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**Eurocentrism in Dutch History Education**

A discourse analysis of Dutch havo-level history education books

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Period 4, 2016-2017

19-06-2017

**Contents**

1. Summary p. 2-3
2. Chapter 1: Introduction p. 4-5
3. Chapter 2: Methodology and Theoretical Framework p. 6-13
4. Chapter 3: A Glorifying National History p. 14-20
5. Chapter 4: Justification by the Misbehaving Orient p. 21-26
6. Chapter 5: Conclusion p. 27-28
7. Bibliography p. 29-31

**Summary**

The topic of this thesis is eurocentrism in Dutch history education. With the use of a critical postcolonial lens applied in a discourse analysis I answered the following research question; ‘How are havo-level history education books about ‘The Golden Age’ in the Netherlands influenced by eurocentrism?’. The concepts of orientalism and nationalism are used to analyse how eurocentrism is embedded into Dutch history education books. The analysis is conducted on two frequently used history books for havo-level students; *Memo* and *Geschiedenis Werkplaats*. The research will focus on the seventeenth century, nicknamed ‘The Golden Age’, in relationship to Asia. This is an interesting era and relationship because the education about these topics are often marked by national frames.

Researching the presence of eurocentrism in Dutch history education is of importance because eurocentrism is interconnected with racism and education textbooks are an important part of shaping students thoughts about their nation, racial groups and power hierarchies. Acknowledging how power relations are present in the Dutch education system is a start to decline racism in the Netherlands.

During my analyses on the education books I found out that there was a strong emphasis on the positive features of trade qualities and heroism. These qualities were repeated countless times and students were invited to identify with these characteristics. Furthermore, this thesis shows that the violent behaviour of the Dutch traders and settlers is either silenced or extensionally justified by the authors of the education books. When drawing attention to the Asian population I discovered that they were primarily represented and stereotyped with negative behaviour. Stereotyping the Dutch population, on the contrary, barely occurred. If it appears, it is only with regard to positive characteristics. For Dutch negative behaviour only a single person is held accountable, but when describing bad behaviour from Asians an entire population group is said to be responsible. Besides this, the authors of the education books seemed to have chosen a vocabulary that does not invoke too much attention to the violent acts conducted by the Dutch. Eurocentrism is thus embedded in the Dutch history education system by creating a superior position for the Netherlands as it silences certain narratives, uses a careful chosen vocabulary and establishes binary oppositions between Dutch and Asian population groups.

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

As a 17-year old I attended high school in the United States of America (USA). I took a class in American history, this was a mandatory course of the curriculum. As I was previously educated in the Netherlands I noticed that the Vietnam war was taught different than the information I received from earlier read Dutch history school books. It seemed like the teacher and material used in my American history class silenced the negative actions of the USA. In the five years that followed I often thought about these history classes and the interest awoke to find out whether history education in the Netherlands also consists out of a similar one-sided narrative. This became the inspiration for my thesis subject in which I answered the following research question; ‘How are havo-level history education books about ‘The Golden Age’ in the Netherlands influenced by eurocentrism?’ The research question is answered with the use of a critical postcolonial lens applied in a discourse analysis of the education history books *Memo* and *Geschiedenis Werkplaats*.

Studying eurocentrism in education is of importance since Michael Baker, a researcher that is interested in present colonial legacies in education, as well as other researchers argued that feelings of superiority and racism are interconnected with eurocentrism.[[1]](#footnote-1) Racism is nowadays an often discussed subject that minority group members still have to endure, this information contradicts the idea of a tolerant Dutch society without institutionalized racism. A belief that many citizens of the Netherlands hold.[[2]](#footnote-2) My thesis is an eye-opener for people to realise that Dutch education is not neutral. Embedding eurocentrism in education books is a dangerous act since textbooks play an important part in shaping students perspectives on their nation, racial groups and power hierarchies.[[3]](#footnote-3) These students are future policy makers and the multicultural Dutch society will not benefit from racist policy makers. By acknowledging how power relations are embedded in the Dutch education system and laying bare hidden messages, as my thesis does, we are one step closer towards declining eurocentrism and racism in the Netherlands.

