "De rode draad" 34).[12]

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10   *Negeri* was the term used in the Dutch East Indies for village communities.
11   *Tangsi* was the term used in the Dutch East Indies to refer to the garrisons that housed the Moluccan KNIL soldiers.
12   My translation from the Dutch original: "kende aan oude gebruiken een soms sacrale waarde toe"; "zelf (nog) geen diepgaand inzicht hadden verworven in de achtergronden van de Molukse cultuur."

As a result, the adat which Moluccans adhered to in the first decades of their residence in the Netherlands, was what Bartels calls "adat-by-rote: i.e., people followed, and forced their children to follow, customs and rules of whose underlying philosophy the ex-soldiers knew little" (30). More often than not, "adat had to be reconstructed, piece by piece from the little everyone remembered" (30). As such, the development of adat within the Moluccan community reflects their situation as migrants who were alienated from their homeland. Identifying neither as Indonesians nor as Dutch, they had to articulate a new identity that would legitimize their position as a separate people, even as their objective of an independent Moluccan republic had not been realized. Their adat was therefore actively built anew from the fragments of that which had survived their migration.

This active reconstruction of adat is an indication of how the first generation of Moluccans in the Netherlands based their collective identity on the construction of a new *collective memory*: by reinstating adat as their central system of norms and values, they imagined their past as a coherent status quo which they were broken away from in the aftermath of Indonesian independence. Through the construction of their past as a coherent point of departure, they also provided a sense of coherence to their present-day existence as a migrant community living in the country of their colonizer. In this process of postcolonial memory articulation, adat thus functioned as a tool to connect the past to the present, and to connect Moluccans of a wide variety of backgrounds to one another.

This conscious effort to articulate a new identity based on the memory of old customs was started by the first generation but was transmitted to further generations. The second generation, the soldiers' children, were especially interested in adat and other traditional concepts, since their sense of alienation was even more far-reaching than that of their parents. Like their parents, they were a visible minority in the Netherlands, living isolated lives in migrant camps, and as such initially developed no sense of belonging to Dutch society. However, unlike their parents, they were born *after* migration. As such, whereas a majority of their parents had at least been born, and partially raised, in Maluku before facing the in-between condition that characterized the Dutch migrant camps, second-generation Moluccans were born directly into this in-between condition. Maluku to them was not a lived but an imagined past, which they had to create through the memories of their parents.

Within this context of not-belonging and having only fragmented access to the memories of the events that brought them to the Netherlands, adat was developed as a founding principle for the articulation of

a contemporary Moluccan migrant identity based on a reconstructed memory of the past. Historian Ron Habiboe relates that, within the Moluccan community, there is "an active core of people who are involved in Moluccan history, adat, language, and *pela* relations which they intend to tighten" ("De rode draad" 35).[13] As Habiboe emphasizes, this group "forms the vanguard of people who wish to conserve, or even reinstate, ancient norms and values. Members of the second and third generations, in particular, take part in this practice" ("De rode draad" 34–35).[14] In short, the Moluccan community uses adat as a connecting principle between the present and the past, or the before and the after of its migration. As such, adat's function for the Moluccan community is to contribute to transforming its involuntary in-between position into the positive articulation of a new identity.

Therefore, the separatism that was underlying the early Moluccan reconfigurations of adat around the time of the proclamation of the RMS in 1950 is still fundamental to the contemporary application by the community in the Netherlands. Adat is used as a sign of difference that sets the Moluccan community apart both from the Indonesians and from the Dutch. To return to the way in which Moluccan artist Dominique Latoel expresses it in his interview for *Untuk Selalu*: adat "forms the *right to exist* of the Moluccan people and of myself as an individual" (*Untuk Selalu*; my emphasis).[15] Latoel's description of adat as the Moluccan right to exist makes sense when considering that the community's migration happened as a result of their hampered attempt to establish an independent republic. The Moluccan identity is therefore based on a state that was never acknowledged: their right to exist as a people was denied. Adat returns this right to the community, as it is applied as an inheritance from a past before their migration to the Netherlands, and before the suppression of their independence struggle by Indonesia.

This function of adat as the Moluccan right to exist is discussed in much detail in an edited volume by anthropologist Elias Rinsampessy. The book

13   *Pela* is a system that allows and disallows Moluccans to marry one another, based on their islands and villages of origin. The sentence is my translation from the Dutch original: "een actieve kern van mensen die zich bezighoudt met de Molukse geschiedenis, adat, taal, en *pela*-banden die men strakker wil aanhalen."

14   My translation from the Dutch original: "vormt een voorhoede van mensen die de oude normen en waarden wil conserveren, zo niet in ere herstellen. Vooral leden van de tweede en derde generatie nemen hieraan deel."

15   My translation from the Dutch original: "die het bestaansrecht vormen van het Molukse volk en mij als individu."

is a collection of articles by Moluccan scholars, as well as interviews with
Moluccans who play a prominent role in the community, including athletes,
artists, church leaders and politicians. It is entitled *Tussen Adat en Integratie:
Vijf generaties Molukkers worstelen en dansen op de Nederlandse aarde*
("Between Adat and Integration: Five generations of Moluccans wrestle and
dance on Dutch soil"). In this title, "adat" is juxtaposed with "integration."
According to sociologist Willem Schinkel, the concept of integration is
problematic because it "allows the identification of what does not belong.
Western European societies diagnose themselves as under threat from
immigrants they perceive as 'not yet present in society', although these
immigrants are part and parcel of the social process in these societies" (2).
Such diagnoses are "productive to the extent that they identify what 'society'
is and who properly belongs to it" (2).

In other words, "integration" is a term reserved by a society for immigrants
it deems unwelcome, as a way to suspend their participation in it. Even
when immigrants are legally citizens, they can still be imagined as "not yet
integrated," meaning that they are still perceived as outsiders to society.
With this consideration in mind, I read the title of Rinsampessy's volume,
"Between Adat and Integration," as an implicit criticism of the concept of
integration. If integration can be understood as referring to the unrealistic
expectation that Dutch society has of its immigrants – that is, for them
to become assimilated entirely within Dutch culture – then juxtaposing
adat with this term suggests that adat is that which stands in the way of
this expectation. In short, the title indicates that there is a divide between
Moluccan identity and Dutch identity that is difficult, perhaps impossible,
to reconcile.

This divide between Moluccan and Dutch identity is explored throughout
the articles and interviews that are included in Rinsampessy's volume.
For instance, in his interview, Moluccan pastor Gersom Salamony states
that "adat conveys the intimate sense of belonging to a people [...], to a
rumah-tangga" (qtd. in Rinsampessy 219).[16] He adds that adat "indicates
where you come from. Many say that it travels along with you, wherever
you go" (219).[17] Salamony's interpretation not only emphasizes the migratory
element of adat, by describing the term as something which travelers take

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16   *Rumah-tangga* can be translated to "family" or "household," and is used here as a reference to
the sense of brother and sisterhood between members of the Moluccan community. The sentence
is my translation from the Dutch original: "adat beantwoordt aan de innerlijke gevoelens van
het behoren tot een volk [...], de rumah-tangga."
17   My translation from the Dutch original: "Het geeft aan waar je vandaan komt. Velen zeggen
dat het met je meegaat, waar je ook naar toe gaat."

with them to remember their origin. He also presents adat as an intimate concept, that signifies the relationship between Moluccans and their wider community, which he imagines as a rumah-tangga, that is, a family or household. According to Rinsampessy, in the Moluccan understanding of society's organization, the rumah-tangga is "the smallest unit of living together. It is comparable to the western 'nuclear family', usually father, mother and children" (*Saudara Bersaudara* 42).[18] By ascribing to adat this sense of belonging to a nuclear family, Salamony presents it as an intimate marker of the Moluccan community's collective identity, aimed at reminding them that, originally, they came from elsewhere.

This interpretation of adat has been a stable element of the Moluccan community throughout their history as a sociopolitical minority in the Netherlands. For instance, Habiboe discusses the Dutch government's suggestion in the 1970s, to set up an intercultural education program for Dutch and Moluccan children. He notes that this idea led to resistance among many Moluccans, because

> this would also mean that Dutch children would learn about Moluccan morals and customs [...]. They argued that these things are none of Dutch people's business, and it would only teach them "our weak spots". On top of that, there is the dilemma concerning to what extent it is allowed for adat to be orally transmitted, let alone via written text. Some elements of it are only supposed to be discussed within the context of the *mata rumah*, and no-one outside of it has the right to this knowledge.[19] [...] Besides, the adat has many variants, and there are differences in emphasis per village and sometimes per family. ("Het gezag van het Nederlandse onderwijs" 62–63)[20]

18   My translation from the Dutch original: "De kleinste leefeenheid is de 'rumah-tangga'. Die kan vergeleken worden met het westerse 'gezin', meestal vader, moeder en kinderen."

19   *Mata rumah* is a term which, like rumah-tangga, refers to the concept of family. According to Rinsampessy, a mata rumah is officially a larger, extended understanding of family: a cluster of rumah-tanggas. However, he stresses that there are various interpretations of both terms, and that they are often used interchangeably (*Saudara Bersaudara* 42).

20   My translation from the Dutch original: "zou namelijk inhouden dat Nederlandse kinderen eveneens kennis opdoen over de Molukse zeden en gewoonten [...]. Die zaken gaan Nederlanders niets aan en je leert ze zo alleen maar 'onze zwakke plekken' te ontdekken, vinden zij. Daarbij komt het dilemma in hoeverre de adat mondeling, laat staan schriftelijk mag worden overgeleverd. Sommige elementen ervan dienen alleen in de context van de *mata rumah* te worden besproken, niemand daarbuiten heeft recht op die kennis [...]. Bovendien kent de adat allerlei varianten en bestaan per dorp en soms per familie accentverschillen."

In this citation, adat is presented not only as an intimate, but even as a secret affair. The construction of adat is seen as private to such an extent that it is not only inappropriate to communicate about it to non-Moluccans, but it is even questionable to discuss adat matters among different Moluccan families.

As such, Habiboe's approach resembles not only that of Salamony, but also that of Latoel, who argued that Moluccan identity was "hidden in the adat" (*Untuk Selalu*).[21] This understanding of adat as something secret leaves the specific definition of the concept emphatically unspoken. It is, in general terms, clear what adat *does*: it forms the Moluccan community's right to exist, it provides them with a sense of belonging to a family, it protects their identity, and so on. However, what adat *is*, or how exactly it does these things, remains undetermined.

These considerations imply that the Moluccan application of adat takes shape as a double dynamic: on the one hand, adat is declared as a central and distinguishing element of Moluccan identity that sets Moluccans apart from both the Dutch and the Indonesians; on the other hand, the definition of adat is kept quiet, or is fragmented into intimate interpretations that are not to be shared. The rationale supporting this double dynamic can be located in the Moluccan community's history of marginalization in Indonesia as well as in the Netherlands. Their separatist identity was never acknowledged by either of these dominant sides. Today, Maluku is an Indonesian province, and the Moluccans in the Netherlands are Dutch citizens. The Moluccan application of adat as an indefinable element of their identity makes sense within this context. By emphasizing adat's function as an identity marker, while remaining silent about its specific meaning, Moluccans protect not only the concept, but also their collective identity itself from becoming a matter of wider contestation. By not defining adat, they remain in control of their own identity.

Conclusions

In theoretical discourses concerning power and identity, "voice" is often used as a metaphor for empowerment, and "silence" as its negative counterpart: loss or lack of power. This chapter offers the following four reconsiderations of that premise:

(1) *Voices carry the potential for deception.* They may offer a false promise of truth or transparency, or a false sense of agency. This argument stands

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21   My translation from the Dutch original: "liggen verscholen in de adat."

in contrast to the common understanding of voice in cultural and political theory as a metaphor for empowerment through transparent self-expression. I do not completely deny the possibility of this latter function, but I do argue that it deserves further scrutiny, seeing that:

(2) *Self-expression can make one vulnerable to the regulatory power of discourse.* Oppositional voices may be recolonized within the oppressing discourses they aim to subvert. As such, I argue that opposition is a vulnerable form of resistance in which one declares one's position, and thereby becomes susceptible to regulation: anything you say can be used against you. In contrast to voice, which thus has its limitations as an instrument of resistance or empowerment, I argue that:

(3) *Silence can be a way to resist discursive power without opposing it.* With this argument, I take silence as a refusal to participate in a particular discourse, that is, a refusal to explain oneself, or to accept certain roles imposed by others. Whereas an oppositional voice can still be identified by the discourse as its dissenting counterpart, a silence defies such regulation through its inherent resistance to interpretation. Due to this ambiguity, it avoids the risk of recolonization, as a result of which:

(4) *Silence can be empowering.* It can undermine and reconfigure discursive power, not so much by escaping discourse entirely, but by being present in it as a manifestation of the limit of its reach. If "discourse itself is inscribed with violence since its goal is to assimilate alterity" (Dingli and Khalfey 69), then silence offers a kind of alterity that, unlike one's voice, cannot be assimilated. In its capacity as an irreducible, ambiguous manifestation of alterity, silence disrupts the flow of discourse, provoking it to change its course.

These four points inform not only this chapter's but this entire book's approach to voice and silence. That is, I argue that silence can be understood not as an absence, but as a presence; not as an indication toward a hidden or lost meaning, but as something that is itself productive of meaning. Voice and silence thus function not as each other's opposites, but as each other's continuation: they are manifested at each other's limit, and hence they need to be theorized together. This approach is exemplified in this chapter's two main case studies: the individual case of my grandmother and the collective case of adat.

Both cases concern forms of self-representation that deploy voice and silence as complementary strategies. Adat is a concrete example of identity being articulated through the interplay of what is and what is not expressed. Often, people are reluctant to define adat at all, instead presenting it as a

secret in which Moluccan identity is sheltered. Like adat's resistance to fixed definition, my grandmother's consistent refusal to map out her history shows how silence can be used actively as a way to stay in control of one's own identity. In both cases, silence is not an all-encompassing, paralyzing condition that one must be liberated from through the intervention of voice. Instead, silence is a deliberate action, used to protect select aspects of one's identity from the meddling of outsiders. The title of the DVD accompanying Rinsampessy's edited volume on adat says it all: "Who are you to say that I am Moluccan?".[22] This phrase indicates an unwillingness to make Moluccan identity into something that is up for discussion.

In short, this chapter's two case studies concerned examples of postcolonial memory articulated through individual and collective self-representation. In both cases, silence and voice are used together. Rather than as a tool for empowerment, the type of voice analyzed in this chapter is a tool for deception: it is meant to distract listeners from the fact that something is being kept silent. The type of silence analyzed in this chapter, in turn, does not imply a condition of powerlessness but an act of empowerment. Indeed, to be granted a voice does not necessarily mean to be listened to. For marginalized subjects, to speak up in a hostile environment might even mean to expose oneself to judgment, regulation, or physical violence. If using one's voice can mean to subject to power, remaining silent can mean to resist or overcome power.

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2 The case of the train hijackings

Appropriated voices and protective silences in media
representation

Abstract

This chapter's focus is on the train hijackings that took place in the
Netherlands in 1975 and 1977. Because the hijackers carried out their
actions on behalf of the Moluccan separatist struggle, the media have
often framed them as *the voices of their community*. By framing them as
such, the hijackers are understood as central representatives of Moluccan
collective memory, but by the same token, Moluccan collective memory
is reduced to the way in which the hijackers expressed it. As such, I will
analyze how speaking up sometimes can entail allowing one's voice to
be appropriated by others, and how remaining silent therefore can be the
process of protecting one's voice from such appropriation.

Keywords: collective memory; postcolonial memory; Moluccan com-
munity; train hijackings; voice and silence; media studies

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the deployment of voices and silences in the articula-
tion of postcolonial memory through media representation. The analysis is
focused on two train hijackings, which took place from 2 to 14 December 1975,
and from 23 May to 11 June 1977, near the Dutch villages of Wijster and De
Punt. The actions were carried out by, respectively, a group of seven and a
group of nine activists belonging to the second generation of the Moluccan
community in the Netherlands. The hijackings were radical protests against
the disadvantaged position of Moluccans in Dutch society and attempts to
force the Dutch government to support their separatist struggle, which aimed
to establish a Moluccan state, independent from Indonesia. The hijackers of
1975 killed three hostages and were sentenced to fourteen years in prison.

The hijackers of 1977 did not kill any hostages. This hijacking ended with a military intervention during which six hijackers and two hostages were killed, all by bullets fired by the military. The three surviving hijackers received prison sentences of various lengths, the shortest being six years and the longest nine years.

In 2014, the families of two of the hijackers killed in the intervention sued the Dutch state, accusing it of having ordered the execution of the hijackers by the military. The court ruled in favor of the state in 2018. Frequent news coverage of this lawsuit has led to renewed discussions about the hijackings, in both traditional and social media. These discussions mainly concern issues of justice and responsibility. That is, these discussions often revolve around the following question: to what extent can the hijackings themselves, and to what extent can the military intervention, be interpreted as justified? The different answers that these questions invite attribute responsibility to different parties, mostly either the Dutch state or the hijackers, sometimes the marines who were involved in the military intervention. Through close readings of such contemporary media discussions, this chapter aims to answer the question: *how are voices and silences deployed in media representation to articulate postcolonial memory?*

Because the hijackers carried out their actions on behalf of the Moluccan separatist struggle, they often have been framed as "voices of their community" in the media. By framing them as such, the hijackers are understood as central representatives of Moluccan collective memory, but by the same token, Moluccan collective memory is reduced to the way in which the hijackers expressed it. Framing the hijackers as the voices of their community can happen for positive or negative reasons. That is, they can be cast as heroes who fought for Moluccan separatism, or they can be cast as perpetrators: exemplars of the Moluccan community's perceived hostility toward their host country.

In a similar way, the Dutch marines, who killed six hijackers and two hostages during their intervention in the 1977 train hijacking, are also often framed in the media as exemplars, voicing larger ideological perspectives. That is, they can either be cast as Dutch heroes who defended the country against domestic terrorism, or as symbols of Dutch state violence against its postcolonial migrants. In the latter case, they can also be perceived to function as a reference to the much longer history of systemic violence perpetrated on Moluccans through Dutch colonialism. Amplifying the voices of either of these parties usually implies silencing the voice of the other party: focusing on the legitimacy of Moluccan separatism often implies disregarding the position of the marines, and by extension the state, as

illegitimate, and vice versa. With these considerations in mind, my aim is to analyze not only how the hijackers' and the marines' voices are silenced or amplified through media discussions about their actions, but also how their voices are appropriated and collectivized: how do individuals' voices come to represent a larger community, and to what extent do these individuals have a say in this process?

In what follows, I will first provide a historical overview of Moluccan separatism as a way to contextualize the train hijackings. I will then analyze which memory practices are deployed to *silence* the voices of either the hijackers or the marines. Subsequently, I will analyze which memory practices are deployed to *appropriate* the voices of either the hijackers or the marines in order to have them represent larger collective identities – that is, the Moluccan community and the Dutch state. Finally, I will analyze which strategies of silence the hijackers and the marines are using to *protect* their voices from being appropriated in this way.

Moluccan separatism

Political historian Richard Chauvel argues that, throughout the Dutch colonization of the Dutch East Indies, the Moluccan population was socially and politically advantaged over other Indonesian ethnic groups (41). This advantage was the result of the importance of the Moluccan region for Dutch colonial power. Maluku was the first, and for almost two centuries (1605–1800), the major region of the Dutch colonial territory. Most other regions of the Dutch East Indies were only conquered or obtained from the beginning of the nineteenth century onward. Moreover, Maluku functioned as the center of the international spice trade, on which the VOC held the monopoly. The spice monopoly was the foundation for the development of the Dutch colonial empire. As a result of this much longer history of subjection to Dutch colonial rule, as compared to the rest of Indonesia, Moluccans were generally granted more social privileges than other colonial subjects. They often served in the KNIL or worked for the colonial administration.

This advantaged position formed the basis of Moluccan separatism, together with the Calvinist Protestantism they had adopted from the Dutch, which set them apart from the primarily Islam-based Indonesian nationalist ideology. During the Indonesian National Revolution (1945–1949), Moluccans predominantly fought on the side of Dutch colonialism, against Indonesian independence. After the end of the Revolution in 1949 there

were an estimated 6,000 Moluccan KNIL soldiers (Chauvel 396).[1] Their unilateral proclamation of the RMS on 25 April 1950 resulted in the Indonesian army invading Ambon on 28 September 1950 in order to annex the Moluccan islands as part of the newly formed Republic of Indonesia. The RMS government fled to a neighboring island, Seram, and continued the struggle from there via guerrilla warfare. In the first months of 1951, all Moluccan KNIL soldiers who refused to be demobilized in Indonesian territory were brought to the Netherlands, together with their families, as a temporary measure.

On arrival in the Netherlands, the soldiers and their families had expected to be treated as Dutch nationals due to their service for the colonial army and their felt shared identity with the Dutch. According to anthropologist Dieter Bartels, their "identification with the Dutch was so complete that they referred to themselves as 'Black Dutchmen' (*Belanda Hitam*)" (25). Contrary to their expectations, they were housed in migrant camps in remote locations, some of which had served during the Second World War as *Durchgangslager*: Nazi camps used as transit locations for prisoners before their deportation to concentration camps. The migrant camp in the Dutch city of Vught had even served as a *Konzentrationslager*: a concentration camp.

The reason for this isolation from Dutch society was that their residence in the Netherlands was supposed to be temporary: the original plan envisaged a period of six months. In 1952, the CAZ (Commissie Ambonezenzorg: Committee for the Care of Moluccans) was installed to organize the facilitation of their daily requirements, such as food and hygiene.[2] Until 1954, Moluccans were not allowed to seek employment or send their children to school. Throughout the 1960s, most Moluccans were relocated to newly built, segregated neighborhoods in Dutch towns. During these years, the Moluccan dependence on the state was gradually reduced until 1970, when the CAZ was dissolved, marking the end of their residence being regarded as temporary by the Dutch government.

From the mid-1960s, a number of people from the community's second generation sought violent means to protest their continued marginalization by both the Dutch and Indonesian governments. In Indonesia, the

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1   The KNIL had a total of 68,889 soldiers at that time (Harinck and Verwey 3).

2   The name would officially translate to Committee for the Care of *Ambonese*. The latter is the original term that was used to refer to Moluccans, by themselves and by the Dutch alike. Ambon is Maluku's main island and is the location for a majority of the Moluccan migration's prehistory. From around the 1970s onwards, the term "Moluccans" started to replace "Ambonese", at least as a term of self-identification.

Moluccan struggle for independence had suffered a major defeat when RMS President Chris Soumokil was publicly executed by the Indonesian government on the Moluccan island of Obi, on 12 April 1966. In the Netherlands, the second generation of the migrant community had perceived the slow retraction of Dutch support for their residence, and the increasing unlikelihood of their return to Maluku, as a systematic denial of responsibility on the side of the Dutch government. The train hijackings were two of the final actions in a longer history of attacks between 1966 and 1978:

 1966: attempt to set fire to the Indonesian embassy in The Hague;
 1970: occupation of the residence of the Indonesian ambassador in Wassenaar (one patrolling police officer killed);
 1975: attempt to take the Queen hostage;
 1975: first train hijacking near Wijster (three hostages killed);
 1975: occupation of the Indonesian consulate in Amsterdam (one staff member died due to an unfortunate fall while attempting to flee);
 1977: second train hijacking near De Punt (six hijackers and two hostages killed, all by bullets fired by the Dutch military);
 1977: occupation of a primary school in Bovensmilde;
 1978: occupation of a province house in Assen (two hostages killed).

The first hijacking started on 2 December 1975, when a group of seven Moluccan youths took control of a train near the village of Wijster and took 23 passengers hostage. The action was meant to force the Dutch government to assist the Moluccan community in realizing the RMS. The hijackers executed three hostages during their action. They surrendered after twelve days, on 14 December 1975, due to the successful mediation by Moluccan representatives, and were sentenced to fourteen years in prison. One and a half years later, on 23 May 1977, a group of nine Moluccan youths hijacked a train near the village of De Punt and took 54 passengers hostage, this time without taking lives. The aims were the same as before, with the additional demand that those who were involved in the previous hijacking were to be released from prison. After nineteen days of unsuccessful negotiations, a special taskforce of marines surrounded the train on 11 June 1977, and ended the hijacking violently, killing six of the hijackers. They also accidentally killed two hostages. The three surviving hijackers were sentenced to six to nine years in prison.

Although these events took place more than 40 years ago, the actions still reappear in the news "on an almost yearly basis," as the Dutch national news channel, *NOS*, remarked in an article on 29 May 2017 ("Hoe Nederland

wekenlang zijn adem inhield bij treinkaping De Punt").[3] Novels based on the events have been written by both Dutch and Moluccan authors (e.g. Van Dam; Pessireron; Scholten). The first non-fiction history of the hijackings was published three years after the second hijacking, in 1980 (Barker). A four-part television documentary was released in 2000 (Roelofs), discussing Moluccan activism in general, but focusing primarily on the hijackings. Telefilms were released for both hijackings (Oest; Smitsman).[4] The one about the 1977 hijacking was notable for being the most watched telefilm in ten years, indicating that "the theme of the film was not only important to the Dutch-Moluccan community but had broader national interest" (Marselis 206).

This lasting public impact was a result of the second hijacking headlining the national media for three weeks, as well as the televised live report of the violent military intervention that ended the action. The 2014-2018 lawsuit rekindled public discussions about this history. Recurring questions in these discussions regard the degree to which the hijackings could be interpreted as justified, when remembered within the larger context of Dutch colonialism, as well as the degree to which the military intervention could be interpreted as justified, when remembered within the larger context of Moluccan attacks in the 1960s and 1970s. The discussions mainly take place on social media and in the online response sections of national newspapers, and can be understood as a conflict between groups of people remembering these events differently. In the next sections, therefore, I will close-read selections of these discussions in order to analyze some of the main ways in which the hijackings are being remembered. As will become clear, these postcolonial memory practices often operate through the silencing or amplifying of the voices of those who were involved in the actions.

Victims and perpetrators: voiceless archetypes

The hijackings caused a shift in the way in which Moluccans were generally perceived in the Netherlands. In his article about the hijacking's effects on the Moluccan community, Dieter Bartels argues that the actions triggered

> widespread abuse by Dutch civilians and indiscriminate actions by the police against younger Moluccans (including non-involved southeast

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3   My translation of the Dutch original: "bijna jaarlijks in het nieuws."
4   Telefilms, according to their website (telefilm.cobofonds.nl/over-telefilm), are Dutch direct-to-TV feature films that discuss current societal themes.