My thesis is organised in a way that the reader will first gain insight into the method and theories used, so that he or she can understand the analysis and conclusion that follows. All the information provided is organised in five chapters. The first chapter is this introduction, the second chapter will consist out of the methodology and theoretical framework. Besides this, you will find a motivation for the choices made to conduct an analysis of specific havo-level education books, eurocentrism as the analysed subject and ‘The Golden Age’ as the time slot. The theoretical framework will then continue with a definition and explanation for a critical postcolonial lens, eurocentrism, nationalism and orientalism. The concepts of nationalism and orientalism are used to lay bare the power relations present in history education textbooks. These concepts will be elaborated upon in the upcoming chapter. In addition, the connection between nationalism, orientalism and eurocentrism will be made. The chapters following this will consist out of the analyses. Chapter three shows how nationalism is embedded in Dutch history education. The focus is on the qualities emphasised in the historical narrative and silenced stories. Chapter four is on orientalism. Here, I discuss how orientalism is present and applied in the education history books. After this my research ends with an concluding chapter on my findings.

**Chapter 2: Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

In this thesis I will analyse history books with the use of a discourse analysis. The aim of a discourse analysis is to dismantle a power structure. You try to understand how ideology and power are intertwined and shape a society.[[4]](#footnote-4) All parts of society are shaped by a great amount of categories like ethnicity, class and geographical position.[[5]](#footnote-5) The discourse analysis desires to understand how these categories construct the society to show how hegemonic power works.[[6]](#footnote-6) In order to reach this understanding an event or text will be investigated while paying close attention to details.[[7]](#footnote-7) In this thesis an in-depth reading of history eduation books will be conducted in order to present how an eurocentric perspective is embedded in Dutch history education.

An analysis of history education books is chosen since education textbooks play an important part in shaping students perspectives on their nation, racial groups and power hierarchies.[[8]](#footnote-8) History is a class that primarily consist out of narratives about the past. Miranda Christou, who researched patriotism and nationalism in history, argues that history and especially history education can function as a tool to promote national unity.[[9]](#footnote-9) According to her, when history is used to create a collective narrative it is often shaped in a way that meets a desirable image of the past. The ‘dark chapters’ are left undiscussed.[[10]](#footnote-10) Melissa F. Weiner shows in her article ‘(E)Racing Slavery’ that eurocentrism is present in the Dutch education system.[[11]](#footnote-11) Eurocentrism is a narrative of Europe that creates a superior position for Europe and only discusses certain stories while silencing others.[[12]](#footnote-12) An analysis on how eurocentrism is embedded into the education system conducted on material that is full of narratives and framed by nationalistic desires is a wonderful way to research power relations in education.

The analysis will be conducted on the information provided in the history books about ‘The Golden Age’ in relationship to Asia. ‘The Golden Age’ is the nickname often used in the Netherlands for the seventeenth century. This period is characterised by great economic and cultural growth. Trade has been the driving force behind this growth in which the national Dutch East Indian Company (VOC) played a major part.[[13]](#footnote-13) Together with the West East India Company the VOC helped the Netherlands to become a world power during the seventeenth century.[[14]](#footnote-14) Colonialism played an important part in achieving this powerful position because the Dutch gained their trade products from the colonized lands. These products were sold with great profits to other -mainly European- nations.[[15]](#footnote-15) When founding the VOC, in 1602, the aim was not to establish colonies in Asia. Solely obtaining Asian products for trade was the goal.[[16]](#footnote-16) But in 1619 and the years that followed the Dutch did began to start establishing trading posts by colonizing areas.[[17]](#footnote-17) It was never the goal to oppress the inhabitants of these colonized lands, the inherent population was free to continue practicing their own culture as long as this did not interfere with Dutch trade.[[18]](#footnote-18) Nevertheless, the inhabitants often did experience negative influences from the Dutch presence. This is because the Dutch settlers and traders were not hesitant to use violence, corruption and slavery in order to organize their trade in Asia and obtain enough trade products.[[19]](#footnote-19) I chose this timeframe and subject because the education about this period is often marked by national frames that hides certain behaviour conducted during this timeframe.[[20]](#footnote-20) This makes it an interesting historical time period to investigate with regard to eurocentrism.