> Moluccans and Ambonese Muslims) countrywide. [...] The immediate
> repercussions ranged from Dutch civilians cursing Moluccans on the
> streets to police harassing young Moluccans or anybody who faintly
> resembled them, including many Dutch-Indonesians. A more long-term
> effect resulted from stereotyping Moluccans as violence-prone, leading
> to widespread discrimination, particularly on the labor market. (35)

The stereotype of Moluccans as violent indicates one of two major extremes
into which the hijackings polarized public opinion. This first extreme regards
Moluccans as *perpetrators*, the other as *victims*. As perpetrators, the Moluc-
cans are interpreted as aggressors, who took innocent bystanders hostage.
As victims, they are interpreted as marginalized postcolonial subjects, who
were driven to despair as a result of their systematic mistreatment by the
Dutch government.

The latter interpretation, of Moluccans as victims, was to a great extent
encouraged by publications that appeared from the late 1960s onward on
the oppressive role the Dutch had played in their colonies during the last
decades before independence. In 1969, a government-initiated investigation
into archive material about the Indonesian National Revolution resulted
in the so-called *Excessennota* ("Report of Excesses"). This research was
led by Cees Fasseur, the legislation advisor for the Ministry of Justice at
the time, and made public a long list of war crimes committed by Dutch
soldiers. The *Excessennota* inspired many further reconsiderations of the
Dutch colonial past. Most prominently, war veterans J.A.A. van Doorn
and W.J. Hendrix released many details about the systematic cruelty of
the Dutch army during the Indonesian National Revolution (1945–1949)
in their book *Ontsporing van geweld* ("Derailment of Violence"), published
in 1970. These are examples of a self-critical Dutch perspective that was
developing in public opinion on postcolonial memory around the time of
the hijackings. This self-critical perspective enabled a general interpretation
of the Moluccans as victims of Dutch state violence within the context of
colonization.

These interpretations of Moluccans as either perpetrators or victims are
further strengthened by considering the casualties of the hijackings. While
the hijackers of 1975 killed three hostages, making their interpretation as
perpetrators more likely, the hijackers of 1977 did not kill any hostages,
whereas the military intervention of this action caused eight deaths, in-
cluding those of two hostages. As such, the second hijacking allows for an
interpretation of the marines as perpetrators, and the hijackers and the
hostages they killed as their victims. Additionally, the lawsuit that started

in 2014 has led to controversial archive material being newly released to the court and the media, including tapes of recording devices that were placed under the train, which indicate that the soldiers were also shooting at unarmed hijackers. The uncovering of these details has resulted in renewed discussions in traditional and social media about the hijackings, and has exacerbated the polarization of public opinion about these events. In a 2018 interview with national newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad*, Professor of Moluccan Migration and Culture Fridus Steijlen argued that the media representation of the lawsuit "reduces the discussion to a case study about perpetrators and victims" (Mee).[5]

Steijlen's argument can be validated by studying user-generated content from between 2014–2018, which was posted online in response to newspaper articles about the lawsuit and the actions themselves. In 2015, about a year after the lawsuit began, national newspaper *De Volkskrant* published a selection of letters from readers entitled "Readers on the Moluccan indict-ment: 'outrageous'" ("Lezers over Molukse aanklacht: 'Godgeklaagd'").[6] One reader writes: "In my opinion, it goes much too far [...] that the train hijackers that died during the actions are cast in a victim role, almost forty years after the fact."[7] Another reader states that, even if the lawsuit were to prove that some of the hijackers were executed despite being unarmed, "their status as perpetrators would remain unchanged, that is: people who seriously harmed, or indirectly even terminated, the lives of others, without any right to do so. Terrorists, in other words."[8]

This selection of reader responses from *De Volkskrant* contains only arguments against interpreting the hijackers as victims, and in favor of interpreting them as perpetrators. However, there are also indications toward the opposite inclination. For example, the 2DOC website posted a selection of viewers' tweets about the actions ("40 jaar na de Molukse Kaping in tweets"). 2DOC is an organization that releases an ongoing series of documentaries about Dutch society that are broadcast on public televi-sion channel *NPO 2*. The tweets were responses to the 2DOC documentary from 2017 about the Moluccan actions (Verbraak). One tweet calls the 1977

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5   My translation of the Dutch original: "De rechtszaak verengt de discussie tot een casus van daders en slachtoffers."

6   My translation of the Dutch original: "Lezers over Molukse aanklacht: 'Godgeklaagd'."

7   My translation of the Dutch original: "Dat de treinkapers die hierbij het leven hebben gelaten bijna veertig jaar na dato in een slachtofferrol geplaatst worden [...] vind ik veel te ver gaan."

8   My translation of the Dutch original: "dan nog blijft de status van de daders ongewijzigd: lieden die andermans bestaan zonder enig recht ernstig hebben geschaad of indirect zelfs beëindigd. Terroristen kortom."

government an "administration with blood on their hands."[9] Another tweet affirms that "the Dutch state is responsible for many lies and mistakes."[10] Yet another states that "Moluccans have indeed been treated scandalously and have been abandoned."[11] Several tweets call upon the Dutch state to make official apologies to the Moluccan community. These public opinions show a tendency to interpret the state as the perpetrator, and the Moluccans as their victims.

These are examples of public discussions about the actions that have taken place since the beginning of the 2014 lawsuit. Similar discussions can, however, be found before 2014 as well, as cultural scholar Randi Marselis has pointed out. In her article, she discusses user-generated content about the actions on an online discussion forum that was active in 2009. This forum was created by Dutch television channel *EO*, as an invitation for viewers to comment on the telefilm *De Punt* (Smitsman), which is a fictionalized account of the Moluccan hijacking of 1977.[12] Marselis points out that many contributions to the forum were preoccupied with locating perpetrators and victims, with some discussants declaring themselves to be "ashamed of the way the Netherlands have treated our Moluccan fellow creatures [*sic*]. [These] people have been treated like old trash [*sic*]" (213).[13] Other voices criticized this point of view of the Moluccans as victims, identifying it as "part of a broader tendency in Dutch society," in which "we the Dutch always seem to be masters at making perpetrators into victims" (211; 212).

According to sociologist Bernhard Giesen, this fixation on perpetrators and victims is common for a society that is dealing with the collective memory of shocking events. He argues that perpetrators and victims are two "archetypes," as he calls them, that appear as the result of "a social construction carried by a moral community defining an evil" (47). This argument informs the relevance of Giesen's theory to the current case study: victims and perpetrators do not construct themselves. Instead, their construction is in the hands of what he calls "the public perspective,"

9 My translation of the Dutch original: "kabinetmetbloedaandehanden [*sic*]."
10 My translation of the Dutch original: "De Nederlandse Staat heeft zoveel gelogen en fouten gemaakt."
11 My translation of the Dutch original: "Molukkers zijn idd [*sic*] schandalig behandeld en in de steek gelaten."
12 For an analysis of this film and the online discussions it incited, see Gerlov van Engelenhoven, "The Case of Telefilm *De Punt*'s Online Discussion Forum: Participatory Space for Societal Debate or Echo Chamber for the Polemical Few?"
13 The English translations of these comments (originally in Dutch) are provided by Randi Marselis.

which acts as a "universalist moral discourse that aims at impartiality and justice," and which is "at a certain distance from the victims, as well as from the perpetrators" (48). Giesen locates this public perspective in different institutional arenas:

> The public perspective can be based on the authority of […] intellectuals, or judges or it can just refer to the majority of impartial spectators. It can be constructed in the discourse of civil society, articulated in literature and art, or brought forward by the response of the common people on the streets. (48)

These different discourses work together to establish the moral boundaries of society, by defining deviations from its norms: "the moral community needs deviance and perpetrators in order to construct the boundary between the good and the evil" (51).

The direct relationship between perpetrators and victims lies in the fact that perpetrators are those who "intentionally and knowingly" cause harm "to members of the community" (62). Their identification as perpetrators therefore relies on the identification of their victims. Victims, in turn, are defined by Giesen as "innocent individuals" who "have been treated as non-humans," as a result of which they, too, "represent the fringe of moral communities, but on the opposite end to the position of the perpetrator" (52). In other words, the identification of victims relies on the identification of their perpetrators. Their connected yet opposing positions at the fringe explains why, "Viewed from the center, the fringe of moral communities appears as an area of twilight and ambivalence where the opposites are sometimes in close vicinity," as a result of which "the boundaries between perpetrators […] and victims tend to be blurred" (52). This confusion of perpetrators and victims corresponds to the two main interpretations of the hijackers.

When applying Giesen's theory to the case study of the hijackers, it becomes possible to analyze why they are generally interpreted either as perpetrators or as victims. The hijackings, as climactic moments in a longer history of attacks on Dutch society, forced the reconsideration of a fragile element of its collective identity, that is, its postcolonial memory. The hijackings violently urged Dutch society to reflect upon the question of how it should remember its colonial past, and to what extent it should acknowledge that past's lasting influence on social dynamics in the present. To stabilize itself in this situation, Dutch society has had to decide on matters of responsibility and justice. By interpreting the hijackers as

perpetrators, they are held responsible for their actions, and their actions are interpreted as unjustifiable. By interpreting them as victims, their actions are interpreted as justifiable, because they are understood as a desperate attempt to gain attention for their treatment as exiles by the Dutch state ever since their migration, despite their history of loyalty to Dutch colonial rule. In the latter case, the state is considered to bear the majority of the responsibility.

However, whether interpreted as perpetrators or as victims, the hijackers are in either case regarded as deviants, whose actions banished them to the margins of the moral community. As such, argues Giesen, both victims and perpetrators have "no faces, no voices, no places of their own [...]. They cannot raise their voices in the public discourse of civil society" (51). As victims, the hijackers have no voice because they are interpreted as having been deprived of it; as perpetrators, because they are interpreted as having lost their right to it. Therefore, in both cases, the hijackers are prevented from voicing their political message, that is, their claim for Moluccan independence and their indictment against the Dutch state. Instead, their protest is reduced either to a victim's desperate cry for help, or a perpetrator's radical attack on society. As such, labeling the hijackers as victims or perpetrators can be understood as ways to silence their political voices. As a counterpoint, the next section will explore which options there are for remembering the events without silencing the hijackers' voices.

Heroes: voices of their communities

Each year on 11 June, the day on which the military intervention ended the hijacking in 1977, an annual commemoration ceremony is held at the memorial for the hijackers who were killed, in the cemetery of the Dutch town of Assen. The commemoration has always been well attended, especially in 2017, 40 years after the hijacking, when the event drew "several thousand attendants" ("NOS journaal, 11-06-2017, 20:00").[14] During his press conference for the event, John Wattilete, president of the RMS government-in-exile since 2010, spoke out about the events for the first time. The RMS government-in-exile is the administrative body that was created after President Soumokil's execution in 1966. After his death, the RMS was restructured and moved its base to the Moluccan community in the Netherlands.

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14   My translation of the Dutch original: "enkele duizenden belangstellenden."

In his address, which was broadcast on national television, President Wattilete referred to the hijacking with the following words:

> This is the day on which the Dutch state ended the train hijacking at De Punt with unprecedented and brutal violence. The day when, on behalf of the Dutch government, the young lives of our heroes were terminated. ("NOS journaal, 11-06-2017, 20:00")[15]

Wattilete's interpretation of the action stands in contrast to the memory practices that were discussed before. While identifying the Dutch state as the perpetrator of the situation, he avoids identifying victims, but instead labels the hijackers as "our heroes," thereby indirectly endorsing their actions. The statement was received controversially in the press. In an interview with national newspaper *De Telegraaf* a few weeks later, the interviewers ask him: "People that threaten children and other innocents, and take them hostage, certainly should not be called heroes?" (Joolen and Schoonhoven, "Het broeit nog steeds").[16] Wattilete responds: "They are heroes because they gave their lives for the RMS. I saw it this way back then, and I still do today. Because of their efforts, which resulted in their deaths, they have become martyrs."[17]

The way in which Wattilete remembers the hijackers constructs them as subjects who died heroically while fighting for the Moluccan separatist cause. As such, his identification of them as heroes, and, later in the same interview, as *martyrs*, corresponds to the way in which literary scholar Stathis Gourgouris defines the latter concept. According to Gourgouris, martyrs are defined by the moment in which they heroically sacrifice themselves "for a different (not yet instituted) *ought*," by which he means "not what society (or reality) *is* but what it *ought to be*" (133). Applied to the hijackings, this means that when President Wattilete presents the hijackers as martyrs, he enables the imagination of an *ought*, in which the RMS would be acknowledged as an independent state, and in which

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15   My translation of the Dutch original: "Het is de dag waarop de Nederlandse staat met ongekend grof geweld een einde heeft gemaakt aan de treinkaping bij De Punt. De dag waarop in opdracht van de Nederlandse regering een einde is gemaakt aan de jonge levens van onze helden."

16   My translation of the Dutch original: "Mensen die kinderen en andere onschuldigen bedreigen en gijzelen, kunt u toch geen helden noemen?"

17   My translation of the Dutch original: "Zij zijn helden omdat ze hun leven hebben gegeven voor de RMS. Dat vond ik toen en dat vind ik nog steeds. Door hun inzet, met de dood tot gevolg zijn het martelaren."

Moluccans therefore would no longer be marginalized subjects within the two surrounding dominant national contexts of Indonesia and the Netherlands.

This understanding of the figure of the martyr as a symbol of the struggle for justice is also taken up in Bernhard Giesen's theory as one among several variants of what he classifies as "heroes" (18). In his classification, heroes are a third archetype, next to victims and perpetrators, who can be identified by their "sacred subjectivity" (7). Giesen bases his notion of the "sacred" on the work of sociologist Émile Durkheim, who conceptualizes it in opposition to the "profane." In the introduction to the English translation of Durkheim's book, editor Mark S. Cladis defines these two concepts as follows:

> Durkheim frequently associated the sacred with the collective practices of the moral community, and the profane with the utilitarian activities of individuals pursuing self-interest. Thus the fundamental religious dichotomy between the sacred and the profane is parallel to the social dichotomy between the common life of the community and the private life of the individual. (xxii)

In other words, whereas the profane refers to individual, everyday actions, the sacred refers to actions that transcend this mundane level, and instead are "collective, elevated, and moral" (xxiii). The purpose of the sacred is to "make and remake society's collective existence" (xxiii). In Durkheim's terms, President Wattilete does not see the hijackings as "profane" actions, committed for individual reasons, but rather interprets them within the larger context of Moluccan separatism, and as such provides them with a "sacred" significance.

Whereas Durkheim's use of these concepts focuses on religious practices toward the construction of collective identity, Giesen applies them to secular versions of such community building. The "memory of the hero," he argues, is "the triumphant representation of subjectivity and collective identity" (2). The hero "is presented as a mediator between the realm of the sacred and the mundane fields of human action; he [*sic*] is imagined as a personal embodiment of the sacred" (2). Correspondingly, in Wattilete's representation of the hijackers as heroes, they gain "sacred" subjectivity, to the extent that they are presented as personal embodiments of Moluccan separatism. As such, the hijackers' sacred subjectivity is dependent upon Wattilete's particular representation of them, as Giesen also stresses: the hero's "subjectivity 'exists' only insofar as it is recognized by a community of other subjects" (7).

This consideration, that someone's heroic status is the result of a community interpreting that person as such, forms the basis of Giesen's argument that the event of a hero's death usually strengthens, rather than diminishes, their heroic status. As he argues, dying "is even today regarded as a prime path for being remembered as a hero," because after death, the hero's monumentality can no longer be shattered "by presenting the profane and humane details of his or her life" (19). In other words, when heroes die during their struggle, they transcend the profane reality of their everyday existence, thereby granting their community the opportunity to identify them exclusively through their "sacred" purpose, which they died for. This understanding of death as a prime path toward heroism is also apparent in Wattilete's remark that the hijackers "are heroes because they gave their lives for the RMS" (qtd. in Joolen and Schoonhoven, "Het broeit nog steeds").[18]

This preference for subjects who have died over those who are still alive, when it comes to the identification of heroes, can be explored further by studying the image reproduced below (see fig. 1). This image is of anonymous origin, but circulates on social media among internet users who see the hijackers as heroes. The image was for instance used in the 2DOC Twitter discussion from 2017, as an accompanying image to a Moluccan user's tweet, who stated that "To me they are and will forever be heroes. The Dutch treason and the colonial past remain painful issues, but we persist…".[19] The image was also used in the national newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* in 2017, for an interview with Moluccan soccer player Simon Tahamata, who sees the hijackers as "heroes, still. Who fought for our ideals" (Wijngaarden and Graat).[20]

This image states the deceased hijackers' names and the date of their deaths, and it includes photos of their faces, as well as the Indonesian-language proverb *Djauw dari mata / dekat di hati* ("Far from the eyes, close to the heart"), printed in the colors of the RMS flag. The text is printed over a photo of the hijacked train's front carriage, including the flag which the hijackers had attached to it. The three hijackers that survived the military intervention are not included in this collage. Moreover, for the earlier hijacking, the one that took place in 1975 during which none of the hijackers were killed, similar collages do not exist. Therefore, like Wattilete's speech and

18   My translation of the Dutch original: "Zij zijn helden omdat ze hun leven hebben gegeven voor de RMS."
19   My translation of the Dutch original: "Voor mij zijn en blijven het helden. Het Nederlandse verraad en koloniale verleden blijven pijnpunten mr [*sic*] we gaan verder…"
20   My translation of the Dutch original: "helden, nog steeds. Die actie voerden voor ons ideaal."

Fig. 1 A frequently cited collage in memory of the killed hijackers of the 1977 action

the annual practice of the commemoration itself, this collage indicates that the process of remembering the hijackings as heroic has an emphasis on death. In all three of these memory practices, the dead rather than the living hijackers are remembered. According to Giesen, the dead hero's legacy can be immortalized by means of memory practices that emphasize three possible elements: "they can mark his [*sic*] *place* in the community, they can recall his *voice* and his story, and they can represent his *face* to insiders and outsiders" (26).

The latter ritual, of representing the hero's *face* to insiders and outsiders, is showcased by the collage's inclusion of the hijackers' profile photos. Moreover, their identity is also presented by enlisting their names. Their *place* in the community is marked by the photo presenting the place where they died, as well as the collage's proverb that locates them "close to the heart." The annual commemoration, during which considerable numbers of

the Moluccan community come together in the cemetery where the hijackers are buried, is also a means to remember their legacy in spatial terms. Their *voice* and their story, finally, are recalled when Wattilete publicly remembers them as "our heroes," and frames their actions within the context of the Moluccan independence struggle, on behalf of which they acted, and for which they ultimately died. Such ideological contextualization is further strengthened by the references to the RMS flag in the collage, and the raising of the flag during the commemoration.

As such, whereas victims and perpetrators are theorized by Giesen to possess "no faces, no voices, no places of their own" (51), he argues that heroes do have all three of these characteristics. Whereas victims and perpetrators are banished to the margins of their community, the hero instead is located in the center of the "social community that reveres him [*sic*], commemorates him and imagines him. His or her presence marks the charismatic center of society" (17). Giesen's notion of charisma is based upon the work of sociologist Max Weber, who defines it as "a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men [*sic*]" and treated as endowed with "specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber 358). Giesen emphasizes that Weber's understanding of charisma concerns a form of authority which "is constituted by the *belief* of followers in the extraordinary qualities of an individual," as a result of which studies about heroism and charisma often focus "more on the charismatic movement than on the figure of the hero himself [*sic*]" (17).

Correspondingly, the interpretation of the hijackers as heroes says less about the hijackers themselves than about how those who develop and foster this interpretation want to remember their actions in the present. Interpreting the hijackers as heroes helps the Moluccan community to remember the hijackings as justified actions against the Dutch state, whose treatment of the Moluccan community since their migration is, in turn, thereby represented as unjust. Therefore, unlike victims and perpetrators, heroes do possess a political voice, to the extent that their legacy is remembered, and their political message is ritually recalled, repeated, and continued. Through memory practices that honor the hijackers as heroes, their claim to separatism stays alive even after their deaths. Their heroic character is constructed by a community that itself benefits from this construction. By interpreting the hijackers as "charismatic," extraordinary individuals, in terms of bravery, sense of justice, and willingness to self-sacrifice, the community constructs itself in this archetype's ideal image. Heroes thus function as exemplars to a community's sense of self.

To that extent, the status of the hero shares with that of the victim and the perpetrator that it is a socially constructed label placed upon a person, rather than this person's self-identification, let alone their natural quality. Therefore, the hero's voice reaches only as far as their community: the hijackers are heroes only to those who believe that the Moluccan separatist struggle is legitimate, and that their actions were a justified means toward the fulfillment of that struggle. To people who interpret these actions differently, for instance as the desperate cry for help of victims of colonial oppression, or as the radical transgressions of perpetrators, the hijackers' heroism, and therefore their political voice, is not acknowledged. I therefore partially depart from Giesen's theory to the extent that I question his general acceptance of the hero's voice. If heroes are constructions made by a community in order to build a positive self-image, it follows that their voices are part of that construction. According to this approach, and in contrast to Giesen's argumentation, heroes do in fact *not* have voices of their own. Instead, their voices are the result of the community speaking through them. They are, quite literally, the voices of their community.

This idea of heroes not being in control of their own voices can be asserted by studying an interview with Abé Sahetapy, who was among the hijackers of the 1975 action. In this interview, Sahetapy is repeatedly asked whether or not he sees himself as a Moluccan hero. He answers: "I am not a hero at all in the Moluccan community and never wanted to be. No, all of that is nonsense" (qtd. in Prillevitz).[21] Throughout the interview, Sahetapy invalidates glorifying interpretation of his actions, one after the other. For example, because he took up writing poetry while he was in prison, the interviewer asks him whether he sees himself as "a romantic artist-warrior in the way in which the philosopher Nietzsche had imagined it."[22] Sahetapy answers: "No, not at all. To me, art and the armed struggle have nothing in common. [...] I was just a guy who performed an action, nothing more. Our people were mistreated and we were no longer going to take it."[23] When asked whether or not the rumor is true that the hijackers received special training for their actions in a guerilla camp, he states: "We did not receive

21   My translation of the Dutch original: "Ik ben helemaal geen held in de Molukse samenleving en wilde dat ook nooit worden. Nee, dat is allemaal onzin."
22   My translation of the Dutch original: "of hij zich daardoor een romantische kunstenaar-strijder voelt zoals de filosoof Nietzsche zich die voorstelde."
23   My translation of the Dutch original: "Nee, helemaal niet. In mijn geval hebben kunst en gewapende strijd niks met elkaar te maken. [...] Ik was gewoon een jongen die een actie uitvoerde, meer niet. Ons volk werd slecht behandeld en dat pikten we niet langer."

special training or even practiced handling weapons. Everyone can use a gun or throw a grenade. There is nothing difficult about it. You can do it, too."[24]

With these and similar statements, Sahetapy attempts to decrease the distance which the interviewer tries to create between them, by attempting to elevate him to the status of a man with extraordinary abilities, or by imagining him as someone whose actions were inspired by a set of unique circumstances. Rather than a courageous freedom fighter, Sahetapy sketches himself as a typical, troubled adolescent: "I felt a lot of dissatisfaction, despite the fact that I had a pleasant youth in Drenthe.[25] I was, and still am, stuck between two cultures. As it happens, you first agitate against the one culture, and then against the other."[26] By refusing to be identified as an extraordinary character, Sahetapy disrupts the possibility of interpreting his actions as serving a larger, ideological purpose. Rather than this "sacred" understanding of his actions, he presents them as "profane," individual transgressions.

What becomes clear from Sahetapy's insistence on the everyday quality of his actions is that living individuals make for more fragile heroes than individuals who are no longer alive. The main reason for this is that the construction of heroes is a way for a community to articulate its own collective identity, and that living subjects may refuse to serve this purpose. Their personal memories and interpretations of their actions may be in conflict with the way in which their actions are taken up in collective memory as exemplary deeds. As such, if becoming a hero means to give up control over one's own voice by becoming "the voice of a community," then rejecting heroic status can be understood as a means to counteract this process. Indeed, it can be understood as a means to protect one's own voice, rather than allow it to be appropriated by a community aiming to use it as a mouthpiece for their articulation of collective identity. This consideration, about the rejection of heroic status as a way to protect one's voice from appropriation, will be further developed in the next section by analyzing another party that was active during the hijackings, and whose perspective has not yet been discussed: the marines who participated in the military intervention that ended the hijacking in 1977.

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24   My translation of the Dutch original: "Ook hadden we niet speciaal getraind of geoefend om met wapens om te gaan. Iedereen kan een geweer bedienen of granaat gooien. Daar is niks moeilijks aan. Ook jij kunt het."
25   Drenthe is the Dutch province in which both hijackings took place.
26   My translation of the Dutch original: "Zelf voelde ik ook veel onvrede, hoewel ik een goede jeugd heb gehad in Drenthe. Ik zat en zit nu nog steeds klem tussen twee culturen. Eerst schop je tegen de ene cultuur aan en vervolgens tegen de andere."

Who controls the hero's voice?

Like the hijackers, the marines that executed the military intervention in 1977 have frequently been the subject of public discussions about perpetrators, victims, and heroes. A thorough attempt to grant the marines an official heroic status was made in 2012, when Minister of Defense Hans Hillen announced the *Veteranenwet* ("Veterans Law"). According to the press release that was published on the Ministry of Defense's website, this law was to extend the definition of veterans to include "soldiers who are deployed against terrorist actions in both the Netherlands and abroad" ("Nieuwe veteranenwet").[27] Within this context, Minister Hillen explicitly mentioned the 1977 marines, announcing his intention to reward their actions with a medal. This proposal resulted in discussions in both traditional and social media about whether or not the marines should be regarded as heroes.

Some of the marines themselves also contributed to these discussions. Most prominently, Kees Kommer, who was the commander of the 1977 taskforce, deromanticized the memory of the military intervention in an interview with national news channel NOS. In the interview, he stresses the fatal reality of the actions for which Minister Hillen suggested he should receive the medal: "In my opinion, the government has the right to intervene in cases such as the train hijacking. But I do not need a reward for the fact that I killed people" ("NOS journaal, 09-06-2012, 20:00").[28] Moreover, with this comment he redirects responsibility for the military intervention to the government, on whose orders the marines were acting. As such, Kommer's point of view complicates the heroic status that a medal would grant him. Because he was one among several marines to criticize the proposal for the same reasons, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Hillen's successor as Minister of Defense, officially decided against the medal in 2014. Therefore, just as in the example of surviving hijacker Abé Sahetapy, Kommer's personal interpretation of his past deeds obstructs the construction of a stable collective memory in the present. The official acknowledgment of the members of his taskforce as heroes by the government is impeded by his personal understanding of the military intervention.

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27   My translation of the Dutch original: "militairen die worden ingezet tegen terroristische acties in zowel Nederland of in het buitenland."

28   My translation of the Dutch original: "Ik vind dat de overheid het recht heeft om in te grijpen in gevallen zoals bij het kapen van die trein. Maar ik hoef niet beloond te worden voor het feit dat ik mensen heb doodgeschoten."

Kommer's refusal to be regarded as a hero can be understood through Bernhard Giesen's arguments concerning the fragility of this position: "the public embodiment of power and charisma in the figure of the hero risks being considered immoral, scandalous, or unjust," as a result of which, whoever "was regarded as a hero before" could be "converted into a perpetrator" (54). For the marines, this shift from hero to potential perpetrator indeed took place in the course of the 2014–2018 lawsuit brought by the hijackers' next of kin against the state. According to an article by national newspaper *De Telegraaf*, after their military intervention in the hijacking in 1977, the marines were initially "welcomed as heroes. But over the last few years this status has come under scrutiny. The most severe attack: a lawsuit in which the hijackers' next of kin accuse the soldiers of being responsible for executions" (Joolen and Schoonhoven, "De harde les van Wijster").[29]

As this article indicates, the elevated position individuals are offered when they are hailed as heroes can also be turned against them once the common interpretation of the event changes: "Versions of the past change with every recall, in accordance with the changed present situation" (Erll 8). In the case of the marines, an example of such a changed present situation took place in 2013, when freelance journalist Jan Beckers published the results of his independent research into the details of the military intervention online ("Het drama van De Punt"). Since 2010, he had worked together with surviving hijacker Junus Ririmasse and forensic pathologist F.R.W. van de Goot to develop a reconstruction of the way in which the 1977 hijacking had ended. The reconstruction was based on a reexamination of the autopsy reports of the dead hijackers, as well as on a series of interviews with people that had been closely involved with the event, including hostages and participating marines. The purpose of this project was to determine whether or not the hijackers' deaths could be interpreted as executions, and as such as illegitimate violence.

To this aim, the reconstruction was focused on finding out both whether or not the marines had purposefully killed, rather than arrested, the hijackers, and whether or not some of the hijackers had been unarmed. Because the reconstruction appeared to confirm both of these questions, Beckers sought national attention for his work, and was interviewed by a number of newspapers. Among these interviews is one with *Dagblad van het Noorden*, the main newspaper for the provinces of Groningen

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29   My translation of the Dutch original: "werden als helden onthaald. Aan die status wordt sinds een paar jaar getornd. De zwaarste aanval: een rechtszaak waarin nabestaanden van kapers de militairen beschuldigen van executies."

and Drenthe, which is where the hijackers were from. In the interview, Beckers proclaims that "several marines have been guilty of committing perversities and engaging in an orgy of blood and violence" ("Treinkapers De Punt geliquideerd").[30]

These and similarly spectacular statements rekindled public discussions about questions of justice in the case of the hijacking of 1977, prompting the government to initiate archival research in order to decide whether or not Beckers's claims were legitimate. As such, the research was primarily aimed at studying the audio recordings that existed of the military intervention, but which had not been publicly accessible up until that point. The outcome of the research was that the government did not consider Beckers's indictment to be legitimate, because the archival research indicated that "the soldiers had acted within their rules of engagement," as was reported by the Ministry of Defense's online magazine *Defensiekrant* (Wiel 4).[31] This outcome, in turn, resulted in the 2014–2018 lawsuit against the Dutch state, led by human rights lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld, who had won several lawsuits concerning state violence since the early 2000s.

Although this lawsuit shifted the question of perpetration from the hijackers to the state, Beckers's initiating accusation, which he has frequently repeated in the media since, labeled individual marines as perpetrators. The discussions in the media have mainly followed the lawsuit's premise rather than that of Beckers, in that they have primarily focused on the roles played by the hijackers and by the state. Nevertheless, Beckers's indictment has inspired a considerable number of public discussions about the marines themselves, which, like the discussions concerning the hijackers, are preoccupied with identifying heroes, perpetrators, and victims. For instance, a reader's letter to *Dagblad van het Noorden* states that "The marines were heroes, not cruel murderers," and expresses frustration about the fact that "the guardians of this country are time and again cast as perpetrators. Meanwhile, perpetrators are turned into victims" (qtd. in Saarloos).[32] This interpretation of the situation as a reversal of moral positions is quite common in the public discussions concerning the lawsuit. Another prominent example is an article for *De Telegraaf* which was written by crime journalist and television presenter John van den Heuvel, who argues that "the (ex-)

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30   My translation of the Dutch original: "een aantal mariniers zich schuldig heeft gemaakt aan perversiteiten en zich te buiten ging aan een orgie van bloed en geweld."

31   My translation of the Dutch original: "De militairen handelden binnen hun geweldinstructies."

32   My translation of the Dutch original: "Mariniers waren helden, geen kille moordenaars"; "De hoeders van dit land worden keer op keer als daders weggezet. Daders worden slachtoffers."

marines of De Punt in any case do not deserve a shameful place in the courtroom. They rather deserve a heroic status" (Heuvel).[33]

The polarized nature of the public debate of marines as heroes or perpetrators stands in contrast to the way in which individual marines themselves have, on several occasions, advocated an interpretation that labels them as neither of these archetypes. In an article for *De Volkskrant*, emphatically entitled "Wij zijn killers" ("We are killers"), two ex-marines who were part of the special taskforce, Jack Schollink and Peter Gatowinas, remind readers of the specifics of their function: "We are trained to kill. Torture. Bite through someone's throat if necessary. [...] When we are deployed, killing is anticipated. Otherwise, one would rather call the police" (qtd. in Thijssen).[34] Their self-representation complicates an understanding of them either as heroes or as perpetrators. While their unappealing and explicitly violent self-description makes it difficult to romanticize their function, they also avoid being interpreted as perpetrators by emphasizing that they work for the state, as a result of which the actions they are ordered to perform, unlike those of perpetrators, do not consist in breaking the law.

Therefore, like Kommer before them, Schollink and Gatowinas criticize the way in which the lawsuit pays attention to them as if they were acting independently, and redirect this attention to the state, on whose orders they were operating: "The state should solve cases, rather than shift the blame onto others as a means of functional self-protection."[35] Moreover, they complicate the binary opposition between hijackers and marines that the hero/perpetrator discussion assumes, as they argue that the hijackings resulted directly from the systemic disregard which the Moluccan soldiers faced upon their arrival in the Netherlands in 1951: "They were screwed over and lied to by the Dutch government. Because the government always screws over its soldiers. We are always the ones to be sacrificed."[36] With this remark they diminish their distance from the hijackers, whose parents, so they argue, were soldiers for the Dutch state just as they themselves are, and were treated with the same systemic neglect which they are currently facing.

33   My translation of the Dutch original: "De (oud-)mariniers van De Punt verdienen hoe dan ook geen beschamende plek in de rechtszaal, maar een heldenstatus."
34   My translation of the Dutch original: "Wij zijn getraind om te doden. Martelen. Een strot doorbijten als het moet. [...] Als je ons inzet, wordt doden ingecalculeerd. Anders bel je de politie."
35   My translation of the Dutch original: "De staat moet zaken oplossen en niet de schuld afschuiven uit functionele zelfbescherming."
36   My translation of the Dutch original: "Ze zijn genaaid en belogen door de Nederlandse overheid. De regering naait ook altijd haar militairen. Wij worden altijd opgeofferd."

This analysis of the marines and the changing public appreciation for the role they played during the hijacking shows how living heroes may often reject their heroic status, because this status makes them easy targets for incriminating interpretations once something changes in the way in which the history is remembered. As long as the hijackers are understood as merciless criminals, the military intervention can be understood as a heroic liberation, despite the fact that it caused eight deaths, including those of two hostages. When, however, new research provides reason to believe that some of the hijackers killed were in fact unarmed, their deaths, which were until then believed to be unavoidable, can be reinterpreted as illegitimate executions. As a result of this, the violence of the intervention becomes more difficult to justify, let alone glorify, as it runs the risk of being reinterpreted as excessive.

In short, because the marines, when they are understood as heroes, run the risk of becoming recast in the role of perpetrators, they prefer to be seen as regular individuals who were playing their predesigned parts in a larger conflict that lies beyond their personal responsibility. This risk that they run of becoming revalidated as perpetrators showcases the notion that heroes are not in control of their own public significance. Therefore, marines like Kommer, Schollink, and Gatowinas, and surviving hijackers like Sahetapy, interrupt the collective memory practices that seek to endow their actions with a sense of "sacredness," in order to avoid their voices being appropriated by a larger community and invested with meaning. By rejecting heroic status, therefore, these individuals remain in control of their own voices.

Conclusions

The Moluccan hijackings in the 1970s were violent actions aimed at forcing the Dutch government to follow up on its alleged promise to help establish an independent Moluccan republic. These actions have caused ongoing discussions in both traditional and social media, where the state, the hijackers, and the marines are often interpreted in terms of Giesen's three archetypes: victims, perpetrators, and heroes. These interpretations indicate different ways in which the hijackings, and the larger context of postcolonial conflict, are remembered, predominantly in terms of responsibility and justice.

Of these three archetypes, victims and perpetrators are opposed to each other, yet mutually dependent. Each of them is identified by identifying the other. If the hijackings are interpreted as unjustified, and the hijackers are held responsible for their actions, they can be interpreted as perpetrators,

whereas their hostages can be interpreted as victims. Conversely, if the state is interpreted as responsible for the neglect which their postcolonial immigrants suffered upon arrival and ever since, the hijackings can be interpreted as a justified, symptomatic result of the Moluccan community's position as victims of this mismanagement. Any casualties of the actions, on the Dutch as well as on the Moluccan side, can then by extension be interpreted as victims of the state's perpetration as well. Remembering any party as either victims or perpetrators takes away their political voice: as victims because they are deprived of it, as perpetrators because they have lost their right to it.

The third archetype, that of the hero, differs from the other two to the extent that to interpret individuals as heroes does not mean to take away, but rather to appropriate and collectivize their voices as expressing a larger ideological position. When a community identifies a certain individual as its hero, it means that this individual is constructed as an exemplar for this community's self-identity. Moluccan President Wattilete remembers the hijackers as heroes because to interpret their deeds as justified and heroic means to interpret the Moluccan independence struggle as legitimate. Correspondingly, when people interpret the marines as heroes, it is because this means their deeds are remembered as justified, and therefore the fatal violence they committed is remembered as legitimate rather than excessive.

Individuals who have died during their struggle are easier objects of such glorification than individuals who are still alive. The main reason for this is that living people may reject their heroic status, whereas people no longer alive lack the capacity to do so. Because heroes run the risk of being reinterpreted as perpetrators when the collective memory of the event shifts to their disadvantage, they often prefer to be remembered as ordinary, rather than extraordinary subjects. The lawsuit against the Dutch state, which largely focused on the question of to what extent the marines were following orders when they killed the hijackers, is an example of this fragile position.

With these conclusions in mind, Giesen's claim that the hero has "a face, a voice and a place in the center of a social community that reveres him" (17), requires reconsideration. Seeing that it is easier to make dead people into heroes, due to their inability to reject this status, a question can be asked about who controls the hero's face, voice, and place. That is, to what extent does a hero have the agency to make decisions about these qualities? On the one hand, heroes express elements of a community's identity. On the other hand, they are cast in these roles by their community, which means that, in a way, their community is articulating its collective identity to

itself, using them as its passive mouthpieces. Rather than having voices and faces of their own, heroes are, quite literally, the voices and faces of their community. As such, one can wonder whether the hijackers who were killed would agree to being venerated as the heroes which RMS President Wattilete makes of them, or whether, in Durkheim's terms, they would deny this "sacred" identity and prefer a more "profane" understanding of their actions, like Sahetapy does in his interview (Prillevitz). Dead heroes' voices can be appropriated as instruments for the articulation of a community's collective identity, precisely because they are not alive, and therefore cannot control what happens to their voices.

Moreover, the cases of Sahetapy and of the marines have shown that even people who are still alive may have difficulty remaining in control of their own voices. Publicly denouncing their own heroic status has not kept the general public from continuing to hail them as heroes or condemn them as perpetrators, or, at times, mourn them as victims. Therefore, unlike perpetrators and victims, heroes *do* have voices, but they are not their own, because the community speaks through them. If becoming the voice of one's community means to lose that voice to the community, remaining or becoming silent can be a strategy to refuse this dubious honor: to retract one's voice becomes to protect one's voice.

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3   The case of Jan Pieterszoon Coen's statue

Repressive voices and resistant silences in public space

Abstract

Jan Pieterszoon Coen is remembered both as a hero for establishing the Dutch spice monopoly, and as a perpetrator who in 1621 massacred the Bandanese population in pursuit of that monopoly. After his statue in Hoorn fell off its pedestal in 2011, the municipality decided to renovate it, in disregard of protesters requesting the statue's relocation to Westfries Museum. As a compromise, the municipality granted the protest a voice by providing the statue with an updated inscription that acknowledges Coen's controversial legacy, and an accompanying exhibition in Westfries Museum. In this chapter, I will analyze this paradoxical interplay of voice and silence in the negotiation of postcolonial memory, in which being granted a voice actually means being silenced.

Keywords: Jan Pieterszoon Coen; postcolonial memory; voice and silence; repressive tolerance; public space; museum studies

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the deployment of voices and silences in the articulation of postcolonial memory in public space. This analysis is focused on the statue of Dutch colonizer Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587–1629) that is located on Roode Steen, the central square in Hoorn. The statue was placed there in 1893, as part of a larger program intended to strengthen Dutch national identity by honoring national heroes with monuments. Coen was selected for this program because of his role in establishing the Dutch monopoly on the global spice trade during the early seventeenth century. However, his heroic status has always been controversial: he established the spice

monopoly by killing 14,000 inhabitants of the Banda islands, where the central plantations for nutmeg and clove were located. The islands were then repopulated with enslaved people from other parts of the Dutch colonies, who were put to work on the spice plantations.

Ever since Coen's statue was erected, the city of Hoorn has systematically refused to engage with recurrent arguments in favor of removing it. However, after the statue fell from its pedestal during a construction accident in 2011, these voices could no longer be ignored. In an attempt to work around this conflict, the municipality decided to add a new paragraph to the inscription of the renovated statue. This new paragraph mentions the fact that Coen's legacy is controversial and that not everyone agrees that he deserves a statue. Apart from this addition to the inscription, the municipality also organized an exhibition in Westfries Museum, located on the same square as the statue. Like the inscription itself, the exhibition was aimed at creating an inclusive space, where both supportive and critical voices could negotiate the contested memory of Coen's actions in Banda.

As such, it seems as if the voices of those who were against the statue are now appropriately represented in public discourse. Yet, by granting the opposition a voice in this way, the municipality legitimized its decision to ignore what these voices had to say: the statue was renovated in direct disregard of the opposition's wishes. Through close readings of the municipality's responses to the protests against Coen's statue, this chapter aims to answer the question: *under which circumstances can being granted a voice mean being silenced?*

In what follows, I will first give an overview of the relevant elements of Coen's actions in the Moluccan region in the 1620s and bring this into relation with an account of the historical context in which his statue was erected more than 250 years later, in 1893. Contextualizing the origin of Coen's statue will help to understand why it has often functioned as a catalyst for disputes about the representation of colonial history. After providing this context, I will analyze the ways in which the municipality of Hoorn responded to the voices protesting the renovation of Coen's statue in 2011–2012. Finally, I will use this analysis to identify the paradoxical interplay of voice and silence deployed in this conflict about postcolonial memory, in which granting voice is a strategy of repression, and in which, as a response to such repression, silence becomes a strategy of resistance.[1]

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1   For further analysis of silence as a political strategy of resistance, which also goes beyond matters of postcolonial memory, see Gerlov van Engelenhoven and Hannes Kaufmann, "When Silence Speaks Louder than Words: Tracing Moments of *Verfremdung* in Contemporary Political Protests."

Coen's controversial legacy

Jan Pieterszoon Coen was the fourth Governor-General of the VOC, from 1617 to 1623. He established the city of Batavia in 1619 (currently Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia) and is remembered for being responsible for the establishment of the Dutch global monopoly over the clove and nutmeg trade in 1621. A less frequently emphasized aspect of this history is the fact that he accomplished the spice monopoly by leading a violent offensive on the Banda islands, killing nearly all 15,000 of its inhabitants, deporting the less than 1,000 survivors as indentured servants to Batavia, and repopulating Banda with "shiploads of slaves, who were usually acquired from regional slave markets on the coasts where the VOC traded, if they were not prisoners" (Loth 24).[2]

The conquest of Banda was not the first time that Coen had burned down and depopulated an area to take control over it. The establishment of Batavia in 1619 had also been the result of his soldiers burning down the existing city of Jayakarta and expelling its native population. This practice became a common VOC strategy to maintain control over the colonies. Throughout the 1600s and 1700s, the trading company organized annual military expeditions, the so-called *hongi* expeditions, to uphold the Dutch monopoly on the spice trade, by extirpating plantations that were not trading exclusively with the Dutch.[3]

Coen's expedition against the Banda islands was motivated by the fact that this region was the main location for the spice plantations, which preexisted the arrival of the Dutch, and were of great interest to the VOC. Coen's actions constituted a decisive step in the VOC project, which political historian Richard Chauvel summarizes as follows:

> a policy of excluding Asian traders and the imposition of control over the clove-producing areas. The clove producers were forced to cease trading with their traditional partners and supply cloves only to the Dutch, while

2   For an overview of the VOC's use of enslaved people for the establishment of the spice monopoly, see Vincent Loth, "Pioneers and Perkeniers: The Banda Islands in the 17th Century." For a more general overview of the extensive Dutch-Asian slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Reggie Baay, *Daar werd wat gruwelijks verricht*, and Matthias van Rossum, *Kleurrijke Tragiek*.

3   The VOC took the term *hongi* from the language of the Moluccan island of Ternate. The word translates to "armada." For an overview of the VOC's use of hongi expeditions for the maintenance of the spice monopoly, see Muridan Satrio Widjojo, "Ruling the Local Rulers: Maintenance of the Spice Monopoly."

the Dutch were the only and more expensive source of the commodities
of exchange. (19)

The Bandanese did not accept this collaboration, which was detrimental
to them and which the VOC was forcing upon them; as a result, "Resistance
was offered by covert trading and force of arms" (19). This resistance is often
taken as a justification for Coen's mass-killing of the Bandanese popula-
tion in 1621, which on the inscription of his statue in Hoorn, for example,
is referred to as a "punitive expedition." Due to the fundamental role he
played in the establishment of the spice monopoly, Coen is remembered
as a national hero in the Netherlands. His statue in Hoorn is an expression
of this heroic status.

However, because of the violent details of Coen's actions, his statue has
often been criticized. A major reason for the offense which people take with
the statue is that Coen's establishment of the spice monopoly was brought
about through the mass destruction that took place on the Banda islands,
and the mass-killing of its inhabitants. The honor that the statue confers
on Coen's legacy therefore implies a one-sided approach to remembering
the Dutch colonial past, which actively ignores Dutch society's postcolonial
reality: that many contemporary Dutch citizens are descendants of people
who suffered oppression and forced migration under the Dutch colonial
regime, in which Coen played a central part.

Seeing the controversial role that Coen has played in Dutch colonial his-
tory, it is curious that he received a statue at all. Perhaps even more curious
is the fact that this statue was built so many years after his death: what was
the purpose of building a national commemoration for a man more than
two and a half centuries after his lifetime? An explanation of these issues
can be found in the work of historian N.C.F. van Sas, who argues that Coen's
statue was built in a time of "statue mania" (560).[4] This statue mania helped
shape the Dutch colonial past as a history of national heroes. Sas sketches
the nineteenth century as a time in which the Netherlands was "preoccupied
with the nation," and the construction of a "fatherland discourse," which
he also terms "the myth of the Netherlands" (523).[5] Sas bases himself in a
tradition that is shared by historians like Benedict Anderson and Pierre
Nora, who theorize nationalism as a process of myth-making, in which
collective imaginations of a national community are institutionalized via

4   My translation from the Dutch original: "statuomanie."
5   My translation from the Dutch original: "preoccupatie met de natie"; "vaderlanddiscours";
"de mythe Nederland."

certain societal practices. These include national media and literature, which Anderson is most interested in, as well as sites of memory, such as national monuments and public art, which is what Nora focuses on.

Based in this tradition, Sas interprets Dutch nationalism, especially in the late nineteenth century, as a form of using literature and public art to strengthen the Dutch national self-identification as a strong colonial power. At the time, the Netherlands was occupied with maintaining control over its colonial territories. The Dutch, argues Sas "enforced their power, if necessary, aggressively," which led to "expressions of outspoken jingoism – exalted nationalism – in the motherland" (565).[6] An example of the violent presence of the Dutch in their colonies in this era is the Aceh "pacification" (1873–1904), as it was euphemistically referred to at the time, which cost between 60,000 and 70,000 Indonesian lives. The offensive succeeded in establishing Dutch control over the insurrectional region of Aceh, on the western-Indonesian island of Sumatra. Governor J.B. van Heutsz, who was responsible for the offensive, was remembered as "the pacifier of Aceh" and received a monument in Amsterdam in 1935. Based on the Dutch victory over Aceh, as well as several other successful expeditions, Dutch national identity "undeniably took on an imperialist tone in the last decades of the nineteenth century" (Sas 579).[7]

These attempts to implement an imperialist-minded Dutch nationalism via public art were rarely uncontested. Coen's statue especially was met with immediate protest, due to the cruel details of his legacy. The first protests in fact date from the time when the statue was still only an initiative. Bibliographer P.A. Tiele argued against the initiative in 1885 by referring to Coen's violent assault on Banda, writing that "for the sake of monopoly, the affluent population of a beautiful archipelago [...] was murdered in a cold-blooded manner" (qtd. in Enthoven 128). In 1887, the head archivist of the Dutch National Archives, J.A. van der Chijs, also expressed his doubts, by reminding that Coen's name "is covered with blood" (qtd. in Enthoven 128).

More contemporary protests against Coen's statue include a play by one of the most celebrated modern Dutch poets, Jan Jacob Slauerhoff – *Jan Pietersz. Coen, drama in elf taferelen* ("Jan Pieterszoon Coen, drama in eleven tableaux"), which "completely stripped Coen of his hero status" (Enthoven 128). It was published as a text but due to its controversial content was not

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6   My translation from the Dutch original: "De gezagshandhaving gebeurde desnoods met harde hand"; "uitingen van uitgesproken jingoïsme – geëxalteerd nationalisme – in het moederland."
7   My translation from the Dutch original: "onvervalst imperialistische toonzetting die dat in de laatste decennia van de negentiende eeuw heeft gekregen."

performed as a play until 1986, 50 years after Slauerhoff's death. During the celebration of Coen's 350th birthday in 1937, the Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party distributed flyers that read: "Monday the Dutch upper class will applaud in grandiloquent terms the exploitation of the Indonesian people" (qtd. in Enthoven 129). During the celebration of Coen's 400th birthday in 1987, at the opening of an exhibition about him in the Westfries Museum in Hoorn, "Protest posters went up in the town, a collection of protest poems was published, and the statue was smeared with paint. [...] Moluccan artist Willy Nanlohy presented the Queen's husband, Prince Claus, with a black book on the atrocities carried out by Coen" (Enthoven 129).

Such protests against Coen's glorification have continued into the twenty-first century. In 2011, a citizens' initiative called *Ja voor Hoorn; Nee tegen Coen* ("Yes to Hoorn; No to Coen") petitioned for the statue's removal and relocation to the Westfries Museum, arguing that it glorifies a perpetrator of genocide. The petition was signed by the rather modest total of 297 citizens of Hoorn. Yet its message gained symbolic significance when Coen's statue was knocked off its pedestal in a construction accident on 16 August 2011. The national attention that ensued urged the municipality of Hoorn to respond to the petition. Although the statue was placed back on its pedestal, the municipality officially acknowledged the petition in three ways. First of all, the statue was provided with a new inscription, which acknowledges the criticism against its renovation. Second, the Westfries Museum hosted an exhibition about the statue and Coen's controversial history as such. Third, the museum issued a publication that presented a selection of both positive and negative perspectives on Coen. The following three sections will provide close readings for each of these offered compromises, in order to analyze the effects they have had on the statue's contested reputation.

The first compromise: the statue's updated inscription

The first compromise that the municipality offered to those who protested the renovation of Coen's statue in 2011, was to update the statue's inscription in a way that would acknowledge critical voices. The old inscription was as follows:

> Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587–1629). Born in Hoorn. Governor-General of the VOC and founder of Batavia (present-day Jakarta). The statue was erected in 1893. The square, named after the red stone where executions took place, is the central point from which Hoorn has developed, with notable

buildings such as Statencollege (1632), nowadays known as Westfries Museum, and Waag (1609).[8]

No reference is made to Coen's violent actions on Banda, or to the fact that he "founded" Batavia by burning down the existing city of Jayakarta and expelling its native population. On the other hand, this version also does not seek to aggrandize his legacy. In fact, more of the inscription is about the statue's location than about Coen.

The new, bilingual inscription (in Dutch and English) presents a much longer, and more detailed version of history. The English version is quoted in full below:

Jan Pieterszoon Coen (Hoorn 1587 – Batavia 1629).
Merchant, Director-General and Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Architect of the VOC's successful trading empire in Asia. Founder of the city of Batavia, currently known as Jakarta.
Coen was praised as a vigorous and visionary administrator. But he was also criticized for the violent means by which he built up trade monopolies in the East Indies. In 1621 Coen led a punitive expedition against one of the Banda Islands, as the local population was selling to the English in disregard of a VOC ban. Thousands of Bandanese lost their lives during the assault and the survivors were deported to Batavia.
By the end of the nineteenth century Coen had grown into a national hero and was honored with a statue in his home town. A national committee headed by the Mayor of Hoorn, Baron Van Dedem, collected money to realize this. The bronze work which was designed by Ferdinand Leenhoff (1841–1914), an instructor at the National Academy of Visual Arts in Amsterdam, was unveiled during a festive ceremony in 1893.
The statue is controversial. According to critics, Coen's violent mercantilism in the East Indian Archipelago does not deserve to be honored.[9]

8   My translation from the Dutch original: "Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587–1629). Geboren te Hoorn. Gouverneur-generaal van de VOC en grondlegger van Batavia, het huidige Jakarta. Standbeeld geplaatst in 1893. Het plein, genoemd naar de rode steen waarop terechtstelling werden voltrokken, is het centrale punt van waaruit Hoorn zich heeft ontwikkeld met het Statencollege (1632), thans Westfries Museum en de Waag (1609) als markante gebouwen."
9   The Dutch version reads: "Jan Pieterszoon Coen (Hoorn 1587 – Batavia 1629). Koopman, directeur-generaal en gouverneur-generaal van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC). Vormgever van het succesvolle handelsimperium van de VOC in Azië. Stichter van Batavia, het huidige Jakarta. Geroemd als krachtdadig en visionair bestuurder. Maar evenzeer bekritiseerd om zijn gewelddadige optreden bij het verwerven van handelsmonopolies in Indië. Voerde in 1621 een strafexpeditie uit tegen één van de Banda-eilanden, omdat de bewoners tegen het

This text contains several telling choices of formulation. First of all, although the inscription acknowledges Coen's violent strategies, it uses the term "punitive expedition," rather than "genocide" or "mass-killing," which suggests, as is also emphasized later in the same sentence, that this expedition happened because the Bandanese were breaking the law. Therefore, the situation is framed in such a way that it sounds as if the mass-killing of nigh on the full population of a region was a justified consequence of their transgressions. Yet this representation sketches a misleading account of the situation, as can be gathered from political historian Muridan Satrio Widjojo's description of the Bandanese resistance to VOC law. He reports that, in August 1609, VOC admiral Simon Jansz Hoen

> managed to blockade the Bandanese coastal waters in order to obstruct the import of foodstuff and the escape by sea by the islanders. On 13 August 1609, a number of *orangkaya* were forced to sign a contract regulating the delivery of nutmeg and mace and control over the islands, but on the very day it was signed, the Bandanese began to violate the contract. ("The VOC in Maluku" 17)[10]

This citation indicates that the law which the Bandanese were breaking was the result of a contract that had been forced upon them by Coen's predecessors. As such, the "punitive expedition" which Coen led against the Bandanese in 1621 is unjustifiable.