During my analysis the aim will be to find out how Asia is depicted and if certain historical narratives are silenced. In order to discover which narratives are silenced I will use additional historical literature that provides information about ‘The Golden Age’ and VOC from a transnational perspective. This perspective is made up out of narratives from the travellers in Asia, the European settlers and the Asian population. I will use the book of Gerrit Knaap ‘De ‘Core Business’ van de VOC’ that elaborates on the life experiences from Dutch settlers in Asia and their way of conducting trade. In his book Knaap draws attention to the corruptive and violent events in which the VOC was engaged. Furthermore, I will include the information of the book ‘Kleurrijke Tragiek’ from Matthias van Rossum and the article of Douglas A. Irwin ‘Mercantilism as Strategic Trade Policy’. Van Rossum acknowledges the slavery conducted by the Dutch in Asia and Irwin provides information on the East India trade of the Netherlands and England. Including this literature will show that a historical narrative is not ‘the truth’ even though people often regard a historical narrative as a fact. Historians are under the influence of power structures and provide historical narratives that are based on their interpretation of history.[[21]](#footnote-21) In this thesis I will thus challenge the interpretation of the Dutch historical narrative that is taught in havo-level history literature. The additional literature will function as a different interpretation of history than the education books provide. They will be used to show which historical narratives are silenced.

The discourse analysis will focus on the history books used by havo-level students. This are students that attend senior general secondary education. The choice for havo-level education books is based upon the amount of history education that havo students receive and the number of students assigned in that level. In 2015 approximately 50.100 students attended the third class of havo, this is the second largest group of all education levels in the Netherlands. Only the VMBO theoretical level received a greater amount of students, 86.000, but these students obtain less history education than the havo students.[[22]](#footnote-22) The havo students are thus the largest group of students that receive the most history education during their high school career. I will analyse the most common used high school history books in the havo-level; *Geschiedenis Werkplaats* and *Memo*.[[23]](#footnote-23) Both books are manuals that include the most important subjects and narratives taught in Dutch history. I will discuss the chapters about ‘The Golden Age’ of both books, this is included in chapter five and six of the book *Geschiedenis Werkplaats* and chapter five, six and seven in *Memo*. The information in these textbooks aligns with the history information recommended to teach by the educational ministry of the Netherlands.[[24]](#footnote-24) The literature taught thus presents the historical narrative as desired by the government.

*Theoretical framework*

As mentioned the discourse analysis will be conducted with the use of a critical postcolonial analytical lens. Postcolonialism can be interpreted in various ways.[[25]](#footnote-25) In this thesis postcolonialism is about the ongoing power hierarchies that define the contemporary world. These power hierarchies are shaped in the nations colonial past and even though the colonies are nowadays independent nations, the colonial legacies can still be found in art, languages and intellectual disciplines. The legacies thus continue to shape culture.[[26]](#footnote-26) The former colonial powers, who mostly consist out of European countries, still try to secure their wealth and power with the use of colonial legacies.[[27]](#footnote-27) The connection with eurocentrism becomes very clear here, since eurocentrism is about securing a European superiority. I will elaborate upon eurocentrism in a moment. To discuss how eurocentrism is embedded in history education I will use the concepts nationalism and orientalism. Besides showing how eurocentrism is embedded in education they will also reveal how colonial representations are still defining the current Dutch society.

*Eurocentrism*

Eurocentrism is chosen as a focus concept because it is problematic for a multicultural society like the Netherlands as already discussed in the introduction. Baker informs us in his article ‘Modernity/Coloniality and Eurocentric Education’ that eurocentrism is about the feelings of superiority in European countries. These countries understand themselves as the most developed and civilized. This understanding of Europe as far advanced in comparison to other countries and continents is a narrative that Europe constructed themselves.[[28]](#footnote-28) Unfortunately Baker and other researchers pointed out multiple times that the narrative of superior Europe influences the current education system.[[29]](#footnote-29) Due to this eurocentrism certain question will be asked and answered while others are silenced on purpose, this constructs a negative image for the population of former colonized nations.[[30]](#footnote-30)