A second problematic element of the new inscription is that it mentions the deaths of "thousands of Bandanese." Although this is an acknowledgment of an important aspect of Coen's legacy, it is still unspecific, seeing that it fails to mention that the Banda region was completely depopulated, and then repopulated with enslaved people, who were put to work on the few remaining spice plantations that had not been burned down. That these actions of depopulation and repopulation, and the destruction of large parts

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verbod van de VOC in nootmuskaat leverden aan de Engelsen. Duizenden Bandanezen lieten hierbij het leven, de overlevenden werden naar Batavia gedeporteerd. Coen kreeg aan het eind van de negentiende eeuw de status van nationale held, compleet met standbeeld in zijn geboortestad. Een landelijk oprichtingscomité onder leiding van de Hoornse burgemeester Van Dedem zamelde hiervoor het geld in. Het bronzen beeld, een ontwerp van Ferdinand Leenhoff (1841–1914), leraar aan de Academie voor Beeldende Kunst in Amsterdam, werd in 1893 feestelijk onthuld. Onomstreden is het standbeeld niet. Volgens critici verdient Coens gewelddadige handelspolitiek in de Indische archipel geen eerbetoon."

10   *Orangkaya* is an Indonesian title referring to members of the nobility.

of the area, were based on premeditated intentions is shown by the letter which the central executive board of the VOC, known as the *Heeren XVII* ("Lords Seventeen"), had sent to Coen in 1615.

In this letter, the executive board urged Coen to conquer the Bandanese and to "exterminate or chase out their leaders, and repopulate the country with pagans, considered more tractable than the Muslim Bandanese" (Tracy 4). In his 1623 report to the Heeren XVII, Coen himself suggested a more rigorous idea, namely, to repopulate Banda with enslaved people: "we should diligently work towards bringing a number of slaves, as many as possible, to Batavia, Amboina and Banda" (qtd. in Lauts 294).[11] In the same report, Coen assures that he has followed his executives' orders to "exterminate the inhabitants of several of the islands" (qtd. in Lensink 17) very closely: "the natives have almost all perished by war, poverty and defeat. Very few have escaped from the surrounding islands" (qtd. in Chijs 162).[12]

Thus, to some extent, the passages of the new inscription analyzed above do provide critical details about Coen's legacy, and as such can be interpreted as granting some sort of voice to the statue's opposition. Yet calling a mass-killing a punitive expedition, euphemizing the oppressive aspects of the action, and framing it as a justifiable counter-measure against the population's transgressions could also be seen as direct attempts to filter or downplay the violence of Coen's actions and the long history of controversy surrounding these actions. The cruel details of Coen's legacy have been publicly criticized at least since J.A. van der Chijs's book about the conquest of Banda, which was published seven years before Coen's statue in Hoorn was erected, in 1886.[13]

Moreover, the updated inscription presents historical details of Coen's actions within a context in which his statue is explicitly understood as the result of a collective Dutch effort, with emphasis on the fact that the statue was built by a renowned Dutch sculptor, and that it was paid for by voluntary subsidies from citizens. The new inscription also includes more directly flattering sentences than the original inscription had. Whereas the

11　Amboina was the colonial name for a region in central Maluku that includes the Moluccan main island, Ambon, and nine other islands. The sentence is my translation from the Dutch original: "behoort men er zich met ijver op toe te leggen, om een aantal slaven, zoo veel immer mogelijk, over te brengen naar Batavia, Amboina en Banda.

12　My translation from the Dutch original: "uijtroeijinge van eenige eijlanden"; "De inboorlingen syn meest allen door den oorlooch, armoede ende gebreck vergaen. Zeer weynich isser op de omringende landen ontcomen."

13　J.A. van der Chijs, *De vestiging van het Nederlandsche gezag over de Banda eilanden (1599–1621)*.

original had none, the new inscription explicitly mentions Coen's "successful trading empire" and depicts him as a "vigorous and visionary administrator."

Additionally, as was outlined in the previous section, the statue had motivated systemic protest even before its construction. Yet the inscription minimizes the acknowledgment of this protest by calling the statue "controversial." This acknowledgment is formulated in an even less direct way in the Dutch version of the inscription, which would literally translate to "The statue is not undisputed."[14] Furthermore, the inscription presents the well-established opposition to the statue as an unspecified set of "critics" that disagree with Coen's heroic status. This heroic status, in turn, is neutrally represented as something that he had naturally "grown into," whereas historians such as Sas have pointed out that it was a conscious strategy to strengthen Dutch national identity, the controversial implementation of which gave rise to immediate protests ("De Mythe Nederland").

Based on my analysis so far, I would thus argue that the apparently tolerant gesture of updating Coen's renovated statue with a more detailed inscription that grants voice to those opposing the renovation, in fact neutralizes and bypasses much of the protest that it was supposed to heed. This form of tolerance can be analyzed through philosopher Herbert Marcuse's theory of *repressive tolerance*, which he develops in a text by the same name, and which he defines as something that is

> prior to all expression and communication a matter of semantics: the blocking of effective dissent [...] begins in the language that is publicized and administered. [...] Other words can be spoken and heard, other ideas can be expressed, but [...] they are immediately "evaluated" (i.e. automatically understood) in terms of the public language – a language which determines "a priori" the direction in which the thought process moves. (95–96)

Marcuse's argumentation can be applied to the current case study as a way to understand how the municipality's apparent tolerance of dissent in fact repressed this dissent: the new inscription acknowledges the criticism against the statue, but uses its own euphemizing and de-escalating rhetoric. It is significant that this public gesture happened only after the statue had literally fallen off its pedestal, more than a century after the first protests had been published to no avail. According to an article in national newspaper *Het Parool*, the restoration of the statue cost the municipality of

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14   My translation from the Dutch original: "Onomstreden is het standbeeld niet."

Hoorn 20,000 Euros ("Restauratie standbeeld J.P. Coen kost 20.000 euro"). As such, placing the statue back on its pedestal was not a neutral measure, which possibly informs the municipality's decision to at least respond in some way to the citizens' initiative against the restoration.

The gesture of the updated inscription was subsequently presented by the national news as a benevolent act proving that the municipality listens to all of its citizens, including those who are critical of their choices. For example, the mentioned article in *Het Parool* states that "In June, the municipality of Hoorn *partly heeded* a citizens' initiative to tackle the issue of the statue. The statue will not be removed, but instead there will be an inscription that provides more nuance about Coen's past" (my emphasis).[15] Just like the inscription itself, this news article presents the situation in such a way that it alters reality to its advantage. In fact, the citizens' initiative did not ask the municipality to "tackle the issue of the statue," but directly pleaded against its restoration and for its permanent relocation to Westfries Museum. Therefore, by putting the statue back on its pedestal, the municipality had not "partly heeded the initiative" but had instead effected the exact opposite of the request. Journalist Eric van de Beek, who had initiated the citizen's initiative, also noticed the municipality's strategic lack of substantial response to his action:

> Instead of removing the statue, they will provide the pedestal with a fig leaf, that is, a substitute text that will read something along the lines of: "We apologize for this statue, but we could not bring ourselves to remove it." ("Iemand als Coen hoor je niet te eren")[16]

In short, the municipality's public gesture of tolerance was used as an attempt to reach a compromise between the status quo and its critics, aimed at keeping things more or less the same.

As such, the municipality's reaction to the citizens' initiative is a case in point in support of Marcuse's argument that "Those who stand against the established system are a priori at a disadvantage, which is not removed by the toleration of their ideas, speeches, and newspapers"

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15   My translation from the Dutch original: "De Hoornse gemeenteraad ging in juli deels in op een burgerinitiatief om het standbeeld aan te pakken. Het standbeeld wordt niet verplaatst, maar er komt wel een tekstboard met meer nuances over Coens verleden."
16   My translation from the Dutch original: "Liever dan het standbeeld te verwijderen, plaatst zij op de sokkel een schaamlapje in de vorm van een vervangende tekst. Deze kan worden gelezen als: 'Sorry dat dit beeld hier staat, maar we konden het niet over ons hart verkrijgen het te verwijderen'."

(92). In fact, tolerating dissent can even help to further strengthen the status quo: "on the firm foundations of a coordinated society all but closed against qualitative change, tolerance itself serves to contain [...] change rather than to promote it" (116). Beek's dissenting voice was effectively silenced through a gesture that claimed to do the opposite. By granting (the illusion of) voice to those who wanted the statue removed, the municipality legitimized its decision to put the statue back on its pedestal.

The second compromise: the exhibition in Westfries Museum

Several months after the statue's renovation, Westfries Museum opened *De Zaak Coen* ("The Coen Case," 14 April–1 July 2012), an exhibition that was aimed at further developing the project of offering nuance to Coen's legacy. The tolerant gesture of this exhibition was even stronger than that of the statue's new inscription, due to its interactive approach. The exhibition invited visitors to reach and share their own verdicts about the matter at hand. Indications for why this gesture of tolerance was of the "deceptive" and "spurious" kind that Herbert Marcuse discusses (116) can be found by close-reading some passages from the spoken text in the introduction video that is published on the museum's website.

> The Coen Case. An exhibition in the form of a trial, with Coen as the accused and a genuine charge: Jan Pieterszoon Coen is not worthy of a statue. [...] Supported by a lot of physical evidence, expert witnesses both for the prosecution and for the defense and an appealing person as the judge, whose verdict everyone wants to know. [...] A fitting format, allowing the visitor to develop an opinion in a well-founded and engaging way while the museum encourages and facilitates the debate without forcing an opinion on anyone. (*De Zaak Coen*)[17]

The first problem with the setup that this text sketches concerns the question of equal representation. The "expert witnesses" that are mentioned are two Dutch historians, one of which argues in favor of Coen's statue and one of which argues against it. The trial judge who presents the final verdict on the case, Maarten van Rossem, is also a Dutch historian. Moreover, what is not mentioned in the video is the fact that Rossem's

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17   Quoted from the English subtitles to this video, provided by the website itself.

concluding verdict, which "everyone wants to know" (see citation above), is a *dismissal* of the charge against Coen's statue. His dismissal of the charge is also published as a short piece in the exhibition's corresponding publication, and will be discussed in more detail during the next section. As this authoritative opinion in favor of the statue forms a central aspect of the fixed, non-interactive part of the exhibition, it becomes difficult to see how the museum facilitates a debate "without forcing an opinion on anyone" (see citation above).

Furthermore, the choice of Dutch, rather than Moluccan, historians for the complete scope of the trial is surprising, seeing that the establishment of the Moluccan migrant community in the Netherlands in 1951 was the conclusion of the Dutch colonial reign over the Moluccan territory. This reign had started with Coen's violent actions in Banda, a group of islands located in central Maluku. The choice of a Dutch historian as the accuser is therefore confusing, seeing that a representative of the impaired party could instead have been chosen from the Moluccan community. One appropriate candidate, for instance, would have been Wim Manuhutu, who was the director of the Moluccan Historical Museum between 1990 and 2008. Manuhutu is a historian and has played a leading role in several state-initiated research projects to resolve conflicts between different cultural identities within the Netherlands, including *Cultureel Erfgoed Minderheden* ("Cultural Heritage of Minorities," 2000–2004). Instead, the role of the accuser was played by Ewald Vanvugt, who has published several books that present a critical view on Dutch colonial history, including *Roofstaat – wat iedere Nederlander moet weten* ("Nation of Plunderers – What every Dutch person should know"). Without aiming to discredit Vanvugt's work or approach, the current argument is still meant to direct attention toward the absence of a Moluccan voice in an instead all-Dutch staged court case about shared colonial history.

As such, the museum's approach to the issue can be interpreted as a claim of opening the floor to all possible voices equally, while in fact doing the opposite. The Moluccan voice within the discussion was repressed, or at least not acknowledged. Nevertheless, the claimed tolerance of the exhibition has still helped to strengthen the museum's, and by extension Hoorn's, position as a legitimate voice of postcolonial memory. Soon after the end of the exhibition, the final results of the visitor's votes were posted on the exhibition's website: of the 3,012 votes that were cast, 63.9% were in favor of the statue, 34.7% were against it, and 1.4% had voted neutral (*De Zaak Coen*). This result was then used as a source for the mainstream media to reconfirm Coen's heroic status.

For example, national newspaper *De Telegraaf* published an article called "J.P. Coen deserves his statue," in which they reported:

> The statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen will not have to be removed from the inner city of Hoorn. That was the final verdict of thousands of visitors of the Westfries Museum, who shared their opinions in the last few months about the question of whether or not the VOC-leader deserves his statue.[18]

Such reporting suggests that the decision to renovate Coen's statue was the result of a democratic vote, whereas in reality the statue was already renovated months before the start of the exhibition and its purely symbolic election. Additional to these national confirmations of the status quo, the museum also received international acknowledgment for its exhibition, when it was granted the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage in 2014. According to its website, "The Prize celebrates and promotes best practices related to heritage conservation, management, research, education and communication" (*European Heritage Awards*). The museum was awarded within the category "Education, training and awareness-raising," which focuses on "Outstanding initiatives" in the field of "tangible and/or intangible cultural heritage."

These national and international forms of support for the exhibition are examples of repressive tolerance, to the extent that the conditions of such expressions of positive assessment are what Marcuse calls "loaded," because "they are determined and defined by the institutionalized inequality" that is based in the "privileged position held by the predominant interests and their 'connections'" (84–85). While claiming neutrality, the museum instead facilitated a discussion about the colonial past that featured no Moluccan or other postcolonial voices. Moreover, even without this consideration regarding the equal representation of voices, the discussion was not impartial, because the "judge" of the staged court case officially chose a side: the side that argues in favor of the statue. The national confirmations of the status quo and the international award which the museum received demonstrate how such tolerance often "actually protects the already established machinery of discrimination" (Marcuse 85).

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18   My translation from the Dutch original: "JP [*sic*] Coen verdient zijn standbeeld"; "Het standbeeld van Jan Pieterszoon Coen hoeft niet weg uit de Hoornse binnenstad. Zo luidt het eindoordeel van duizenden bezoekers van het Westfries Museum die de afgelopen maanden lieten weten of de omstreden VOC-voorman een standbeeld verdient."

The third compromise: the glossy magazine

The final gesture of tolerance that still remains to be analyzed is that of the exhibition's accompanying publication *De Coen! Geroemd en verguisd* ("The Coen! Famed and reviled"), in 2012. This publication was designed as a so-called "glossy magazine" that performed Coen's reputation as that of a controversial celebrity. Mirroring the exhibition, the magazine's first article is Rossem's written version of his verdict as a judge in the trial, entitled "Coen in Context." In his first sentences, he writes:

> There exists an understandable, but nevertheless peculiar tendency to judge the past according to the customs, norms and values of the present. [...] Whoever would think this tendency through a little further, would probably realize that such exercises may perhaps result in considerable moral satisfaction, yet are not very sensible. The past must be judged by its own standards. This is certainly a difficult task, because our standards are indeed hard to switch off. (7)[19]

In this citation, without addressing the conflict around the statue directly, Rossem sketches a societal tendency which he immediately and, in my opinion, patronizingly identifies as something which people would understand is not very sensible, if only they would think it through more thoroughly. His diagnosis of this tendency – that is, to judge the past according to the moral standards of the present – is his main argument in the text against the removal of Coen's statue. This argument is often used as a way to disregard criticism of the statue. The museum's director Ad Geerdink already made a similar statement in national newspaper *De Volkskrant* a year earlier: Coen "was a violent person. But he was not the only one in his time. These were ruthless times" (qtd. in Beek, "Iemand als Coen hoor je niet te eren").[20] In the same article, the initiator of the 2011 petition against Coen's statue, Eric van de Beek, identifies this statement as

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19   My translation from the Dutch original: "Er bestaat een begrijpelijke, maar desalniettemin wonderlijke neiging om het verleden te beoordelen naar de gewoonten en normen en waarden van het heden. [...] Wie er even over nadenkt zal zich waarschijnlijk wel realiseren dat dergelijke exercities weliswaar aanzienlijke morele bevrediging opleveren, maar niet erg zinvol zijn. Het verleden dient beoordeeld te worden naar zijn eigen maatstaven. Dat is overigens een lastige opgave, omdat onze maatstaven zich inderdaad lastig laten uitschakelen."
20   My translation from the Dutch original: "was een gewelddadige persoon. Maar hij was niet de enige in zijn tijd. Want in die tijd werden geen zoete broodjes gebakken."

a fallacy, and argues that "committing genocide was already quite unusual in the Golden Age."[21]

Such references to historical context as an argument to de-emphasize Coen's deadly transgressions can be interpreted as an attempt to achieve what legal theorist Scott Veitch argues to be an asymmetrical compartmentalization of responsibility:

> According to the image of the two-way mirror, all kinds of current benefits that are built on the "achievements" of the past – from landholding, all the way to taking patriotic pride in the nation's past – can be held onto or espoused as "one's own", even though "our current" generation did not *do* any of those things either. There is, in other words, a simultaneous acceptance of benefits accruing from, and a refusal to accept responsibility for any wrongdoing having occurred in, the self-same period. (113)

This disparity can also be traced in the argument about Coen's historical context. If, conforming to Geerdink's and Rossem's arguments, Coen's atrocities should be disregarded because they took place in a historical context in which such conduct was *allegedly* common, then his heroic status as such must also be disregarded according to the same line of thought. That is, the actions for which Coen was hailed as a national hero took place in a historical context of colonial domination, in which the oppression of colonial subjects could still be interpreted as heroic. In the Netherlands's current postcolonial context, in which a considerable part of Dutch nationals consists of descendants of the oppressed rather than the oppressors in the self-same colonial past, it should therefore not be possible any longer for a colonizer to be hailed as a hero.

This recurrent fallacy about the historical context of Coen's legacy poses a compartmentalized understanding of the past, in which Coen's heroic deeds are presented as timeless, while his crimes are presented as dated and therefore argued to be irrelevant. It was according to the same principle that former Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende (in office from 2002 to 2010), during a House of Representatives debate in 2006, felt legitimated to argue in favor of what he called "that VOC-mentality: looking across the borders, being dynamic!" (qtd. in "Balkenende betreurt VOC-uitspraken").[22]

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21 My translation from the Dutch original: "ook in de Gouden Eeuw was het bepaald ongebruikelijk genocide te plegen."
22 My translation from the Dutch original: "Die VOC-mentaliteit. Over grenzen heen kijken! Dynamiek!"

The remark led to widespread criticism at the time, but was justified by Balkenende in a subsequent press conference as an innocent remark with which he "solely referred to the mercantile and entrepreneurial spirit of the Netherlands in that era" (qtd. in "Balkenende betreurt VOC-uitspraken").[23] As with Rossem's argument about Coen's statue, Balkenende's remark honors the colonial past as an exemplary time for the current era, while denying problematic elements of such historical identification.

Because Rossem's argument is based on an asymmetrical compartmentalization of Coen's legacy, he is able to tolerate critical voices within his appeal for the statue's preservation. For example, the acknowledgment that, "If he were alive today, he would be tried at the International Criminal Court in Scheveningen" (7), is implicitly disregarded within the larger argumentation of his text, which is that all such criticism ignores that Coen lived in a different, crueler time.[24] Such apparent tolerance is in effect a repression of dissent. The criticism against Coen's *statue* is given a voice within Rossem's appeal, but is reformulated as a criticism against Coen's *actions*, which could allegedly be disregarded as a product of his time. The actual criticism, meanwhile, was in fact never directed against Coen's actions per se, but against his statue's central place in the city. The latter is not a matter of Coen's bygone era, but of the representation of postcolonial memory in the current era.

Rossem's favorable appeal has a central position in the glossy magazine, not only because it is the opening article, but also because, within the context of the museum exhibition, Rossem's voice has considerably more authority than that of the magazine's other contributors, due to his role as a judge in the exhibition's staged court case. This central positioning of an authoritative opinion in favor of the statue unsettles the claim to neutrality that the museum's director Geerdink makes in the foreword to the magazine:

> This publication does not take a stance in the discussion and only serves the purpose [...] of making you acquainted with the great wealth of viewpoints, stories and objects that are associated with this historical person. (3)[25]

23 My translation from the Dutch original: "dat hij louter doelde op de handels- en onderne-mersgeest van Nederland in die tijd."
24 My translation from the Dutch original: "Zou hij nu leven, dan zou hij voor het Internationale Strafhof in Scheveningen belanden."
25 My translation from the Dutch original: "Deze uitgave neemt geen stelling in de discussie en heeft enkel tot doel om [...] u kennis te laten maken met de grote rijkdom aan visies, verhalen en objecten die met deze historische persoon samenhangen."

The plurality of perspectives that this quote suggests is to some extent confirmed by the fact that the magazine contains 24 articles by ten different authors, and that some of these articles are indeed quite critical of Coen's actions, for instance, Hans Lensink's article "The Bloody Revenge on Banda" (14–20).[26] However, none of these articles criticize the statue as such, but rather only address Coen's historical actions. Therefore, Rossem's introductory credo that past actions cannot be judged by today's moral compass has implicitly and before the fact already disregarded all such criticism. By giving voice to a few critics who address past mistakes, the museum can assert their open-minded approach toward this issue. Yet with the self-same gesture, they can minimize the potential strength of such voices by contextualizing them within an overarching reminder that such past mistakes cannot be judged anymore, at least not by "sensible" people (Rossem 7).

Moreover, what was mentioned about the exhibition as such can also be repeated here: none of the articles are written by, or are interviews with, historians or other spokespersons with a postcolonial background. For example, the Moluccan artist Willy Nanlohy is neither referred to nor interviewed, despite the fact that he led a major protest against the statue during the museum's festive opening of the official "Coen Year" in 1987, marking 400 years since Coen's birth. Nanlohy's protest involved handing Prince Claus van Amsberg a *zwartboek* about Coen's crimes against the Bandanese people: a *zwartboek* (literally, "black book") is a name that refers to publications protesting institutionalized injustice. Several assisting protesters handed out flyers with similar information to the rest of the audience. After the performative interruption, Nanlohy and his crew left the exhibition without further comment. The fact that no mention of Nanlohy's protest is made can be criticized for two reasons.

First of all, his protest took place in 1987, which was a year in which the Westfries Museum was facing public criticism due to its decision to declare it "Coen Year." Protests were initiated not only by Nanlohy but by other artists as well, such as the Dutch poet Dirk Beemster, who published a collection of protest poetry about Coen, and was also jointly responsible for smearing the statue with paint that year. Unlike Nanlohy, Beemster *did* receive an interview for *De Coen!* (Koenen, "De laatste der hekeldichten" 100–101). The title of this interview is "The Last of the Satires," and it is introduced in the magazine's table of contents with the following words: "A rebel does not

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26   My translation from the Dutch original: "De bloedige wraak op Banda."

always remain a rebel. Dirk Beemster was a fierce activist 25 years ago, but nowadays presents himself in a more nuanced manner" (5).[27]

As is indicated by this introduction, the article is mostly an account of how Beemster does not support his own actions from 1987 any longer. Instead, he presents his present-day take on the issue in a way that very much echoes the kind of neutrality that Geerdink claims, as well as the context argument formulated by Rossem in both the exhibition itself and in the magazine's opening article:

> I have become more careful when it comes to taking up a one-sided standpoint. That will only lead to conflicts. I am trying to avoid that nowadays. [...] To what extent can we morally judge things that happened in history, and how far are we willing to go with this? [...]. By the way, the statue is not even that bad. Beautiful statues were created in the nineteenth century, and Coen has one of them. Especially after the restoration, when he was placed back on his pedestal. (Qtd. in Koenen, "De laatste der hekeldichten" 101)[28]

The final sentences of this quote, which form the conclusion of the interview, are a direct vote in favor of the statue again, this time cast by a former protester. The suggestion seems to be that even former protesters are now favoring the statue. However, this implicit proposal is only possible because none of the protesters that still disagree with Coen's statue have been interviewed.

The second reason for my argument that Nanlohy's absence in *De Coen!* is problematic concerns the fact that he was protesting from an ambivalent position. That is, he was one of several Moluccan artists who had initially accepted an invitation from the museum's former director, Ruud Spruit, to participate in the celebration of Coen's 400th birthday, but then turned back on this decision at the last moment. One of Nanlohy's co-conspirators was anthropologist Fridus Steijlen, who recalled Nanlohy's sudden change

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27   My translation from the Dutch original: "De laatste der hekeldichten"; "Een rebel blijft niet altijd rebels. Dirk Beemster was 25 jaar geleden fel actievoerder, maar stelt zich tegenwoordig genuanceerder op."

28   My translation from the Dutch original: "Ik ben voorzichtiger geworden met het innemen van een eenzijdig standpunt. Dat levert toch alleen maar conflicten op. Dat probeer ik tegenwoordig te vermijden. [...] In hoeverre kun je een moreel oordeel vellen over de geschiedenis en hoever kun je hierin gaan? [...] En trouwens, het beeld zelf is niet eens zo slecht. In de negentiende eeuw maakten ze mooie standbeelden en daar is Coen er één van. Helemaal toen hij gerestaureerd en wel weer terug op zijn sokkel stond."

of mind during the inaugural lecture of his 2018 professorship of Moluccan Migration and Culture in Comparative Perspective at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam:

> The director at that time, Ruud Spruit, had invited Willy Nanlohy to exhibit his work in the basement of the museum as part of a wider exhibition about Coen. While installing his sculptures, Nanlohy discovered that Coen was being glorified in the other halls of the museum. [...] Nanlohy felt that he had been misused and, in protest, covered his sculptures with black mourning cloths. [...] During the opening ceremony, Nanlohy, dressed as Alfoer, stood up and offered Prince Claus a black book about Moluccan history.[29] Museum director Spruit was furious and ordered for the cloths over Willy's sculptures to be removed. ("Tjakalele at Full Moon" 2)

It is peculiar that Nanlohy's story would remain absent from the magazine's array of stories about the statue, especially because his protest took place during the museum's previous large-scale attempt at a tolerant, inclusive event around Coen, which, in contrast to the 2012 exhibition, did in fact include Moluccan contributors.

Nanlohy's criticism of the 1987 event in general, and of former director Spruit in particular, was included in the information flyer that Nanlohy, Steijlen, and their co-conspirators distributed, and was republished in an article for Moluccan magazine *Marinjo* in the same year. According to this article,

> The way in which Spruit has invited Moluccans to participate in the opening manifestation and exhibition does not allow them the possibility to write their own history. It is the history of Ruud Spruit with Moluccans as decoration. (Qtd. in Steijlen, "Willy Nanlohy vs. J.P. Coen")[30]

This argumentation behind Nanlohy's protest is a direct criticism of the kind of tolerance that is central to this chapter. That is, the flyer acknowledges Spruit's gesture of apparent tolerance, but criticizes the silencing effects of this gesture.

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29   An Alfoer is a mythical Moluccan forefather.
30   My translation from the Dutch original: "De wijze waarop Ruud Spruit Molukkers bij de openingsmanifestatie en tentoonstelling heeft betrokken laat Molukkers echter geen mogelijkheid hun eigen geschiedenis te schrijven. Het is de geschiedenis van Ruud Spruit met Molukkers als versiering."

Spruit himself did in fact write a contribution to the glossy magazine, in which, however, he makes no mention at all of Nanlohy's or any of the other protests during his time as the museum's director. Instead, his contribution is entitled "Coen's Paradise: My Memories of Banda."[31] This contribution is a memoir about Spruit's friendships with Moluccans since his early childhood, culminating in a story about how he visited Banda together with his wife, and how they were

> bombarded with the status of honorary village chiefs, and were taken by singing rowers in cora-coras (long slender canoes) along the islands, where we were received by dancing girls on the beach: the kind of circumstances that seafarers under Coen's leadership must also have remembered for the rest of their lives. (75)[32]

Whether or not this fragment, or Spruit's full article for that matter, is an example of blatant Orientalism is perhaps a matter of perspective. However, it is hard to deny the implicit comparison which Spruit draws between the Bandanese tribute to him and his wife on the one hand, and Coen and his fellow colonizers on the other. Rather than commenting on the large, Moluccan-led protest that the museum underwent while he was in charge of it, in "Coen Year" 1987, Spruit's article argues repeatedly that current generations of Bandanese have forgiven the Dutch for Coen's actions, an argument which he makes through a series of anecdotes concerning his friendship with Bandanese ambassador Des Alwi (75).

This final point, even if true, has very little to do with Coen's statue in the Netherlands, and takes away focus from the actual topic of conflict, that is, the city's decision to not remove the statue from the square. Spruit's memoir instead shifts the focus once again toward the question of Coen's actions in the past, and stresses that current Bandanese have in fact forgiven these actions, implying perhaps that Moluccans and other critics in the Netherlands should do the same. However, the criticism which inspired the glossy magazine and the other gestures of tolerance, was never about Coen's actions in the past, but rather about the *contemporary* Dutch society's institutional glorification of someone

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31   My translation from the Dutch original: "Het paradijs van Coen. Mijn herinneringen aan Banda."

32   My translation from the Dutch original: "tot ere-dorpshoofd werden gebombardeerd en in cora-cora's, lange ranke kano's, door zingende roeiers langs de eilanden werden gevoerd waar we overal werden ontvangen door dansende meisjes op het strand, gebeurtenissen zoals de zeelui onder Coen zich hun leven lang herinnerden."

who committed the mass-killing of a people whose descendants are now part of that self-same contemporary Dutch society. Spruit was directly involved in this debate as the museum's director in 1987, when Moluccans protested this glorification of the past. It would have been relevant to the present-day societal discussion if Spruit had discussed this incident, and to have included Nanlohy's account as well, or at least some archive material from newspapers at the time: many of the magazine's pages are devoted to archive material on Coen and his statue, none of which concern Nanlohy's or other Moluccan protests.

This absence of Moluccan voices from the magazine, either as experts or as protesters, can be extended to a question about the one-sidedness of the magazine in general. The magazine includes no experts on Moluccan history at all. Absent, for example, is Fridus Steijlen, who was not only active during the 1987 protest, but who has also published a large amount of research about the Moluccan community since the early 1990s and has been a close contributor to the Moluccan Historical Museum since its foundation in 1990. His absence from the magazine, alongside previously mentioned absences like that of Moluccan Historical Museum director Wim Manuhutu, indicate that the magazine is not as inclusive as it repeatedly claims.

That the magazine is perhaps not entirely responsible for this latter aspect of its one-sided approach can be read in an article by activist Harry Westerink for the website of anti-capitalist platform *Doorbraak*. According to Westerink, the museum did in fact approach protester Eric van de Beek himself, whose petition to great extent was the cause for this glossy magazine to be published. The museum as such reached out to the main protester, at least in this particular chapter in the long history of protests against Coen, and offered him a space to voice his criticism. However, Beek declined the offer, explaining to Westerink that he finds the project of the magazine "inappropriate. Would we release a glossy magazine entitled 'Adolf?'" (qtd. in Westerink, "Gemeente Hoorn ontkent koloniale genocide").[33] His refusal to participate in the project echoes Nanlohy's action of covering his sculptures with black mourning cloths and withdrawing from the 1987 exhibition, after having offered the *zwartboek* to Prince Claus in silence. Such refusals to participate in repressive tolerance will be discussed in more detail during the next section.

33　My translation from the Dutch original: "ongepast. We brengen toch ook geen glossy uit met de titel 'Adolf?'"

When being granted a voice means being silenced

One preliminary conclusion that can be drawn from these close readings of the museum's and the municipality's approaches to granting a voice to their opposition is that the kind of tolerance that these gestures showcase works on a very selective basis. Only voices of dissent that can be framed in such a way that they form no risk to the status quo will be tolerated. An example of this process of selection can be found in the fact that the Dutch Socialist Party (SP) had proposed another new inscription for the renovated statue that differed from the one that was ultimately chosen. Their inscription came closer to Beek's demands, for instance by mentioning that Coen was "criticized for his aggressive politics," and that he "depopulated the Banda islands in 1621" (qtd. in Westerink, "Gemeente Hoorn blijft 'de slachter van Banda' vereren").[34] This is a more specific version of Coen's actions, the gruesome details of which are provided in two paragraphs that paraphrase Coen's own famous words, which directly mention genocide, and which make a strong voice against the glorification of this part of Dutch colonial history:

> Thousands of Bandanese died. Hundreds were enslaved and deported to Batavia, where they were eventually killed or where they died under other miserable circumstances. From this genocide Coen derives his nickname: "The butcher of Banda."
> The municipality of Hoorn placed the statue, which was created by Ferdinand Leenhoff in 1893, but no longer views it as a tribute. (qtd. in Westerink, "Gemeente Hoorn blijft 'de slachter van Banda' vereren")[35]

This version of the inscription was written in three languages – Dutch, English, and Indonesian – and as such also directly addressed Moluccan and other postcolonial citizens with an Indonesian background. Anticipating that their suggested inscription would be rejected at the city council meeting, members of the SP attached their version to Coen's statue during the night of 11 to 12 March 2012 (the meeting took place on 13 March). The next day, a

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34   My translation from the Dutch original: "Bekritiseerd om zijn agressieve beleid"; "ontvolkte in 1621 de Banda-eilanden."

35   My translation from the Dutch original: "Duizenden Bandanezen kwamen hierbij om het leven. Honderden werden als slaaf naar Batavia gedeporteerd, waar ze alsnog werden gedood of van ellende omkwamen. Aan deze volkerenmoord ontleent Coen zijn bijnaam 'De slachter van Banda'. De gemeente Hoorn, die het door Ferdinand Leenhoff vervaardigde standbeeld plaatste in 1893, ziet het niet langer als eerbetoon."

representative of the local political party of Hoorn, Fractie Tonnaer, publicly cut the poster into pieces.

An indication of how repressive tolerance is a matter of careful selection can be found in the particular way in which this occurrence was eventually referred to in the glossy magazine. One of the sections of the magazine is called *Coen Weetjes* ("Coen's 'Did You Know...?'" 88–89). This section contains a more or less arbitrary selection of facts concerning, among other things, the number of babies named Coen that were born in 2011. Among such facts is one short paragraph entitled "Cut-Art," which addresses the protest of the SP, and presents it as "an action that had playful intentions," but which "was not appreciated by everyone. The local party, Fractie Tonnaer, publicly cut the SP-sign into pieces" (89).[36]

The exact way in which this incident eventually made it into the magazine is an example of the strategic selectivity of repressive tolerance. Rather than including a copy of the SP-version of the sign or interviewing the member of the party responsible for the action, the action is instead framed as having "playful intentions," a manifestation of a certain behavior that other parties did not appreciate. The rather spectacular gesture of cutting up this alternative inscription publicly, is then de-escalated in a tongue-in-cheek manner, by calling this action a form of "Cut-Art." That the action was serious and not intended to be playful at all can be seen from reading Westerink's articles for *Doorbraak* about this issue ("Gemeente Hoorn blijft 'de slachter van Banda' vereren"; "Gemeente Hoorn ontkent koloniale genocide").

Thus, the way in which the magazine strategically tolerates only selective aspects of dissent and presents them in such a way that these aspects further confirm the status quo, rather than invite a more thorough discussion, corresponds to the way in which Marcuse warns against the repressive tolerance strategies to be found in

> such things as the make-up of a newspaper (with the breaking up of vital information into bits interspersed between extraneous material, irrelevant items, relegating of some radically negative news to an obscure place), in the juxtaposition of gorgeous ads with unmitigated horrors [...]. The result is a *neutralization* of opposites, a neutralization however, which takes place on the firm grounds of the structural limitation of tolerance and within a preformed mentality. (97–98)

36   My translation from the Dutch original: "Knipkunst"; "Deze ludiek bedoelde actie viel niet bij iedereen in de smaak. De lokale fractie Tonnaer verknipte publiekelijk het SP-bordje."

In other words, to open up the floor to a carefully selected plurality of voices does not automatically result in a fruitful discussion. To the contrary, an overdose of too many half-related voices and viewpoints might instead lead to a weakening of the possible impact of voices of dissent, due to its resulting fragmentation, which Marcuse terms "affluent discussion" (94).

A further possible repressive effect of affluent discussion is that specific voices of dissent might get lost in the overwhelming plurality once tolerated into it. Moreover, although dissenting voices may be accepted within an affluent plurality, there is no guarantee that anyone is listening. An example of this argument is the addition of a QR-code on the statue's inscription. Scanning this code with a smartphone redirects to a phone number that, when called, immediately goes to Jan Pieterszoon Coen's voicemail, with a voice actor urging the caller to leave a message. As such, everyone who wants to express their opinion about Coen can do so directly via this method. In his interview for the magazine, city council member Peter Westenberg calls this part of the project "pedestal-communication," which "gives the statue an extra dimension; you can now easily work interactively with Coen" (qtd. in Koenen, "Sokkelcommunicatie" 65).[37] However, it is doubtful whether a one-way possibility of expressing one's opinion to a fake voicemail account with a prerecorded message from a voice actor is really all that interactive. To the contrary, it is perhaps the most concrete example of the museum's repressive tolerance, and how it attempts to silence dissent. Repressive tolerance is a strategy of repression that works by giving dissenters the illusion of being granted a voice, while instead creating a neutralizing plurality that reaffirms the status quo.

Therefore, the case study of Coen's statue shows how dissenters who offer their voice to the discourse against which they are protesting risk being silenced by being tolerated. An example of this is the protest poster that was found on the statue in the morning of the exhibition's opening. The protest was a parody of the glossy's front cover, but featured a photograph of Adolf Hitler, rather than Coen, as well as the following introductory text: "Adolf, famed and reviled: you give the verdict" ("Coen ontvangt eigen glossy").[38] About this action, director Geerdink related in an interview with the magazine's publisher, that "we immediately included the poster in our exhibition. The discussion is alive, which means that the history is alive,

37   My translation from the Dutch original: "Deze sokkelcommunicatie geeft het beeld een extra dimensie; je kunt snel interactief aan de slag met Coen."
38   My translation from the Dutch original: "Adolf, geroemd en verguisd. U velt het oordeel."

which is wonderful" (qtd. in "Coen ontvangt eigen glossy").[39] By including the parody as one of the many voices in the exhibition's collection, the protest is effectively silenced. This gesture of tolerance enabled Geerdink to reframe the protest as part of a wonderful discussion about history, rather than a direct attack on the museum's project.

Such cases – the parody on the magazine's cover, Coen's voicemail account, and the SP's alternative new inscription – are examples of the museum's elaborate strategy of tolerance. They can serve as indications for why protester Beek refused to be included in the museum's project, which he called a "circus attraction" (qtd. in Westerink, "Gemeente Hoorn ontkent koloniale genocide").[40] Rather than being tolerated as one of the many voices that are granted a place in the affluent plurality of perspectives, selected and monitored by the museum, Beek chooses to reserve his voice for platforms outside of the museum's control. Although it has been quite some years since the restoration of Coen's statue in 2012, he still frequently publishes his viewpoints on the statue and his criticism of the museum via multiple news platforms (e.g. "Adolf Hitlerschool in Berlijn. Moet kunnen?"). Because these publications exist outside of the museum's or the municipality's will to tolerance, his voice of dissent is not silenced.

Conclusions

The construction of Coen's statue in 1893 served Dutch nationalist identity politics within the context of modern European imperialism and was chosen based on a mechanism of selective remembering. That is, Coen's heroic deeds were remembered, while his cruelty was denied or euphemized. A continuation of that mechanism can be identified in current discussions about the statue. Contemporary voices that support the statue tend to propagate a relativist point of view with regard to Coen's cruel deeds, compartmentalizing them as products of his allegedly crueler era, while granting the more reputable aspects of his legacy a timeless presence.

Since the restoration of Coen's statue in 2011, certain voices of protest are partially tolerated by the municipality of Hoorn and the Westfries Museum, through the statue's updated inscription, through the museum exhibition in 2012, and through the publication of the glossy magazine in the same

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39   My translation from the Dutch original: "De poster hebben we direct opgenomen in de tentoonstelling. De discussie leeft, dus de geschiedenis leeft en dat is prachtig."
40   My translation from the Dutch original: "kermisattractie."

year. However, these compromises reframe the protest in such a way that they strengthen rather than question the status quo. A directly exclusionary outcome of this one-sided approach to the discussion about Coen's statue is that it denied the possibility for Moluccan voices to contribute to this discussion about shared postcolonial memory. Rather than including Moluccan voices in any of the aspects of the exhibition, the magazine, and the inscription, all parties are represented by Dutch people.

The museum's perspective on the conflict is further reinforced by other representatives of the status quo, who affirm the museum's apparent tolerance by giving it credit for being open-minded enough to acknowledge voices of dissent within their discourse. Examples of this are the national media's reestablishment of the statue's legitimacy, based on the exhibition, and the international award for European cultural heritage that the museum received in 2014.

Therefore, if being tolerated within a dominant discourse can mean being silenced or neutralized, it might under such circumstances be a more productive plan of action to *resist* such tolerance through deliberate silence – in other words, to withdraw from certain discussions. By actively remaining silent in spaces of debate that are run by the forces under scrutiny, dissenters may protect the potential of their public impact, which they otherwise would lose. This is why Eric van de Beek refused to contribute to the glossy magazine, and why Willy Nanlohy, who was too late to refuse the museum's tolerance, covered his sculptures with black mourning cloths and, after having handed Prince Claus his black book, left the exhibition without further comment. Whereas both refused to engage within a particular discussion on postcolonial memory, the silence they left was expressive in itself. Nanlohy's protest was powerful precisely because of his performative use of silence. His lack of speech itself indicated the message of his protest: that his perspective had been co-opted against his will for the exhibition's aim to glorify Coen's legacy, and thus that his voice had been repressed. Beek's active refusal to be part of the glossy magazine allowed his lack of voice to be a disruptive presence in it.

What these examples show is that speaking up is not empowering in every context, and that one's voice and one's silence can be situated parallel to another: one can be deliberately silent in one context and speak up in another. Nanlohy retracted his participation in the 1987 Coen exhibition and was not available for interviews with the national media afterwards. However, he did voice his motivation in Moluccan magazine *Marinjo* and explained his case to Fridus Steijlen, who eventually wrote an article about his protest. Beek's refusal to be part of the glossy magazine inspired the

activist platform *Doorbraak* to approach him for an interview, to which he acquiesced. Their deliberate silences in one context strengthened their voices in another context. If taking up a voice in certain discussions means losing that voice, one's silence in these discussions may speak louder than one's words. If being granted a voice can mean being repressed, remaining silent can mean resisting that repression.

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4   The case of De Grauwe Eeuw

Disruptive voices and silences in social activism

Abstract
This chapter is an analysis of the activist strategies of De Grauwe Eeuw. This protest group aims to disrupt the glorification of the Golden Age, through actions against colonial references in Dutch public space. On the one hand, De Grauwe Eeuw makes its anti-colonial voice heard through spray-painted slogans, blog posts, and social media participation. On the other hand, the group refuses to speak to the mainstream media about the motivation for their actions. Both the group's voice and its silence are thus *disruptive* articulation strategies. They use their voices to disrupt the public discourse that glorifies colonial history, and they use their silence to disrupt the mainstream media's attempts to appropriate and repress their voices of protest.

Keywords: De Grauwe Eeuw; social activism; colonial glorification; postcolonial memory; voice and silence; *Verfremdung*

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the deployment of voices and silences in the articulation of postcolonial memory through social activism. The analysis is focused on the activist group known as De Grauwe Eeuw. This Dutch name translates to something along the lines of "the grizzled age," or "the dreary age," and will be further discussed after this introduction. In 2016 and 2017, the group frequently made the national news by spray-painting slogans such as "genocide" and "stop colonial glorification" on colonial statues in the Netherlands, including the statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Hoorn that was discussed in Chapter 3.

However, despite their outspoken presence in public space, the activists are uncharacteristically silent in the mainstream media. They refuse all

participation in interviews with national newspapers or television channels, claiming that speaking to these established discourses is tantamount to not speaking at all. On their website (degrauweeeuw.blogspot.com) they have frequently explained their selective silence as a strategy of protecting their political voice from becoming filtered and downplayed through, as they argue, the media's predetermined position with regard to Dutch postcolonial memory. Their silence thus indicates a distrust in mainstream media as a neutral form of communication.

As such, the group's actions are an example of social activism that uses both voice and silence as strategies of disruption: their spray-painted slogans are meant to disrupt colonial glorification in public space, and their silence is meant to disrupt the mainstream media's control over their message. However, as will be discussed in the second half of this chapter, their deliberate use of silence is not without its particular risks: the media have criminalized these activists, to large extent based on their refusal to speak out about their actions publicly. Therefore, this chapter is aimed at answering the question: *what are the limits of voice and silence as disruptive strategies of social activism?*

In what follows, I will first contextualize De Grauwe Eeuw's targeting of colonial statues within a global movement of decolonial activism that has accelerated throughout the 2010s. I will then analyze the disruptive voices and silences which De Grauwe Eeuw deploys in its activism. Finally, I will study the particular risks involved in the group's approach, in order to analyze the limits of both voice and silence as strategies of social activism. This analysis will result in my concluding suggestion to see voice and silence not as opposites, but as allied modes of articulating postcolonial memory.

The glorified presence of colonial history in Dutch public space

The activists of De Grauwe Eeuw are among those protesters who criticize the veneration with which colonial history is remembered in the Dutch public space. As such, they can be understood as participating in what cultural theorist Rosemarie Buikema has called "a global activist movement geared towards the decolonization of the postcolonial public space" (193). According to Buikema, decolonization starts with the realization that, "whilst colonialism has indeed been abolished, both the public sphere and the setup of institutions continue to be dominated and legitimized by an imaginary that is inherently referential to a 'glorious' colonial past – that is to say, by reminiscences that are apparently unaware of the enduring polarizing effects

and spasms of colonial and patriarchal power" (194). Within this context, decolonization is understood as the process of undoing the glorification of the colonial past, in acknowledgment of the fact that for a majority of the world, this past is felt as a history of exploitation and oppression.

In their pursuit of this objective, activists often target colonial statues because of their symbolic value as indicators of postcolonial memory. By contesting these public signs of a collective memory that favors the colonizer over the colonized, such activism can be understood as attempts to demand a different perspective on colonial history. Examples of this kind of activism can be found across the globe: examples include the successful Rhodes Must Fall movement in Cape Town, South Africa in 2015;[1] the growing list of Confederate memorials in the United States that have been removed since 2015;[2] the ongoing protests against James Cook memorials in Australia and New Zealand since 2016;[3] and the toppling of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol in 2020.[4] Similar contestations are happening in the Netherlands, as exemplified by the longstanding conflict about Jan Pieterszoon Coen's statue in Hoorn, discussed in Chapter 3.

In terms of postcolonial memory, historical figures like the ones targeted in the above-mentioned actions are often remembered in one of two major ways: as heroes or perpetrators (cf. Chapter 2). For instance, Coen is remembered as a hero because he brought wealth and power to the Netherlands through the spice monopoly which he established in the early seventeenth century. He is also remembered as a perpetrator because of his violent legacy: he orchestrated the mass-killing of almost the entire Bandanese population

1   The movement successfully rallied for the removal of a statue for Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902) at the University of Cape Town. Rhodes was the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony (in present-day South-Africa) from 1890 to 1896, and the founder of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe and Zambia). The removal of the statue heeded criticism concerning Rhodes' legacy as a white supremacist.

2   The growing list of removed memorials is a result of the critique against the positive memory of the Confederate States of America (1861–1865), i.e. seven secessionist states that rejected the abolition of slavery.

3   James Cook (1728–1779) was a British explorer who is widely remembered for "discovering" Australia and is honored by memorials and other public tributes throughout Australia and New Zealand. His legacy is being criticized for symbolizing the erasure of indigenous history, and the normalization of European colonialism.

4   Edward Colston (1636–1721) was an English slave-trader for the Royal African Company. Despite his central function in the Atlantic slave trade, he is remembered and honored for his philanthropism in his city of birth, Bristol: he built schools, houses for the poor, hospitals and churches. His statue was toppled and thrown into the Bristol Harbor by Black Lives Matter demonstrators as a way to criticize Bristol's double standard of honoring Colston as a philanthropist, while ignoring that the money he used for his philanthropy was made through the Atlantic slave trade.

in pursuit of the monopoly. The interpretation of Coen as a national hero can be seen as a symptom of one dominant form of remembering the Dutch colonial past: as the glorious history of conquest and mercantile power. This glorifying interpretation is developed and maintained through, among other things, public symbols such as statues that honor this history. The interpretation of Coen as a perpetrator is an increasingly well-established counter-memory that can be taken as a sign of another dominant form of remembering the Dutch colonial past: as the shameful history of oppression and exploitation. Coen's statue in Hoorn is one among many other examples of colonial statues that function as catalysts for this larger societal debate over the way in which Dutch colonial history should be remembered.

This debate is marked by a power imbalance between the institutional contexts of the two opposing perspectives. Whereas favorable interpretations of the colonial past are supported by national monuments, street names, and other public symbols, critical interpretations are restricted to the role of counter-voices to the norm, whose criticism can be, and often is, interpreted as an attack on Dutch identity. To give one example of this mechanism, Dutch historian Piet Emmer published an essay in 2018 in which he addresses the debate about postcolonial memory as follows:

> A new iconoclasm is raging through our country. Apparently, countless statues and street names are tributes to bad, white men such as Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Hoorn, Petrus Stuyvesant and General Heutsz in Amsterdam, and more recently, Michiel de Ruyter in Vlissingen and Witte de With in Rotterdam. The latter two were until recently still celebrated as courageous Dutch seafaring heroes. (7)[5]

5   Petrus Stuyvesant (1592–1672) was the director-general of the Dutch colony of New Netherlands (present-day New York) from 1647 until 1664. His legacy is controversial because of his outspoken anti-Semitism. General Heutsz (1851–1924) was the military governor of Aceh, an insurrectional region in the west of the Dutch East Indies, from 1898 until 1904. During his office, he commissioned the violent repression of the region's struggle for independence, which cost the lives of at least 2,900 Acehnese. Michiel de Ruyter (1607–1676) was a Dutch colonial admiral who is criticized for his role in the Atlantic slave trade. Witte de With (1599–1658) was a Dutch naval officer for both the VOC and the WIC. He participated in multiple violent expeditions against colonial populations, including the siege of Jayakarta in 1618–1619, during which the city of Jayakarta was burned down in order to establish Batavia, the capital city of the Dutch East Indies until 1942. The passage is my translation from the Dutch original: "Er raast een nieuwe beeldenstorm door ons land. Tal van standbeelden en straatnamen blijken een eerbetoon aan foute, witten mannen te zijn zoals Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Hoorn, Petrus Stuyvesant en Generaal van Heutsz in Amsterdam en meer recentelijk Michiel de Ruyter in Vlissingen en Witte de With in Rotterdam. Beide laatsten werden tot voor kort nog als dappere Nederlandse zeehelden gevierd."

Emmer's publication was both a reaction to, and a further escalation of, the polarized debate about the colonial past in Dutch society. His term for critical perspectives on postcolonial memory, "iconoclasm," has since been widely reiterated by the mainstream media, both critically and uncritically.

In his text, Emmer reduces the conflict over the complex legacies of Dutch colonialism to a dispute between "rational" historians and "emotional" iconoclasts, in which the latter are characterized as inferior to the former: "Whoever reads the newspaper nowadays cannot escape the impression that Dutch history is being incriminated. [...] Debates about such topics have little to do with facts and numbers, and instead revolve around emotions" (17).[6] According to Emmer, the process of defaming national heroes because of their controversial deeds would be "more appropriate for a vicar or a pastor than for a historian. But you may have noticed that nowadays we enjoy making our past replete with guilt and atonement, especially when it comes to our contacts with the overseas world" (8).[7]

With such statements, Emmer interprets criticism against the glorifying representation of postcolonial memory in public space not only as an emotional project but also as the moralistic attempt to "incriminate" Dutch history. According to his point of view, this criticism is marked by "an unwillingness to understand our past" (19), because it projects "our contemporary moral views upon the past without the least hesitation" (18).[8] As such, his approach to this conflict resembles the way in which Coen's statue in Hoorn, after it had become damaged in 2011, was defended by writers who were in favor of its restoration (cf. Chapter 3). For example, as further elaborated in Chapter 3, regarding the criticism against Coen's statue, Maarten van Rossem wrote: "There exists an understandable, but nevertheless peculiar tendency to judge the past according to the customs, norms and values of the present" (7).[9] To him, this tendency is "not very sensible," because "the past must be judged

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6   My translation from the Dutch original: "Wie dezer dagen de krant openslaat, kan zich niet aan de indruk onttrekken dat de geschiedenis van Nederland in het verdomhoekje zit. [...] Met feiten en cijfers hebben deze debatten weinig te doen, wel met emoties."

7   My translation from the Dutch original: "eerder afkomstig van een dominee of pastoor dan van een geschiedkundige. Maar het zal u niet ontgaan zijn, dat we tegenwoordig graag veel schuld en boete in ons verleden stoppen, zeker als het gaan om de contacten met de overzeese wereld."

8   My translation from the Dutch original: "onwil om het verleden te begrijpen"; "onze huidige morele opvattingen zonder de minste aarzeling steeds op het verleden."

9   My translation from the Dutch original: "Er bestaat een begrijpelijke, maar desalniettemin wonderlijke neiging om het verleden te beoordelen naar de gewoonten en normen en waarden van het heden."

according to its own standards" (7).[10] Emmer makes this point of view explicit by calling the past "a strange land with very different ideas about good and bad compared to those we have now, in the present-day Netherlands" (8–9).[11]

The way in which writers like Emmer and Rossem approach postcolonial memory justifies the existence of colonial statues in the Dutch public space by interpreting history as a natural fact, and such statues as the logical outcomes of it. As such, their approach ignores that a majority of these statues in the Netherlands were built in the nineteenth century, that is, two or three centuries after the lifetimes of the colonizers that are being honored. Coen's statue in Hoorn, for instance, was built in 1893, two and half centuries after his lifetime. According to historian N.C.F. van Sas, the construction of this statue had little to do with Coen's historical context, but was instead a sign of the historical context in which it was built: the late nineteenth century was a period in which the Netherlands was impacted by the rise of "modern imperialism, with its intensification of international tensions and rivalries" (564–65).[12] Within this context, the Netherlands sought to develop a national self-identification as a strong colonial presence in the world, which resulted among other things in "statues of national heroes being erected everywhere" (560).[13] These statues, like Coen's, often honored well-known colonizers from the Golden Age, in order to present Dutch history as a history of colonial conquest and mercantile ingenuity.

In other words, the way in which history is presented in public space is not neutral. To the contrary, it is a selective interpretation, which is used in order to articulate a particular self-image in the present. In this selective interpretation, certain details, like Coen's murder of 14,000 Bandanese in pursuit of a Dutch monopoly on the global spice trade, are actively ignored in favor of more honorable details, such as the fact that he brought wealth and fame to the Netherlands through this spice monopoly. Emmer's representation of colonial statues as innocent products of their time enables him to reframe the public debate about postcolonial memory as a conflict

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10   My translation from the Dutch original: "niet erg zinvol"; "Het verleden dient beoordeeld te worden naar zijn eigen maatstaven."

11   My translation from the Dutch original: "een vreemd land met heel andere opvattingen over goed en kwaad dan wij er nu op nahouden in het hedendaagse Nederland."

12   My translation from the Dutch original: "het moderne imperialisme met zijn verscherping van internationale spanningen en rivaliteiten."

13   My translation from the Dutch original: "om overal standbeelden op te richten van vaderlandse helden."

between historians and iconoclasts, the former of which are portrayed as aiming to defend history itself against the latter, who are portrayed as trying to erase history by calling for the destruction of its visible symbols in contemporary society.

However, this polarized portrayal of the conflict ignores the fact that the criticism of colonial statues is in fact not a protest against colonial history as such, but against the particular way in which this history was represented in the nineteenth century, through the construction of statues and monuments that glorified this past. The criticism suggests that such aggrandizing symbols are no longer appropriate in the contemporary reality of postcolonial societies like the Netherlands, in which a considerable amount of citizens is descended from the colonized rather than the colonizers.[14] The debate is therefore not between defenders and destroyers of history, as Emmer suggests, but between two different interpretations of history – one in which colonialism is remembered as a history of conquest and discovery, and one in which it is remembered as a history of oppression and exploitation. Emmer represents his own interpretation of history as based on "facts and numbers," while reducing that of his opponents to an emotional project of misguided moralists (17).[15] As such, he refutes the possibility that one shared past could engender multiple histories that place emphasis on different aspects of that past. He naturalizes his own perspective as historically correct, while discarding that of his opponents as ahistorical and incorrect.

He expresses this reductive interpretation of the conflict even more directly in his many interviews with the mainstream media. For example, in an interview with national newspaper *De Volkskrant*, he argues that "Slavery is so long ago. It keeps surprising me that people never cease complaining about it" (qtd. in Naaijer).[16] In an interview with *De Wereld Draait Door*, a talk show on national television, he remarks that "black people in the Netherlands are constantly attempting to cast themselves as victims of history" ("De Wereld Draait Door, 17-01-2018").[17] The latter remark indicates that with his representation of the topic he not only assumes his own perspective to be

14   According to historian Gert Oostindie, of the approximately seventeen million inhabitants of the Netherlands, "The number of Dutch people with roots in the colonies is estimated to be around one million" (8).

15   My translation from the Dutch original: "feiten en cijfers."

16   My translation from the Dutch original: "De slavernij is zo lang geleden. Het verbaast me altijd opnieuw dat mensen daar eindeloos in blijven rondzeuren."

17   My translation from the Dutch original: "Je ziet voortdurend vanuit de mensen die in Nederland zwart zijn [...], pogingen om [...] een soort slachtofferrol te spelen in de geschiedenis."

correct and the opposing perspective to be incorrect, but he also presents the debate as a conflict between people with different skin colors. By explicitly framing the other side of the debate as a "black" point of view, he implies that the reasonable qualities which he assumes for his own voice in the debate are also understood by him to be "white" qualities.

As such, Emmer's approach to postcolonial memory is an example of what anthropologist Gloria Wekker has identified as a sustained collective illusion that she terms "white innocence," and which according to her is "a dominant way in which the Dutch think of themselves, as being a small, but just, ethical nation; color-blind, thus free of racism; as being inherently on the moral and ethical high ground, thus a guiding light to other folks and nations" (2). This self-aggrandizing identity, she argues, is maintained through what she calls a "smug ignorance" of the problematic elements of national history: that is, "an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly – not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest level of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as *knowledge*" (18). That this sense of innocence is indeed naturalized as a form of knowledge is shown in Emmer's representation of the debate over postcolonial memory as a conflict between those who do understand history, and those who do not.

The next section will introduce the activist group De Grauwe Eeuw, in order to discuss how it protests against this glorification of Dutch colonial history in public space, and how it attempts to protect its protest from being misrepresented as emotional, ahistorical iconoclasm.

The disruptive activism of De Grauwe Eeuw

On its Twitter account (@DeGrauwEeuw [*sic*]), De Grauwe Eeuw profiles itself as "The counter-reaction to the glorification of the Golden Age."[18] The anonymous group first gained national attention when it claimed responsibility for a series of slogans that were spray-painted on colonial monuments in the city of Hoorn during the night of 24 October 2016, as was reported by the national newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* (Groenendijk). The activists had written "Get rid of colonial glorification" on a monument for Willem IJsbrantszoon Bontekoe, who was a merchant in the service of the VOC.[19] A bust of Bontekoe was also smeared with paint. On Jan

18   My translation from the Dutch original: "Tegenantwoord op de verheerlijking van de gouden eeuw."
19   My translation from the Dutch original: "Weg met koloniale verheerlijking."

Pieterszoon Coen's pedestal and in front of Museum Halve Maen, which is a replica of a VOC ship, they had painted the word "genocide," as well as a variant of the VOC logo, in which the "O" was drawn in such a way as to resemble a noose. A post on their Facebook page described the motivation for the action as follows:

> Via an action that took place last night, members of our group have shown their disgust regarding the colonial glorification with which Hoorn proudly parades.
> J.P. Coen and Bontekoe were two mass-murderers in the service of the VOC and brought colonial terror to the population of the Dutch East Indies, as well as other territories. [...] Museum Halve Maen is a replica of the VOC ship, which Henri Hudson used to "discover" Manhattan, which was the beginning of a bloody colonization, and a genocide against the area's native population, the Lenape. [...]
> Colonial glorification leads to the normalization of genocide, as well as to the normalization of large-scale pillaging of land and natural resources. This is one of many actions that will follow throughout the country. ("Actiegroep De Grauwe Eeuw bekladt VOC-monumenten")[20]

The group was active throughout 2017 as well, protesting against a wide array of colonial references in Dutch society, including statues, street names, and racist elements in national and local festivals.

This overview of their actions shows that the activists of De Grauwe Eeuw focus on postcolonial memory as it is practiced in Dutch public space. The statues and other public symbols of memory that they target form a constant presence in citizens' daily lives, inviting them to uncritically identify and empathize with colonizers through these statues that portray them as national heroes, despite the fact that these figures played pivotal roles in histories of oppression. In other words, public space has a *theatrical function* when it comes to postcolonial memory, to the extent that it stages the past in a glorifying way. In a text called "Staging the Past," cultural geographer

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20   My translation from the Dutch original: "Vannacht hebben leden van onze groep via een actie hun afschuw laten blijken van de koloniale verheerlijking waarmee Hoorn vol trots pronkt. [...] JP Coen [*sic*] en Bontekoe waren twee massamoordenaars in dienst van de VOC en hebben hun koloniale terreur losgelaten op o.a. de bevolking van Nederlands-Indië. [...] Museum de Halve Maen is een replica van het VOC schip waarmee Henri Hudson Manhattan 'ontdekte', het begin van een bloedige kolonisatie van en genocide op de Lenape, de inheemse bevolking daar. [...] Via deze koloniale verheerlijking worden roof van land, grootschalige roof van grondstoffen en genocide genormaliseerd. Dit is een van vele acties die door het gehele land zullen volgen."

Karen E. Till stresses this theatrical function by arguing that "official urban landscapes of memory – museums, memorials and monuments" function "as stages or backdrops framing myths of national identity" (254). Therefore, public space may often become a location in which collective identity is contested, seeing that "social groups may not agree with the official meanings of these landscapes and staged rituals: they may decide to take over existing *topoi* or create their own sites of memory" (254).

The activism of De Grauwe Eeuw is an example of such contestation. By spray-painting anti-colonial slogans on colonial statues, they complicate the identification with colonizers which these statues encourage. For example, the spray-painting of the word "genocide" on Coen's statue in Hoorn complicates its representation of him as a national hero, because it offers an alternative interpretation of him as a mass-murderer. Because the slogan is an unsolicited addition to the statue's usual presence in the city, it demands attention. Passers-by are provoked to notice the statue and the added slogan, and form their own opinion about the conflict that is presented through their juxtaposition: should Coen be remembered as a hero or a mass-murderer?

As such, De Grauwe Eeuw's protest strategy can be analyzed by applying Bertolt Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung* to it. This term has been translated into English as the "alienation effect" (*Brecht on Theatre*) and refers to Brecht's method of effecting social and political change through theatrical intervention. Brecht defined *Verfremdung* as the directing of a play in such a way that the audience is "hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play" ("Alienation Effects" 91). To the contrary, the audience's "acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances" is urged "on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious" ("Alienation Effects" 91). Brecht disapproved of theatre that aimed at the audience's empathy. His problem with such theatre was that, according to him, it encouraged audiences to remain passive spectators of the staged action, rather than inspire them to think and act for themselves. Therefore, he suggested an alternative approach, which he called "epic theatre," and which operated via effectuating instances of *Verfremdung*. This alternative form of theatre was aimed at distancing spectators from what they saw on stage, and thereby, alienating them from the conditions of their own lives, in order to urge them to actively change these conditions rather than passively accept them.

In his analysis of Brecht's method, Walter Benjamin points out that *Verfremdung* is often "brought about by processes of being interrupted" ("What is Epic Theatre?" 18). Brecht used many forms of interruption in his

plays. Actors would frequently interrupt their own acting and start over again, specific gestures would be repeated in different contexts, actors would fall out of their roles and address members of the audience directly. Such interruption, argues Benjamin, "has an organizing function. It brings the action to a standstill in mid-course and thereby compels the spectator to take up a position towards the action" ("The Author as Producer" 100). In other words, Brecht's use of interruptions was aimed at *disrupting* the possibility for the audience to passively empathize with the actors or to identify with their actions.

Based on these considerations, the activism of De Grauwe Eeuw can be understood as a strategy of *Verfremdung*, because it disrupts citizens' usually passive and unconscious acceptance of postcolonial memory as it is presented to them through public monuments.[21] These monuments stage controversial figures of colonial history unequivocally as national heroes. By disrupting these glorifying memory practices, De Grauwe Eeuw urges citizens to become conscious of their own positions in relation to what is presented to them. By becoming aware of the statues which usually form the backdrop to their daily lives, they are encouraged to see them as if for the first time, and to consider to what extent they agree with the version of postcolonial memory that these monuments symbolize. The following section will explore De Grauw Eeuw's strategy of disruption further by analyzing how it can be identified not only as the central element of their protest strategy, but also as the defining feature of their relationship to the mainstream media.

De Grauwe Eeuw's refusal to speak with the mainstream media

De Grauwe Eeuw is known to systematically refuse interviews with the mainstream media. In a blog post on their website from 25 October 2017, the activists describe the motivations behind this attitude in the following way:

> Because of our policy concerning mainstream white media [...] we often encounter surprised or even indignant journalists. Yes, there will undoubt-edly be journalists who have good intentions, et cetera blah blah [*sic*],

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21 For further analysis of Brechtian strategies of disruption in social activism, going beyond conflicts concerning postcolonial memory, see Gerlov van Engelenhoven and Hannes Kaufmann, "When Silence Speaks Louder than Words: Tracing moments of *Verfremdung* in Contemporary Political Protests."

but even those generally still work for white newsrooms, that are often owned by white institutions that benefit from publishing news about racism as tepidly and inaccurately as possible.

The knowledge of most journalists in the Netherlands about racism, colonialism and slavery is substandard to such an extent that it is basically impossible for them to write a serious article, even if they would try. Their questions are always framed from a white perspective: insinuative, depreciative and derisive. ("Witte media… deel 1")[22]

The central message of this blog post is that, whereas the activist group's project is to criticize dominant postcolonial memory, the mainstream media are owned, so they argue, by the white, dominant part of Dutch society that directly benefits from the heritage of colonialism. Therefore, to publish their anti-colonial views in this biased context would be to jeopardize the integrity of their voice.

Like their approach to protest, this critical understanding of the mainstream media can be analyzed via Brecht. According to Brecht, critical thinkers should be wary of publishing their thoughts via the mainstream media:

For by imagining that they have got hold of an apparatus which in fact has got hold of them they are supporting an apparatus which is out of their control, which is no longer (as they believe) a means of furthering output but has become an obstacle to output, and specifically to their own output as soon as it follows a new and original course which the apparatus finds awkward or opposed to its own aims. ("The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" 34)

In other words, Brecht argues that the media should not be seen as a channel through which thinkers can reach their audience, but as an obstacle to this objective. He understands the media not as a neutral vehicle for the communication of thoughts and opinions, but as a manipulative apparatus

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22 My translation from the Dutch original: "Gezien ons beleid omtrent mainstream witte media […] krijgen wij vaak verbaasde of zelfs verontwaardigde journalisten. Ja er zal vast die ene tussen zitten die het wel goed bedoelt enz blabla. [*sic*] echter zijn zij allemaal journalisten voor een witte redactie die vaak eigendom is van een wit instituut wat er baat bij heeft om nieuws mbt [*sic*] racisme zo lauw en onnauwkeurig mogelijk te brengen. De kennis over racisme, kolonialisme, slavernij van de meeste journalisten in Nederland is zo beneden peil dat je er geen serieus artikel uit krijgt al zouden ze hun best doen. De vragen zijn altijd vanuit een wit perspectief, insinuerend, bagatelliserend en badinerend."

in the hands of society, which itself he understands as a conservative body aimed at reproducing the status quo: "Society absorbs via the apparatus whatever it needs in order to reproduce itself. This means that an innovation will pass if it is calculated to rejuvenate existing society, but not if it is going to change it" ("The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" 34).

Applied to the case of De Grauwe Eeuw, this understanding of the media as an apparatus aimed at reproducing the status quo further clarifies the group's refusal to submit its voice to it. The group's actions are meant to reveal and criticize certain conditions of society that are usually taken for granted, particularly concerning the topic of postcolonial memory. The mainstream media could be argued to generally work against this principle, as their purpose, from a Brechtian point of view, is to reproduce those conditions. Therefore, for the group to contribute their voice to this discourse would imply subjecting their voice to that mechanism of reproduction. For this reason, the group chooses to remain silent within that context, and instead preserves its voice for what it deems to be non-conforming platforms, such as its own website.

These considerations suggest an interpretation of De Grauwe Eeuw's silence in the mainstream media as a conscious strategy to remain in control of its own voice, and not as an obstacle to getting its message across. The latter interpretation is common among journalists whose attempts to interview the activists were rejected. On their website, the group discusses this recurrent interpretation of its silence, arguing that it proves the extent to which journalists overestimate their roles in society as agents of information. The activists support their argument by providing a series of print screens taken from a conversation between them and a journalist that took place in October 2017 via Facebook Messenger.

They introduce their example by stating that "this journalist has the same distorted image of himself as most journalists of the mainstream media. He thinks that he is doing us a favor and that he is an important link between us and the world" ("Witte media... deel 1").[23] The print screens show a conversation in which the journalist requests an interview. The activists ask to which news platform the interview would be submitted. The journalist indicates that he works independently and would sell his article to the highest bidder. The activists respond that, in that case, they are not available for an interview, and they wish him good luck in future

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23   My translation from the Dutch original: "deze journalist heeft hetzelfde vertekend beeld van zichzelf als de meeste journalisten van de mainstream media. Hij denkt dat hij ons een plezier doet en hij de belangrijke schakel is tussen ons en de buitenwereld."

endeavors. At this point, the conversation takes a turn in the direction which De Grauwe Eeuw argues is symptomatic for its relationship with the mainstream media. The journalist states:

> I have indicated sincerely that my aim is to present your vision objectively. At that point, if you decide to be unwilling to cooperate, then that is fine. But you should be aware of the fact that you thereby lose the right to take on a victim-role. After all, you had the chance to influence my reporting. An article cannot illuminate your perspective and motivation if you yourself choose not to share it. [...] Seeing that you are an action group, it would seem to me that your priority should be to share your vision and plans with the larger public. What is happening now is the opposite of this. Your choice. (Qtd. in "Witte media... deel 1")[24]

The activists respond by saying:

> Exactly, and this is the type of whitesplaining [*sic*] reaction we always get from white media. They think that we need them, that we want to hear their opinions and, above all, that we really need the approval of white people. And yet, we do NOT [*sic*] need any of these things.[25]

This exchange shows that De Grauwe Eeuw and the journalist have different understandings of the function of journalism for the articulation of an activist perspective on society. With his remark, the journalist invokes the common principle of *audi alteram partem*, that is, the right for an accused party to defend themselves. By offering the activists a space to voice their side of the conflict, he believes that he offers them a chance to defend themselves. Therefore, he understands their refusal to speak with him as their failure to defend themselves, that is, their failure to present themselves

24   My translation from the Dutch original: "Ik heb namelijk met open vizier aangekaart dat ik jullie visie op een objectieve manier wilde belichten. Op het moment dat jullie er voor kiezen niet mee te werken, is dat prima. Ben er u dan wel van bewust dat u metterdaad het recht verspeelt om een slachtofferrol in te nemen. U had immers zelf de kans om de berichtgeving te beïnvloeden. Een artikel/productie kan namelijk niet uw standpunten en motivatie belichten als u er zelf voor kiest deze niet te willen delen. [...] als zijnde actiegroep lijk het me een prioriteit uw visie en plannen kenbaar te maken aan het grote publiek. Wat er nu gebeurt is het tegenovergestelde. Uw keuze."

25   My translation from the Dutch original: "Zo'n Whitesplainerige [*sic*] reactie als de jouwe krijgen we dus altijd van de witte media. Ze denken dat wij hun [*sic*] nodig hebben, hun mening willen en maar vooral goedkeuring van witte mensen nodig hebben. We hebben dat alles NIET nodig."

as a legitimate movement. As such, consciously or not, the journalist creates an unequal power distribution between himself and the activists, by positioning himself as a representative of the norm, whose legitimacy is self-evident, while positioning De Grauwe Eeuw as occupying a deviant position, that has yet to acquire legitimacy.

The activists' response indicates that they disagree with the journalist's representation of their relationship. By emphasizing that they do not "need the approval of white people" (see citation above), they reframe the conversation that he offers them as an unequal space in which they would be expected to convince him and his readers of their legitimacy.[26] By refusing to engage in this conversation, they imply that their legitimacy is not dependent upon such approval. This refusal to explain themselves suggests that the activists interpret taking up a voice within the context of the mainstream media as a form of subjection. By submitting their voice to a conversation that is hosted by the media, they would acknowledge the latter's power to evaluate their actions. Their deliberate silence is therefore motivated by their aim to disrupt the media's dominant position as an apparatus that grants or denies legitimacy to political voices.

Thus, De Grauwe Eeuw's silence can be understood as an example of what political scientist Kennan Ferguson calls the "overt refusal to participate in the normative linguistic practices of a state or society" (7). According to Ferguson, silence has a defiant quality to the extent that it "can serve as resistance to any institution that requires verbal participation (as do virtually all). [...] Silence as non-participation is threatening to institutional forces in that silence resists whatever demands are made without necessarily opposing" (8). In other words, Ferguson theorizes an activist's silence not as the overt opposition to, but as the disruption or suspension of, the status quo. Silence "disturbs those institutions and institutional executors [...] who demand verbal interaction as evaluative mechanisms. It disturbs precisely because the ideal of transparent speech is the presumed mode of affiliation in our cultural practices, a standard to which silence is not reducible" (15). By not participating in the mainstream media's normative practice of evaluating different points of view by bringing them into dialogue with each other, the activists of De Grauwe Eeuw resist such evaluation, because they avoid expressing a clear position to which they could be held accountable.

This use of deliberate silence in their protest strategy aligns them to some extent, but not entirely, with other historical examples of political

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26   My translation from the Dutch original: "goedkeuring van witte mensen nodig hebben."

resistance through silence, or its non-aural equivalents, such as withdrawal and non-participation. In a text called "Silent Citizenship in Democratic Theory and Practice," political scientist Sean Gray points out that

> silence is often the default mode of sanctioning those in power whenever citizens lack the credibility to be heard or the costs of other instruments (speech) are simply too high. In these situations, withholding acknowledging or refusing to respond can reduce the asymmetrical effects of differences in power by motivating the other side to take notice and engage – even if only to clarify a silence's meaning. (9)

In other words, Gray theorizes silence as a weapon in the hands of those whose voices are usually not valued. Examples which he provides include the National Women's Party's deployment of so-called "Silent Sentinels," that were "committed to drawing attention to politically voiceless women by standing in silent protest outside of the White House everyday throughout 1917," and the action of the religious Falun Gong movement in Beijing in 1999, when "10,000 of its members surrounded government buildings in Zhongnanhai in silent protest of the government's religious policies" (9).

Unlike such examples of silent resistance, however, I argue that De Grauwe Eeuw's objective is *not* to demand a voice through silence, but rather to express their *distrust of voice* as an instrument for societal change. Their refusal to engage in conversation about their negative representation of colonial history is not a way to claim that their point of view has not been heard before in this debate. Instead, their silence is a protest against the debate itself. This is for example how they explained it to a journalist of the national newspaper *NRC*, who relates that "I would have been happy to start a conversation with them, but the anonymous group informed me via the internet that they refuse to talk to the press: 'We are not looking for a dialogue; it is the task of white Europeans themselves to educate each other about their past'" (Weijts).[27] With this remark, the activists make clear that they do not see how a dialogue would rectify the glorifying representation of postcolonial memory that is upheld in the Dutch public space. By refusing to explain their actions through a conversation, they let their actions speak for themselves, or as they expressed it explicitly to the national newspaper

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27   My translation from the Dutch original: "Ik was graag met hen in gesprek gegaan, maar via internet laat de anonieme groep me weten niet met de pers te praten. 'Wij zijn niet uit op een dialoog; witte Europeanen hebben zelf de taak zich te onderwijzen in hun verleden'."

De Volkskrant: "Dialogue prolongs the status quo, while action needs to be taken" (qtd. in Huisman).[28]

These paradoxical exchanges with journalists, in which the group speaks to them only to explain why they will not speak to them, indicate how they pair their silence with a strongly articulated voice in society via other channels. For instance, they frequently update their blog with lengthy posts in which they elaborate their objectives and perspectives. Moreover, their actions themselves constitute a coherent voice of protest in the public realm. As such, their outspoken refusal to speak to the mainstream media can be interpreted as an autonomous form of societal participation that protects them from having to compromise their voice. However, as will be elaborated in the next section, this strategy is not without its particular risks. By studying the negative way in which the mainstream media have portrayed the group, predominantly based on their systematic refusal to speak with them, I will argue that silence, like voice, has its limitations as a strategy of activism.

The risks of remaining silent

One of the most effective actions by De Grauwe Eeuw was its very first. In August 2016, the activists wrote a letter to the municipality of Utrecht, in which they requested that all twelve street names in a particular neighborhood of the city be changed, because they uncritically refer to the colonization of Indonesia. The municipality did not heed the request, but instead offered to start a project with them and several other parties, including other activist groups, and students of Cultural History from Utrecht University. This project would be aimed at improving the awareness of colonial history in the city's public space. De Grauwe Eeuw agreed to this idea. It eventually led to the initiation of the so-called *Bitterzoete Route* ("Bittersweet Route") in October 2018: a guided tour through the neighborhood in question, in which the controversial historical context of its street names is discussed.[29]

Although this initiative was based on an action by De Grauwe Eeuw, the municipality banned the group from the project halfway through, in October 2017. The discontinuation of their collaboration was based on the

28 My translation from the Dutch original: "Dialoog verlengt de status quo, terwijl er actie ondernomen moet worden."
29 More information about this guided tour can be found on the project's website: bitterzoeteroute.nl/wandeling.

negative national attention which the group had received earlier that year, in August 2017, when it had sent a letter to the Director-General for Public Works and Water Management. The letter demanded the immediate name change of the Coen Tunnel, which is a tunnel under the North Sea Canal in the west of Amsterdam that is named after Jan Pieterszoon Coen. In this letter, the activists promised further actions should the name not be changed, and specified that these actions would possibly also be aimed at the Director-General personally, seeing that she was the sole official who could make a decision about this matter.

The chairman of the Utrecht department of the conservative-liberal party VVD, Dimitri Gilissen, interpreted this letter as a direct threat, and based on that interpretation, criticized the city's collaboration with the group in an interview with national newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad*. In this interview, he announced that if Utrecht would not end its relationship with the action group, he would address this matter during the next plenary meeting of the House of Representatives. In the interview he emphasizes the fact that the group can usually not be reached for commentary and calls them "an extremely shadowy and elusory organization with no face" (qtd. in Hoekstra).[30] Addressing the matter officially was eventually unnecessary: two days after this article, the same newspaper reported that the municipality of Utrecht "has ended its collaboration with action group De Grauwe Eeuw promptly" (qtd. in Dankbaar).[31]

This sequence of events marks the first time that the activists' silent treatment of the media directly worked against them. As had been the case with all their previous actions, their letter about the Coen Tunnel had prompted new requests for interviews by the mainstream media, all of which the group had rejected. In combination with the negative attention their letter had caused, their refusal to defend or explain themselves publicly was now interpreted as a sign of their culpability. This negative interpretation was frequently repeated in news coverage about the group from this time onward, as newspapers began to increasingly stress the group's refusal to speak to them. For example, national newspaper *De Volkskrant* published an interview with terrorism expert Jacco Pekelder on 7 February 2018. In this interview, Pekelder notes that "De Grauwe Eeuw is not looking for debate. They are not interested in whether or not their message reaches a wider

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30   My translation from the Dutch original: "een uiterst schimmig clubje, zonder gezicht, en ze zijn onbereikbaar."
31   My translation from the Dutch original: "Gemeente Utrecht stopt onmiddellijk samenwerking met actiegroep De Grauwe Eeuw."

audience and are preaching to the choir. If you never listen to anyone else, you are always right. That is frightening" (qtd. in Vos).[32] In the very next sentence, the newspaper specifies that they have attempted to contact the activists via email and social media to ask them for a response, but without success.

As such, by juxtaposing the group's silence with a terrorism expert's denouncement of it, the newspaper frames this silence as part of the threat to society which the group supposedly poses. However, this representation ignores the fact that the group's silence is only aimed at one particular type of news platform. Whereas De Grauwe Eeuw refuses to speak to the mainstream media, the group does give interviews with what they see as non-dominant news platforms, and also frequently publish their thoughts and opinions on their own website. For instance, in the aftermath of their controversial letter about the Coen Tunnel, the activists published a lengthy blog post about Dimitri Gilissen's public request for the discontinuation of their collaboration with the city of Utrecht. In this post, which also includes a link to the letter in question, they state that their action was not unlawful in any way: "We have used our freedom of expression and have claimed our right to demonstrate about our right not to be discriminated against" ("Dimitri Gilissen doet een 'doe gewoon' à la Rutte").[33] They criticize the fact that Gilissen called their letter threatening, and argue that this is a form of "tone policing," in which "a white person decides which tone should be used in the anti-racism debate."[34] Seeing that this blog was posted on their website, it can be read as their official comment on the situation, which makes it difficult to insist that they do not speak out publicly.

Two days later, on 1 November 2017, they also published an open letter on their website to the councilor who was responsible for the final decision to discontinue their collaboration on the street names project. In this letter, they express their suspicion that the councilor had originally initiated the project partly in order to limit the group's activity as protesters, and that they themselves had already discussed exiting it. They call the collaboration "a prestige project for the municipality of Utrecht" and state that they believe

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32   My translation from the Dutch original: "dat de Grauwe Eeuw niet het debat zoekt. Ze zijn niet geïnteresseerd of hun boodschap bij een breed publiek aankomt en preken voor eigen parochie. Als je nooit naar anderen luistert, heb je altijd gelijk. Dat is benauwend."
33   My translation from the Dutch original: "Wij hebben gebruik gemaakt van onze vrijheid van meningsuiting en het recht om te demonstreren om onze rechten niet gediscrimineerd te worden op te eisen."
34   My translation from the Dutch original: "om als wit persoon de toon te bepalen in het antiracismedebat."

that the councilor had always planned to excommunicate them once they were no longer necessary ("Open brief aan wethouder Diepeveen").[35] In the same post, they emphasize that the only reason for the fact that there will be no counteraction from their side is that "this is not about De Grauwe Eeuw, nor the municipality of Utrecht; the decolonization of Utrecht's public space is the priority."[36] If the municipality wishes to continue the project without them, so they state, they will comply, but only in order to make sure that the project as such will not be jeopardized.

Because these detailed responses are publicly available on their website, their representation by the mainstream media as a group that refuses to speak out publicly is in fact a misrepresentation. As the activists have frequently declared on their website, their refusal to speak to the mainstream media is meant as a disruption of the latter's usually unquestioned authority when it comes to societal issues, such as the public representation of postcolonial memory. Their aim is to address these societal issues without having them filtered by this normative discourse. Therefore, their reputation as "shadowy," as VVD chairman Gilissen called them, does not correspond to their public self-representation. Instead, it can be interpreted as the result of a form of selective journalism, in which reporters disregard any of the group's public statements made through media channels other than their own. Representing the group as unresponsive is a way of dodging its criticism of the media as perpetuators of the status quo, and parrying its strategy of silence by turning it into something that reflects badly upon the activists themselves.

An example of this kind of selective journalism can be found in an article for *Algemeen Dagblad* that is entitled "Who are hiding behind De Grauwe Eeuw?"[37] This article includes the following paragraph:

> Who are behind De Grauwe Eeuw, and what are their motives? An interview with this newspaper is not an option: the group has a "no white media-policy". "We write on our own platforms, because we refuse to give power to white media", declared one of its members recently in an interview with *Hollandistan*, which is a website for young Muslims. "This policy is based on anti-racist motives."

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35   My translation from the Dutch original: "een prestigeproject van Gemeente Utrecht."
36   My translation from the Dutch original: "omdat het allemaal [...] noch om De Grauwe Eeuw, noch om gemeente Utrecht gaat. Dit gaat over het dekoloniseren van het Utrechtse straatbeeld en dat heeft prioriteit."
37   My translation from the Dutch original: "Wie gaan er schuil achter De Grauwe Eeuw?"

The statement was provided by Michael van Zeijl, the only member of De Grauwe Eeuw which this newspaper was able to trace. (Groenendijk)[38]

The quote in question was taken from a video that was made on 15 August 2017 by *Hollandistan*, an independent online news platform that was founded by Dutch sociologist and journalist Sangar Paykhar in 2015.[39] In a conversation with *Spreekbuis*, a trade magazine for media professionals, Paykhar calls *Hollandistan* "an experiment to see whether we as Muslims in the Netherlands could initiate an alternative to existing mainstream media, using only our own resources" ("Hollandistan wil alle nieuwe media inzetten").[40] He mentions that many Dutch Muslims are dissatisfied with the mainstream media and their hostile attitude toward Muslims. *Hollandistan* is therefore meant as a contribution to "the diversity and pluralism of the Dutch media landscape."[41] As such, Paykhar's point of view regarding mainstream media is similar to that of De Grauwe Eeuw, to the extent that he criticizes this discourse for perpetuating an imbalanced representation of, in his case, Muslims in the Netherlands. Whereas De Grauwe Eeuw responds to this perceived imbalance by refusing to partake in it, Paykhar initiated *Hollandistan* as a way to improve on it.

Because of their shared wariness of the mainstream media, De Grauwe Eeuw's decision to accept an interview with *Hollandistan* makes sense: it is an example of their policy of reserving their voice for media platforms that represent marginalized rather than dominant positions in Dutch society. The resulting conversation, between Paykhar and the activist Michael van Zeijl, marked an important moment in the history of De Grauwe Eeuw, to the extent that this was the first time that one of its members showed their face on video and spoke out on a platform other than their own. During the

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38   My translation from the Dutch original: "Wie zitten achter De Grauwe Eeuw, en wat zijn hun drijfveren? Een interview met deze krant behoort niet tot de mogelijkheden: de groep heeft een 'geen witte media-policy'. 'Wij schrijven op onze eigen platforms, omdat we witte media geen macht willen geven', liet één van de leden onlangs weten in een interview aan *Hollandistan*, een website voor jonge moslims. 'Dat doen wij vanuit antiracistisch motief.' De uitspraak is van Michael van Zeijl, het enige lid van de Grauwe Eeuw dat deze krant kon traceren."

39   As of 2020, the website of *Hollandistan* is no longer online. I am grateful to the platform's founder and contributor, Sangar Paykhar, for making the video of his interview with De Grauwe Eeuw available to me nevertheless.

40   My translation from the Dutch original: "als een experiment om te kijken of wij als moslims in Nederland op eigen kracht een alternatief kunnen oprichten voor bestaande mainstream media."

41   My translation from the Dutch original: "aan diversiteit en pluriformiteit van het Nederlands medialandschap."

interview, Zeijl not only elaborates on their "no white media-policy," he also declares the central motivation of his group and of himself as an activist, in the following way:

> My goal as an activist is to kick open doors that usually remain closed, and we are willing to go quite far with that. However, we would not attack people personally, not at all. We are trying to do our work as much as possible within the limits of the law.
> Our objective is to create awareness and to empower marginalized groups. We hope to inspire other people, who experience racism and who have a colonial past that is being ignored completely to become proactive as well. We want them to realize that it is ok to stand up for themselves. (Qtd. in Paykhar, "Gevaren van activisme")[42]

This quote includes two direct statements about De Grauwe Eeuw's objectives and methods. In the first half of the quote, Zeijl declares that, although his group is willing to explore the limits of the law in pursuing their goals, they are nevertheless non-violent: "we would not attack people personally" (see citation above). The second half is a description of the action group's main objectives: to create awareness and to empower marginalized people.

   With these statements in mind, *Algemeen Dagblad*'s claim (Groenendijk) that De Grauwe Eeuw's motives are unclear can be identified as selective journalism: it is based on a citation from the very interview in which a representative of the group does in fact state their motives. By citing only Zeijl's remarks about their "no white media-policy" and meanwhile ignoring the parts of the interview in which he explains his group's objectives, the newspaper frames the group as being unwilling to share their agenda. This corresponds to Gilissen's remark about them being a shadowy group without a face, and Pekelder's argument that the group preaches to the choir. By actively ignoring the fact that the group's voice is available on platforms other than those of the mainstream media, such journalism misrepresents the activists' no white media-policy as the complete refusal to explain

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42   My translation from the Dutch original: "Mijn doel als activist is om deuren open te trappen die altijd dicht blijven, en wij zijn best bereid om daar ver in te gaan. Niet dat we daar mensen persoonlijk mee gaan aanvallen, nee dat niet, we gaan ook proberen om dat zoveel mogelijk binnen de wet te doen. Het gaat ons om het awareness [*sic*] creëren, het gaat ons om het empoweren [*sic*] van gemarginaliseerde groepen. Dus zodat andere mensen die slachtoffer van racisme zijn en die een koloniaal verleden hebben wat totaal genegeerd wordt, dat die ook proactief gaan worden, dat die gaan merken van hé, ik mag wel voor mezelf opkomen."

themselves, thereby presenting their silence as potentially threatening to society.

This interpretation of De Grauwe Eeuw as a potential threat to society has not remained limited to the mainstream media. In November 2017, one month after they were banned from the Utrecht street names project, the group was mentioned in the *Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands* (NCTV). This report is published four times a year by the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, a division of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security. The report is published in both Dutch and English and is, according to its colophon, meant as "a broad outline of the threat to the Netherlands posed by domestic and international terrorism" (8). It bases itself "on information from the intelligence and security services, the police, public sources and foreign partners, and on analyses by embassy staff" (8).

In this report, De Grauwe Eeuw is mentioned under the section-header "Extremism," as one among several "relatively new far-left anti-racist activist groups" that "consist mainly of activists with migrant backgrounds. They are fighting against what they perceive to be racist and colonial symbols in Dutch society," such as "the Dutch East India Company, street names and statues" (7). In an interview with *De Volkskrant*, a representative of the bureau emphasizes that their mentioning of De Grauwe Eeuw in the report does not mean that the activists are explicitly understood to be terrorists. Rather, the report aims to outline potential forms of radicalization and polarization: "We want to signal developments early on and sketch a threat assessment that is as wide as possible" (qtd. in Vos).[43] This elaboration indicates that De Grauwe Eeuw is interpreted as a potential threat, much like the way in which the mainstream media has profiled the group.

These considerations show that the main benefit of the type of silence that is deployed by De Grauwe Eeuw is also its biggest risk. Although De Grauwe Eeuw's silence vis-à-vis the mainstream media was a way for the group to avoid perpetuating the latter's power position, the media have turned that strategy against itself, by taking the group's silence as an invitation to propagate their own interpretations about them. These interpretations, which frame the group as a threat to society, can be repeated until the group opt to refute them publicly, by breaking their silence. Therefore, as long as the group refuses to enter the dominant news discourse, they de facto confirm this discourse's representation of them as potentially dangerous. As such, instead of a disruption of the status quo, the group's silence risks

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43   My translation from the Dutch original: "We willen vroeg ontwikkelingen signaleren en een zo breed mogelijk dreigingsbeeld schetsen."

becoming a confirmation of it. In his article about silent resistance, Sean Gray also stresses this risk, when he warns that silence is a vulnerable form of communication: "silent individuals risk losing control of their silence's meaning – especially if they have little or no opportunity to correct misinterpretation" (13).

That De Grauwe Eeuw itself became aware of this risk is shown by the fact that the group eventually did decide to accept an interview with a national newspaper on 16 August 2018, one year after the controversy concerning its letter about the Coen Tunnel had begun. The article in question is a double interview with De Grauwe Eeuw's Zeijl and his colleague from an allied activist group, Rogier Meijerink. In this article, the interviewer reminds her readers that Zeijl "does not often speak extensively to the 'white, racist press', among which he ranks *De Volkskrant* as well. But, this afternoon, he has decided to tell his story, possibly only this once, as he declares" (Huisman).[44] The reason for this rare decision to break his usual silence is that "He finds that he is often misunderstood" (qtd. in Huisman).[45]

In the interview, Zeijl mentions his group's inclusion in the Terrorist Threat Assessment as an example of such misunderstanding: "We do not see ourselves as extremists. I predominantly send official requests about street names. Especially when keeping in mind the kind of injustice which we are fighting against, I find our actions themselves not to be so extreme" (qtd. in Huisman).[46] His colleague activist, Meijerink, adds that "The inclusion of De Grauwe Eeuw in a report from the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism is pure propaganda, meant to present the group in a bad light. If they would regard a group like that to be truly dangerous, they would rather monitor them quietly."[47] Zeijl himself explicitly makes the connection with his group's notorious silence: "The quieter we are, the more nervous they become."[48] However, despite all the "fables that exist about me

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44   My translation from the Dutch original: "praat niet vaak uitgebreid met de 'witte, racistische pers', waaronder hij ook de Volkskrant schaart. Maar deze middag neemt hij de tijd om, misschien wel eenmalig zegt hij, zijn verhaal te doen."

45   My translation from the Dutch original: "Hij vindt dat hij vaak verkeerd wordt begrepen."

46   My translation from the Dutch original: "Wij zien onszelf niet als extremisten. Ik stuur voornamelijk officiële verzoeken over straatnamen. Zeker gezien het onrecht waartegen wij strijden, vind ik zulke acties zelf niet zo extreem."

47   My translation from the Dutch original: "Dat De Grauwe Eeuw wordt genoemd in een rapport van de Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding is puur propaganda, om de groep in een kwaad daglicht te stellen. Als ze zo'n groep werkelijk gevaarlijk zouden vinden, zouden ze die stilletjes in de gaten houden."

48   My translation from the Dutch original: "Hoe stiller wij zijn, hoe nerveuzer zij worden."

in the media," he emphasizes that "I draw the line far before violence. We are not violent."[49]

This interview shows the limitations of De Grauwe Eeuw's disruptive protest strategy. News reporters have the power to ignore the group's voice as long as it dwells outside of the norm, while misrepresenting its silent treatment of the mainstream media as a general unwillingness to declare its motives publicly. As a result of this, the group finally decided to accept an interview with *De Volkskrant*, if only to rectify its negative framing by this and other national newspapers. In other words, although De Grauwe Eeuw's refusal to submit its voice to the mainstream media is perhaps an effective form of resistance to it, it still fails to set the group free from its dominance.

In a text called "Freedom's Silences," political theorist Wendy Brown draws the same conclusion, when she argues that "while silence can be a mode of resistance to power," it is "not yet freedom precisely insofar as it constitutes resistance to domination rather than its own discursive bid for hegemony" (97). Correspondingly, De Grauwe Eeuw's silence vis-à-vis the mainstream media may disrupt the latter's authority temporarily. But without a voice that is strong enough to challenge that discourse, this disruption can be no more than a temporary reprieve, or as Brown calls it, "a defense in the context of domination, rather than a sign of emancipation from it" (97). In short, facing its criminalization by the mainstream media and the government, De Grauwe Eeuw eventually saw no other choice than to break its silence toward them and explicitly declare its non-extremism and non-violence. The following section will explore what this means for the limitations of silence as a strategy of social activism.

Using voice and silence together

In a text called "The Paradox of Silence: Some Questions About Silence as Resistance," legal scholar Dorothy Roberts discusses the thin line between silence as resistance, and silence as an obstacle to resistance: "This ambiguity should make scholars cautious about their own interpretations of silence" (346). Because silence is exactly the practice of not declaring one's position, opinions or motives, it is not always possible "to discern the transformative potential of what is largely a response to subjugation. The distinction between what is compelled and what is defiance is not always apparent"

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49   My translation from the Dutch original: "alle fabels in de media over mij"; "De grens ligt voor mij ver voor geweld. Wij zijn niet gewelddadig."

(346). Reformulated within the context of De Grauwe Eeuw's case study, Roberts's question would be: is the group's silence vis-à-vis the mainstream media an expression of defiance aimed at transforming the status quo, or is it an expression of its *inability* to transform the status quo? The latter option would be to understand the activists' refusal to participate in the dominant discourse as symptomatic of their marginalized position within it.

Roberts' critical perspective on silence to some extent recalls Wendy Brown's argument that silence is "a defense in the context of domination, rather than a sign of emancipation from it" (97). Brown understands silence as the practice of "refusing complicity in injurious interpellations or in subjection through regulation" (97). In other words, while she agrees that silence may not yet be a form of emancipation, she argues that it does at least challenge domination. Whereas Brown therefore does regard silence positively, Roberts is more skeptical, as she asks: "Does outsiders' silence in response to dominant speech challenge the status quo or simply acquiesce in it?" (347). With this question, Roberts suggests an understanding of silence not as a refuge from, but as the silent acceptance of, domination. Correspondingly, De Grauwe Eeuw's refusal to discuss their dissenting point of view with representatives of the status quo could also be understood as them shying away from confrontation.

This perspective can be found, for example, in an article that journalist Klaas Cobbaut wrote for online opinion magazine *Doorbraak* in response to De Grauwe Eeuw's interview with *De Volkskrant* (Huisman).[50] In his piece, which is called "Does the Left actually want to hear counterarguments?", Cobbaut notices the group's unwillingness to engage in debate, and argues that this is a recognizable left-wing attitude: "It is a common sight nowadays: the Grand Righteousness of the Left has assumed such large proportions that it requires no further argumentation" (Cobbaut).[51] Throughout his article, he uses De Grauwe Eeuw as an example to argue how their "lack of interest in a civilized debate" proves that such activism cannot be reasoned with: "among many progressive thinkers, a moral absolutism has been installed that refuses to be contradicted" (Cobbaut).[52]

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50   Belgian opinion website *Doorbraak*, not to be confused with Dutch anti-capitalist activist platform *Doorbraak*, which was referenced in Chapter 3.

51   My translation from the Dutch original: "Wil Links wel tegenargumenten horen?"; "Je ziet dit de laatste tijd steeds vaker: het Grote Gelijk van links neemt zulke proporties aan dat het geen argumenten meer nodig heeft."

52   My translation from the Dutch original: "niet meer geïnteresseerd zijn in een beschaafd debat"; "installeert zich bij veel progressieven een moreel absolutisme dat geen tegenspraak meer duldt."

This point of view marks a return to the power imbalance between the two predominant voices in the debate about postcolonial memory, which was discussed near the beginning of this chapter. The example of historian Piet Emmer showed how he naturalizes his own perspective by framing the voice of the opposition as unreasonable. Cobbaut's interpretation of De Grauwe Eeuw's silence corresponds to this form of framing to the extent that he argues that it is reasonable to be willing to hear counterarguments through "civilized" debate, and therefore, that an unwillingness to partake in such debates is unreasonable, and even shows a lack of "civilization." In short, De Grauwe Eeuw's decision to remain silent in the face of a normative discourse that represents them as unreasonable may also be understood as confirming, rather than disrupting, that representation.

These considerations may seem to encourage the conclusion that De Grauwe Eeuw's silent treatment of the mainstream media has failed to be an effective form of resistance. However, such a conclusion would ignore the fact that the group's silence is part of a larger protest strategy that, as a whole, has been effective. Zeijl himself points this out during his interview with *De Volkskrant*: "The way in which the Netherlands reflects on its colonial past is changing" (qtd. in Huisman).[53] As an example of his group's direct influence on this gradual change, the activist mentions the Utrecht street names project, which, despite De Grauwe Eeuw's exit halfway through, was still successful. When the interviewer suggests that this and similar projects would perhaps happen more often if the group would be willing to engage in more dialogues about their point of view, in which they would also listen to others, Zeijl answers: "Dialogue prolongs the status quo, while action needs to be taken" (qtd. in Huisman).[54] He elaborates: "I take it as a form of moral blackmail when I am told: we can only listen to you when you make it easy for us."[55]

These remarks paradoxically argue for the uselessness of dialogue within the context of a dialogue. They may serve as an indication of the fact that activists of De Grauwe Eeuw breaking their silence in this particular instance does not equal the renouncement of their entire silence policy. Rather, their approach to protest combines forms of speaking out with forms of deliberate silence. It combines spray-painting their point of view on public

53   My translation from the Dutch original: "Het denken in Nederland over het koloniale verleden is […] aan het veranderen."

54   My translation from the Dutch original: "Dialoog verlengt de status quo, terwijl er actie ondernomen moet worden."

55   My translation from the Dutch original: "Ik zie het als een vorm van morele chantage als men zegt: we kunnen alleen naar je luisteren, als je het ons gemakkelijk maakt."

property with an outspoken unwillingness to make this point of view open to debate. This approach offers a welcome perspective on public debates about postcolonial memory, namely that, as long as these debates are hosted and led by representatives of the status quo, they are more likely to perpetuate rather than change that status quo. Nevertheless, as the media's and the government's criminalization of the group has suggested, remaining silent in contexts where speaking out is the norm has its limitations as a strategy of resistance. The fact that the group eventually decided to speak to a national newspaper in order to make their non-violent motives explicit shows that the activists themselves also realized that, at some point, their silence had ceased to work in their favor, and had instead become a liability to their project.

Therefore, this case study shows that, although refusing to submit one's voice to a dominant discourse can be a way to disrupt that discourse's authority, such disruption cannot be the final step of the process. In order to make sure that this disruption also leads to a reconfiguration of authority, the silence may need to be broken in order to articulate an alternative norm. For this reason, Brown suggests that "one historical-political place of silence for collective subjects emerging into history is this crossed one: a place of potentially pleasurable reprieve in newly acquired zones of freedom and privacy, yet a place of 'freedom from' that is not yet freedom to make the world" (97). The insight offered by her definition of silence as "freedom from," rather than freedom as such, is that silence may protect one's voice from domination, but that this is not yet the same as emancipation. Combining deliberate silence with a carefully aimed voice can be a way to not only disrupt, but reconfigure authority, or construct an alternative to it.

Conclusions

In the public debate about Dutch postcolonial memory in public space, two main perspectives can be identified. One perspective is in favor of colonial statues and other public memorials that honor well-known colonizers as national heroes. The other perspective suggests that such glorifying symbols are inappropriate in postcolonial societies like the Netherlands, in which many citizens are descended from the colonized rather than the colonizers.

De Grauwe Eeuw is a group of activists who, far from aiming to contribute to this debate, instead aim to disrupt the possibility of the debate as such. In their point of view, debating prolongs the status quo, to the extent that, as long as the conversation is still taking place, nothing will be changed.

The disruptive quality of their protest strategy can be detected both in their actions, and in their "no white media policy," as they call it. Their actions often aim to disrupt Dutch citizen's usually passive and unconscious acceptance of postcolonial memory as it is presented to them through public memorials, for example by spray-painting slogans such as "get rid of colonial glorification" or "genocide" on statues that portray famous colonizers as national heroes. By disrupting the glorifying way in which the colonial past is staged in public space, the group encourages citizens to become alienated from this glorification, so that different representations may be articulated.

In similar fashion, De Grauwe Eeuw's attitude toward the mainstream media is aimed at disrupting the latter's authority when it comes to shaping public debate about societal issues. By openly refusing to speak to the mainstream media, the activists prevent it from, as they call it, "whitesplaining" their point of view. In other words, the activists see the mainstream media as an apparatus that is aimed at reproducing the status quo through enabling dialogues between unequally staged voices, in which marginal voices are not granted the same gravitas as the dominant voices which they oppose. As such, the group's silent treatment of these dominant news platforms can be interpreted as an autonomous form of societal participation, that protects it from having to compromise its political voice. The activists reserve this voice for what they deem to be non-dominant platforms, such as their own website and independent news platforms like *Hollandistan*, which represent marginalized positions in Dutch society.

Through selective journalism that ignores most of De Grauwe Eeuw's communication on platforms other than those belonging to the mainstream media, reporters have misrepresented the group's silent treatment of these particular media as a general unwillingness to share its agenda with the wider public. Through this misrepresentation, the group has gained the reputation of a potential threat to society, a designation that was even made official in a publication by the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism in 2017. This reputation has had a directly negative effect on its productivity as an activist movement, to the extent that the municipality of Utrecht discontinued their collaboration with the group on a project that was aimed at improving the awareness of colonial history in the public space of the city.

In order to rectify these false rumors about its potentially violent tendencies, De Grauwe Eeuw eventually decided to break its silence by accepting an interview with a national newspaper in August 2018. This disregard of their own policy indicates that the activists were aware of the risk of using silence as a strategy of resistance: one cannot always remain in control of

how one's silence is interpreted by other, more powerful parties. Depending on such interpretations, silence can cease to be a disruption of the authority of the discourse it refuses to submit to, and unwillingly become a silent acceptance of that authority. Therefore, rather than arguing that silence as a strategy of protest is to be preferred over vocal protest, or vice versa, the central conclusion of this chapter is that silence and voice do not have to be opposites, but can be approached as allied modes of protest. Deliberate silence can disrupt the authority of dominant discourses, and a carefully aimed voice can help turn such disruption into lasting change.

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Conclusion

Beyond logocentrism

Abstract

In this chapter, I depart from the logocentric tendency to see voice and silence as binary opposed metaphors about power: voice as empowerment; silence as powerlessness. Instead, I propose to see voice and silence as allied modes of articulation, relating to each other not in terms of *either/or*, but of *this/and.* I develop this proposition by providing an overview of the four main types of voice and silence that can be identified in postcolonial memory conflicts: deceptive, appropriated, repressive, and disruptive voices; empowering, protective, resistant, and disruptive silences. The purpose of this classification is to show how moving beyond logocentrism will benefit postcolonial memory studies.

Keywords: postcolonial memory; memory studies; voice and silence; logocentrism; articulation; Dutch colonialism

Conflicts about postcolonial memory, in the Netherlands and elsewhere, often revolve around *voice* and *silence.* The implicit or explicit topic of discussion tends to be: who has the right or ability to tell their stories and who does not? In other words: who has a voice, and who is silenced? As such, postcolonial memory conflicts represent a wider tendency in cultural theory and activism to use voice and silence as opposite metaphors concerning empowerment: silence is generally understood to indicate powerlessness, while speaking up is understood as the act of emancipation that solves this powerlessness. This understanding of voice and silence is *logocentric*, in that it prioritizes voice over silence, and reduces silence to the absence of voice.

However, as I have argued throughout this book, there are many forms of speaking up that are not empowering. To be granted a voice does not necessarily mean to be listened to. For marginalized subjects, to speak up in a hostile environment might even mean to expose oneself to judgment,

regulation, or physical violence: anything you say can be used against you. If using one's voice sometimes means becoming subject to power, remaining silent can mean resisting power. This consideration informs the case study analyses of all four chapters. In each chapter, I have discussed forms of voice and silence that disprove the logocentric binary opposition between voice-as-power and silence-as-powerlessness. The four kinds of voices I have analyzed are:

(1) *deceptive*;
(2) *appropriated*;
(3) *repressive*;
(4) *disruptive*.

And their corresponding silences:

(1) *empowering*;
(2) *protective*;
(3) *resistant*;
(4) *disruptive*.

The purpose of this classification has been to theorize voice and silence not as opposites, but as allied modes of articulation: my proposition is to see their relationship not as a matter of *either/or*, but of *this/and*. In this conclusion, I will bring together all chapters' main findings, in order to show how this understanding of voice and silence is indispensable for the analysis of postcolonial memory conflicts in the Netherlands.

Deceptive voices; empowering silences

Chapter 1 is an exploration of voices and silences with regard to individual and collective articulations of Moluccan identity in the Netherlands. The chapter compares the case of my grandmother's individual articulation of identity with that of adat as an articulation of collective identity. In both cases, voice and silence are used together to articulate identity in such a way that outsiders cannot interfere in the process. Throughout her life as a first-generation Moluccan migrant in the Netherlands, my grandmother remained silent about certain details of her pre-migration life. Her silence was so complete that her husband and her son, my grandfather and my father, were unaware of her place of birth: everyone assumed she had come from the main Moluccan island of Ambon, whereas in fact she came from a lesser-known island called Leti. Her refusal to rectify this false impression

culminated in them taking a trip to Ambon for my father's eighteenth birthday. My father accidentally realized that they had traveled to the wrong island during a conversation with a random passerby.

The reason it took my father so long to realize that his mother had kept quiet about the misunderstanding about her place of birth was because she combined her silence with a strategic use of voice: rather than refusing to speak altogether, she *talked around the issue*. During the trip, whenever my father would ask her when they would visit her birth village, she would not outright refuse to go, nor refuse to respond. Instead, she would respond in a circuitous manner: for instance, she would say that she was not feeling well, or that she had heard that there would be bad weather later in the day. In other words, if the truth about her origin was hidden behind her silence, her silence itself was hidden behind her voice. She used her voice to deceive my father into believing she was not being silent about anything.

In my analysis of this case study, I point out that one might be inclined to interpret my grandmother's silence as a lack of voice, in the sense of Spivak's theory about the subaltern ("Can the Subaltern Speak?"; "The New Historicism"). The fact that she did not speak about her pre-migration background could be interpreted as implying that she *could not* speak about it, which in turn could be taken as an indication of a certain trauma or experience of marginalization. However, I read this situation differently: I argue that my grandmother did not speak about her past because she *did not want to*. This marks the difference between silence as a condition versus silence as a choice. The reason I interpret my grandmother's silence as a choice is because of her deliberate use of voice as a way to conceal her silence: she protected her silence from being detected. In my interpretation, her use of silence was thus *empowering* because it allowed her to stay in control of her own history; her use of voice was *deceptive* because it was meant to distract my father's attention away from her silence.

The reason I started the book with this personal case study is to show how the articulation of postcolonial memory is not only a collective, but also an individual practice. My grandmother's migration to the Netherlands was the result of the end of Dutch colonial rule over the Moluccan islands. She used her voice and her silence together as a joint strategy to present her memories from before her migration selectively: to only allow outsiders access to her memories up until a point she was comfortable with.

In the chapter's second case study, on adat as a collective identity marker, the same strategy can be identified. Like in my grandmother's case, adat is a concrete example of identity being articulated through the interplay of what is and what is not expressed: whereas adat is commonly invoked

as a central element of Moluccan identity, the exact meaning of the term is generally kept vague. Often, people are reluctant to define adat at all, instead presenting it as a secret in which Moluccan identity is sheltered. In both case studies, silence is not a paralyzing condition that one must be liberated from through the intervention of voice. Instead, silence is a deliberate, empowering action, used to protect select aspects of one's identity from the meddling of outsiders.

Apart from being examples of articulation strategies that combine deceptive voices with empowering silences, both case studies are also examples of *postcolonial memory* articulation, specifically. Adat, like my grandmother's presentation of personal memories, is a selective reference to the time before the Moluccan migration to the Netherlands in 1951. The term is a flexible reference to age-old Moluccan customs: by remaining deliberately vague or even secretive about its exact definition, adat can mean whatever it needs to mean depending on the situation. Therefore, as with my grandmother's silence about her background, the silence surrounding adat is not a condition that needs to be cured by voice, but a deliberate smoke screen deployed to keep others at bay, in order to stay in control of one's own memories and identity.

Appropriated voices; protective silences

Chapter 2 continues the previous chapter's focus on Moluccan memory and identity but shifts the emphasis from self-representation to representation by others, specifically by national news and social media. In other words, whereas Chapter 1 was about postcolonial memory as articulated within the Moluccan community, Chapter 2 concerns postcolonial memory as articulated in Dutch society at large. The concrete case study that I use in this chapter is that of the train hijackings of 1975 and 1977. These actions were undertaken by second-generation Moluccans in the Netherlands and were aimed at national and international support for their separatist objective. My analysis focuses on the way in which these actions were remembered both in national newspapers and in discussions on social media.

These discussions tend to place the actions within a larger context of postcolonial memory. They often revolve around questions of justice and responsibility, and take place through the identification of victims, perpetrators, and heroes. On the one hand, if the actions are remembered as the justified results of a long history of the Dutch colonial oppression of Moluccans, the Dutch state is understood as the perpetrator of the situation,

the Moluccan community as its victims, and the hijackers as the heroes that fought against the community's marginalized position in Dutch society. On the other hand, if the actions are remembered as an unwarranted reaction to the community's felt marginalization, the hijackers are understood as perpetrators, their hostages as their victims, and the state as the heroic entity ending the hijackings and saving the hostages.

In my analysis of these disputes over collective memory, I point out that the identification of victims, perpetrators, and heroes is a practice based on the granting and taking away of voices. Remembering any party as either victims or perpetrators takes away their voice: as victims because they are deprived of it, as perpetrators because they have lost their right to it. The hero archetype differs from the other two to the extent that to interpret individuals as heroes does not mean to suppress, but rather to appropriate their voices as expressing larger ideological positions. When a community identifies a certain individual as its hero, it means that this individual is constructed as an exemplar for this community's collective identity. When elevated to the status of hero, the individual's voice is thus appropriated as the *voice of the community.*

The type of voices analyzed in this chapter could thus be defined as *appropriated voices*: "heroic" voices that are repeated and amplified through media representation and imbued with collective significance. In the chapter, I point out how this memory practice is intensified if heroes are killed during the actions for which they will later be remembered. Unlike living heroes, deceased heroes cannot interrupt the appropriation of their voices. The community can speak through them in whichever way it wants. The chapter therefore ends with a reflection on living people who refuse to be remembered as heroes. Through analyses of surviving hijackers, as well as Dutch soldiers who were tasked with putting a stop to the hijacking of 1977, I identify the type of silence which they use to counter the appropriation of their voices as *protective silence.* If becoming the voice of one's community means to lose that voice to the community, remaining or becoming silent can be a strategy to refuse this dubious honor. To retract one's voice becomes to protect one's voice.

These first two chapters both concern what memory scholar Jan Assmann terms *communicative memory*: non-institutional negotiations of collective memory that are made through *self-representation* (Chapter 1) and *media representation* (Chapter 2). In contrast, the latter two chapters both concern what Assmann terms *cultural memory.* That is to say, they are about institutionalizing collective memory in *public space* (Chapter 3), and about protesting such institutionalization through *social activism* (Chapter 4).

Repressive voices; resistant silences

Chapter 3 is an analysis of the controversy about Dutch colonizer Jan Pieterszoon Coen's statue in Hoorn. Coen is both remembered as a hero for establishing the Dutch spice monopoly, and as a perpetrator who massacred the Bandanese population in pursuit of that monopoly. Depending on how he is remembered, his glorified presence in public space through the statue that was built in his honor can be taken either as justified or as unjustified. In the chapter, I focus on the accident of 2011, in which the statue was toppled over by a crane truck in the aftermath of the city's annual fair. While the municipality made preparations to renovate the statue and place it back on its pedestal, journalist Eric van de Beek started a petition to have the statue be relocated to Westfries Museum, located in the same square.

Rather than heeding the request, the municipality placed the statue back on its pedestal in 2012, but still offered the protesters a set of compromises. First, the renovated statue was provided with an updated inscription that gave voice to those who were critical of the statue, by mentioning Coen's violent legacy and paying attention to the conflict in society about whether or not his statue is an appropriate articulation of postcolonial memory. Second, the Westfries Museum devoted an exhibition to Coen's controversial status, which, like the updated inscription, was aimed at including more voices into this societal debate. Third, the exhibition also came with a special publication presented as a glossy magazine that performed Coen's reputation as that of a controversial celebrity.

In my analysis of all three of these compromises, I understand them as gestures of what philosopher Herbert Marcuse terms repressive tolerance. Voices of dissent were tolerated in the dominant discourse on postcolonial memory only in order to repress them. By technically including the critical voices into the discourse, through the publication, the exhibition, and the inscription, the municipality of Hoorn legitimized its decision to ignore what these voices had to say: the statue was placed back on its pedestal in direct disregard of the original request. Therefore, in this situation, granting voice is a strategy of repressing voice. By giving people the illusion that their voices are being heard, their voices are in fact being dismissed.

Near the end of the chapter, I shift my emphasis once again from voice to silence. I argue that, if taking up a voice in certain contexts can mean to lose that voice, one's silence in these contexts may speak louder than one's words. To put it another way, if being granted a voice can mean being repressed, remaining silent can mean resisting that repression. This consideration informs my analysis of several protesters who refused to

take up a voice in the public debate about the statue in 2011–2012, because they realized that to speak up would have meant to be silenced. In short, what this chapter's case study about *repressive voices* and *resistant silences* shows is that, paradoxically, speaking up can mean sacrificing one's voice, and remaining silent can mean preserving one's voice.

Disruptive voices; disruptive silences

Chapter 4 is a continuation of the previous chapter's case study, but this time with an emphasis on social activism. Throughout the chapter, I analyze the activist strategies of De Grauwe Eeuw. This protest group aims to disrupt and undo the glorification of the Golden Age in Dutch public space, through actions against colonial references, including Coen's statue in Hoorn. Their actions are an example of an articulation strategy that deploys voice and silence together, in that they combine the outspoken expression of their point of view with a deliberate silence aimed at the mainstream media. On the one hand, De Grauwe Eeuw makes its anti-colonial voice heard through spray-painted slogans on statues and other public references, as well as through blog posts and social media participation. On the other hand, the group refuses to speak to the mainstream media, such as national newspapers or television, about the motivation for their actions. By openly refusing to speak to mainstream media reporters, the group prevents them from neutralizing its point of view. Both the group's voice and its silence are thus *disruptive* articulation strategies. The activists use their voices to disrupt the public discourse that remembers colonial history as something worth devoting statues to, and they use their silence to disrupt the mainstream media's attempts to appropriate and repress their voices.

However, as I show near the end of this chapter, remaining silent can be as risky as speaking up. In their news stories about De Grauwe Eeuw, reporters have misrepresented the group's silent treatment of the mainstream media as a general unwillingness to share its agenda with the wider public. This is an inaccurate portrayal of the activists, because they do in fact speak out about their motivations: they are just very selective as to their choice of media platforms. Through this misrepresentation, the group has gained the reputation of a potential threat to society, which was even made official in a publication by the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism in 2017. As such, their strategy of disruptive silence eventually started working against them to such an extent that one of the group's members decided to

accept an interview with national newspaper *De Volkskrant* in 2018 in order to rectify false rumors about their supposed terrorist agenda.

With this comparison between both the affordances and risks of voice and silence as articulation strategies, this chapter brings the book full circle: De Grauwe Eeuw's case confirms my original claim that voice and silence are not matters of *either/or*, but of *this/and*. The group's activism is built on the interplay between speaking out and remaining silent. Their deliberate silence is aimed at disrupting the authority of dominant discourses on postcolonial memory; their carefully directed voice aims to turn such disruption into lasting change.

Three considerations

Three main considerations can be made based on this book's four chapters. The first consideration is that none of the functions of voice and silence discussed are isolated phenomena. On the contrary, most voices and silences combine several of the functions that I have identified in my case studies. For example, when the train hijackers are represented as the voices of their community, the individuality of their voices is *repressed* in the same gesture in which their voices are *appropriated* to become the mouthpiece for the community's collective identity (cf. Chapter 2). When they then refuse to speak up on particular media platforms in order to *protect* their voices from such appropriation, they also *resist* the repressive tolerance at play (cf. Chapter 3). Another example: both my grandmother's *empowering* use of silence and her *deceptive* use of voice could also be analyzed for their *disruptive* qualities (cf. Chapter 1). Therefore, voice and silence are not monolithic concepts that can be placed in binary opposition to one another. Rather, exactly what counts as voice or as silence depends upon context.

The second consideration is that strategies of voice and silence can be used either to overpower or to empower. But whatever the purpose, voices and silences are invariably used together. An example of using voice and silence as a joined strategy of *overpowering* was provided in Chapter 3: the new inscription of Coen's statue in Hoorn uses a strategy of granting voice to protesters as a way to silence them. An example of using voice and silence as a joined strategy of *empowerment* was provided in Chapter 1, in which both my grandmother individually and the Moluccan community collectively were analyzed as choosing to express certain aspects of their identity, while deliberately leaving other aspects unexpressed. Both what was and what was not expressed contributed to their ownership of their own

identities. In each of these examples, silence and voice are not opposites, but allied strategies of articulation. Moreover, in each example, silence is not an absence but a presence: not an indication of a hidden or lost meaning, but something that produces meaning in and of itself.

The third and final consideration is that both speaking up and remaining silent are vulnerable positions to take up: both our voices and our silences can be appropriated by others. Your words can be used against you, but so can your silence. For instance, I interpret adat's secretive quality as the deliberate omission of fixed meaning that keeps the concept flexible. However, others have interpreted the same quality as proof of the concept's worthlessness as an identity marker (cf. Chapter 1). Another example: De Grauwe Eeuw remained silent in order to stay in control of their own voice. But eventually, this silence was used against them as an indicator of their supposed malevolent intentions (cf. Chapter 4). This vulnerability, which characterizes both voice and silence, is yet another reason to theorize these concepts together. If remaining silent can be a way to protect one's voice from appropriation by others, then a carefully aimed voice can be a way to protect one's silence from such appropriation. The terms are thus not each other's opposites, but each other's continuation.

All three of these considerations are useful for the analysis of conflicts about postcolonial memory, in the Netherlands as well as elsewhere: approaching voice and silence as allied rather than opposite modes of articulation creates the possibility of moving beyond logocentrism. In a world that is oversaturated by the spoken and written word, it can be refreshing to try to read between the lines and search for silence. In a logic of empowerment obsessed with distributing voices to the voiceless, it can be a relief to realize that silence is expressive too, just in ways that we are less accustomed to. Most importantly, accepting silence as a form of articulation takes away the pressure to speak ever louder and clearer. Perhaps the problem was never our ability to speak, but our ability to listen.

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Epilogue

"East Indian deafness"

Abstract

In this epilogue, I offer some food for thought about the relevance of analyzing the relationship between voice and silence beyond postcolonial memory. By analyzing the Dutch expression "Oost-Indisch doof zijn" ("being deaf in the East Indies way") through Spivak's theory of the subaltern and Althusser's theory of interpellation, I will suggest that every tactical response to power involves deliberate, meaningful deployments of voice *and* silence. Therefore, it is important for any analysis of conflicts over power to find ways not only to listen to the voices, but also to the silences that make up these conflicts.

Keywords: voice and silence; postcolonial memory; logocentrism; Oost-Indisch doof; Dutch colonialism; interpellation

Based on this book's four chapters, one would perhaps assume that the proposition to understand voice and silence as allied modes of articulation is only useful for the analysis of very specific case studies about postcolonial memory. However, there is an expression in the Dutch language that can serve as an example of the everyday relevance of analyzing voice and silence together: "Oost-Indisch doof zijn," which translates to "being deaf in the East Indies way." I am aware of the irony of writing a book about silence, and then refusing to become silent even after the conclusion. Nevertheless, I would still like to take a moment and offer a brief analysis of "East Indian deafness" as food for thought, in order to indicate how the relevance of this book's approach to voice and silence extends beyond the scope of its own focus on postcolonial memory.

When someone is acting "Oost-Indisch doof," it means that the person who is addressed understands perfectly well that they are being spoken to, but strategically acts as if they are not aware of it, in order to delay or avoid

the necessity of response. The Genootschap Onze Taal ("Dutch Language Society") explains the expression as follows:

> The expression dates from the nineteenth century. P.J. Harrebomée suspected that this "habit of not wanting to listen to an admonition or a request applies most to East Indians, seeing that they have a natural inertness due to the hot temperatures." However, more likely is that it stems from East Indian monarchs who, in their contacts with Western rulers, deliberately played dumb. F.A. Stoett argues that monarchs did this predominantly to win a reprieve with the Dutch. ("Oost-Indisch doof (herkomst)")[1]

This explanation includes two possible interpretations of the phenomenon: someone pretends to be deaf because they are lazy, or because they are resisting whatever is being asked of them. The first interpretation perpetuates the stereotype of colonial subjects being lazy. The second interpretation takes a more nuanced approach, implying that someone's unwillingness to listen to their colonial oppressors might be based on their refusal to accept the distribution of power between them. However, rather than explicitly voicing their refusal, the colonial subject in this scenario resists precisely by *not taking up a voice*.

Acting "Oost-Indisch doof" thus is the refusal to take up the disempowering kind of voice that was analyzed throughout all four chapters of this book: the type of voice that does not liberate one from, but subjects one to power. This feigned deafness is therefore also an example of silence as it has been analyzed throughout this book: that is, silence as a disruptive mechanism that has the power to undermine and redirect the verbal execution of power. As long as the silent party offers no verbal acknowledgment of mutual comprehension, the speaking party cannot affirm its own authority.

It is significant that this common Dutch expression about "East Indian deafness" explicitly refers to the colonization of the Dutch East Indies. By identifying this strategy of silence as something particularly deployed by colonial subjects, the expression invokes colonial power as something

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1   My translation from the Dutch original: "De uitdrukking dateert uit de 19e eeuw. P.J. Harrebomée vermoedde dat 'deze hebbelijkheid van niet te willen luisteren naar eene verma-ning of een verzoek wel het meest op de Oost-Indiërs toepasselijk is, daar hun, door de heete luchtgesteldheid, eene natuurlijke traagheid eigen is'. Waarschijnlijk moeten we echter denken aan Indische vorsten die zich bij contacten met westerse machthebbers vaak doelbewust van de domme hielden. F.A. Stoett denkt dat die vorsten dat vooral deden om uitstel te winnen bij de Nederlanders."

secured in a logic of verbal communication: the colonizer asks and the colonized answers. "East Indian deafness" is an act of resistance that is effected by disrupting the logic of this communication: the colonizer asks and the colonized does *not* answer, at least not in the way desired. The given answer may be "what do you mean?" or "sorry, did you say something?". In other words, the lack of a substantial response is not motivated by an explicit refusal to answer. Instead, it is motivated by a feigned inability to understand what is being asked, or even that something is being asked at all. The colonizer may suspect that this inability is in fact an excuse used in order to avoid responding, but as long as the colonized "acts deaf," the suspicion cannot be confirmed.

As such, "East Indian deafness" resonates closely to the way in which political scientists Sophia Dingli and Thomas N. Cooke define political silence (cf. Chapter 1). As they argue, this type of silence happens when someone "refuses to validate, confirm, or verify [...] another actor's pursuit of power or attempts to execute power" (2). Their definition of silence explicitly presents the phenomenon as a deliberate action: a refusal to engage in communication, which "produces uncertainty. Through the usage of silence by the agent, the receiver of the silence entangles in ambiguity and confusion about how and whether language, symbols and meaning are internalized, organized, and synthesized" (15).

This definition is useful because it describes silence as the *refusal* rather than the *inability* to speak. As discussed in Chapter 1, the latter is an all-too-common logocentric interpretation of silence, in that it reduces silence to the negative opposite of voice. Silence understood as the failure of voice implies the *involuntary* nature of one's silence. This understanding forms the basis of literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's approach to silence in "Can the Subaltern Speak?". It is the type of silence that implies a desire for voice: the silence must be broken, erased, or solved through the intervention of voice (cf. Spivak, "The New Historicism").

In contrast to this logocentric understanding of silence, Dingli and Cooke's definition leaves the exact relationship between silence and voice unclear. To them, the power of silence lies exactly in the ambiguity of its meaning and purpose: the reason behind someone's silence can be speculated about, but it cannot be affirmed. As long as someone does not speak, it can only be *assumed* that they either cannot speak, or that they can, but refuse to; that they have nothing to say, or rather that they have something specific to say which they are withholding.

This emphasis on ambiguity indicates the challenge which silence poses to a logocentric understanding of power. This challenge can be demonstrated

through philosopher Louis Althusser's theory of *interpellation*. The gist of his theory can be summarized by referring to his central example:

> the policeman hails the passerby with "hey you there" and the one who recognizes himself [*sic*] and turns around (nearly everyone) to answer the call does not, strictly speaking, preexist the call. [...] The passerby turns precisely to acquire a certain identity, one purchased, as it were, with the price of guilt. The act of recognition becomes an act of constitution: the address animates the subject into existence. (Butler 25)

This scene describes a situation in which a person is only constituted as potentially guilty at the moment in which they recognize the call of the police officer. The power relation between the police officer and their potential subject does not start from the moment of hailing, but from the moment in which the act of hailing is acknowledged by someone's response. This call-and-response constitution of power is what Althusser terms interpellation: recognition becomes the constitution of subjecthood. Within this scenario, "East Indian deafness" would be the situation in which one *foregoes recognition* in order to suspend the constitution of one's subjecthood. As long as the recognition of the police officer's call is suspended, one's implication in the intended power relation is suspended, too. "East Indian deafness" can thus be understood as a resistance strategy that is accomplished through the breakdown of interpellation.

A crucial aspect of this resistance strategy is its reliance upon both voice and silence. "East Indian deafness" is neither based entirely in vocal resistance, nor entirely in silent resistance. To use Althusser's example once more: reacting with "East Indian deafness" to the police officer would not be simply to ignore the call. It would be to act as if one is unaware that the call is aimed at them, or what exactly the call means. As etymologist F.A. Stoett argues in his definition of "East Indian deafness" cited above, East Indian monarchs "deliberately played dumb" in order "to win a reprieve with the Dutch" ("Oost-Indisch doof (herkomst)").[2] This description of "East Indian deafness" as a form of playing dumb indicates that it is not simply a matter of not responding: it is a matter of responding in such a way so as to imply that one has not understood the question or demand. The result is a *reprieve*, or as Dingli and Cooke would have it, a sustained ambiguity that offers "the political possibility of (re)collectivism, (re)inscription, and (re) configuration" (3). In the ambiguous *not yet* that is created by the articulation

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2   My translation from the Dutch original: "om uitstel te winnen bij de Nederlanders."

of "East Indian deafness," power relations are temporarily destabilized as a result of which the possibility is created for a reconfiguration of these relations.

This ambiguity is created in the interplay between what is and what is not expressed – or, to use two of the specific types of voice and silence that were identified in this book, this ambiguity is created through the deployment of a *disruptive silence* (cf. Chapter 4) in combination with a *deceptive voice* (cf. Chapter 1). That is, silence is used to disrupt the implementation of power; voice is used to deceive the other party into believing that this silence is not an intentional act of resistance, but the result of an unintentional hiccup in communication. What is significant about this particular resistance strategy, is not only that its description as "East Indian deafness" traces its origin back to the Dutch colonial era, but also that its quality as a common expression in the Dutch language proves its everyday relevance: it is nowadays mostly used in reference to everyday occurrences of resistance.

For instance, the expression can describe children's disobedience to their parents. When children are asked to finish their food or to go to bed, they may attempt to perform "East Indian deafness" in order to delay the fulfillment of the request. They do not disagree with the request outright, nor do they ignore it entirely: they simply act as if they did not understand it. What the everyday example of parents and children has in common with the expression's origins in the colonial era is that both situations describe an unequal power relation, in which one party is expected to answer when the other party calls, or to do what the other party asks of them. "East Indian deafness" is thus an empowering course of action within this context, because it creates a destabilizing ambiguity in which positions are temporarily unclear: what can parents do as long as their children act as if they do not understand them, other than ask again, or ask differently? The power shifts at this point, because the ambiguity only ends once the hailed party decides to cease performing its feigned "deafness."

This analysis thus shows that the strategic combination of speaking up and remaining silent is not unique to matters of postcolonial memory. In fact, it is my contention that most tactical responses to power involve deliberate, meaningful deployments of both modes of articulation. Therefore, it is important to be perceptive not only with regard to the voices, but also the silences that permeate our lives. On that note, I think this might be an appropriate time to close the book. There are those who would argue that there is always more to say and better ways to say it. Then again, others would maintain that it is important to know when to stop talking.

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This book is about *postcolonial memory* in the Netherlands. This term refers to conflicts in contemporary society about how the colonial past should be remembered. The question is often: who has the right or ability to tell their stories and who does not? In other words: who has a voice, and who is silenced? As such, these conflicts represent a wider tendency in cultural theory and activism to use voice as a metaphor for empowerment and silence as voice's negative counterpart, signifying powerlessness. And yet, there are voices that do not liberate us from, but rather subject us to power. Meanwhile, silence can be powerful: it can protect, disrupt and reconfigure. Throughout this book, it will become clear how voice and silence function not as each other's opposites, but as each other's continuation, and that postcolonial memory is articulated through the interplay of meaningful voices *and* meaningful silences.

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