*Nationalism*

Nationalism is about the feeling of connection with other nation members and having a sense of belonging to that nation. This feeling of being part of the nation’s community is the foundation of organisation and administration of the nation.[[31]](#footnote-31) The sense of belonging is created with the use of traditions, symbols and narratives. History is an important part in creating a sense of nationalism. History lends itself to tell the story of the common past of the collective group of people. It emphasizes one specific narrative that forms the national history. In this history certain events are recognized and sometimes even celebrated while other historical narratives are silenced.[[32]](#footnote-32) Ken Montgomery, who investigated racial hegemony and nationalist methodologies in Canadian school history books, argued that Canadian high schools are highlighting morality, compassion and tolerance as key characteristics of Canada while teaching national history. Students come to understand these characteristics as inherently Canadian.[[33]](#footnote-33) They regard the historical narratives as facts and the truth and thus come to believe the addressed characteristics as inherent in the Canadian identity. Present history education then becomes a tool to promote nationalism. Unfortunately this nationalism often includes, as Montgomery argued, a hierarchy created between population groups. In the history books assumptions are made about who is good, who is evil, who is to blame and who is the peacemaker.[[34]](#footnote-34) The narrative written benefits the view on history of solely the own nation, in Montgomery’s case Canada and in this thesis the Netherlands, instead of providing well-rounded information based on the experiences from all the nations involved.[[35]](#footnote-35) In this thesis I will analyse which characteristics are promoted in the Dutch historical national narrative, which stories are told and which narratives are silenced.

As national history frames perspectives and creates a sense of belonging it simultaneously creates a dominant ideology. The feeling of belonging arises when you feel connected with this dominant ideology and narrative. You feel like you are part of the national group. But as the narrative constructs an in-group it also constructs an out-group. This is the group that can not connect with the dominant ideology.[[36]](#footnote-36) Nationalism thus creates a sense of inclusion and exclusion that displays itself in a social ranking within the nation.[[37]](#footnote-37) Eurocentrism similarly creates power hierarchies by constructing a narrative in which Europe is superior compared to other parts of the world. These parts become the inferior. Both, eurocentrism and nationalism, are creating a division by constructing a narrative. Eurocentrism only on a larger scale than nationalism. They focus on a single nation; in this thesis this single nation is the Netherlands. The study of nationalist representations can thus be important in comprehending the use of eurocentric perspectives and power relations in Dutch history education textbooks.

*Orientalism*

Edward W. Said, university professor at Columbia University, has written one of the most remarkable theories used in postcolonialism; orientalism.[[38]](#footnote-38) Orientalism is a style of thought developed in western nations during colonial periods that still influences the current society.[[39]](#footnote-39) It is a way of representing oriental nations and populations that legitimizes domination and authority over the group addressed.[[40]](#footnote-40) These representations are characterised by the orient being the exact opposite of the western nation. According to the western nation the orient is undeveloped and oddly different.[[41]](#footnote-41) Often these western nations describe the oriental populations with negative stereotypes. For example, the assumption that oriental persons are born as violent and lazy beings. The western societies make up these stereotypes by looking at race, ethnicity or/and religious identity of the oriental population group. No individual characteristics are taken into account when defining an oriental person.[[42]](#footnote-42) By representing the orient as inferior the western nations gain strength, because they depict themselves as the exact opposite; the superior.[[43]](#footnote-43)

As no authority comes natural, it is important to research how authority is established.[[44]](#footnote-44) This can be done with the use of deconstructing oriental representations.[[45]](#footnote-45) As eurocentrism is closely related with a self-created western superiority and therefore also with a self-organized authority discovering orientalist representations can play an important part in researching how eurocentrism is embedded in Dutch history education. While conducting a discourse analysis I will pay attention to the construction of binary oppositions between the Netherlands and Asia.

**Chapter 3: A Glorifying National History**

This chapter will analyse how nationalism is used in the Dutch historical narrative. As I examined the education books I found out that there is a strong emphasis on the positive features of trade qualities and heroism. I will elaborate on these qualities in combination with an acknowledgement of suppressed historical narratives.

*Trade qualities*

The acknowledgement of the VOC and its contribution towards the economic prosperity in ‘The Golden Age’ has been repeated in the history education textbooks countless times. A few of these representations will be discussed. One of the four main characteristics that *Memo* assigns to the seventeenth century are the great trade qualities that contributed to a leading position for the Netherlands in the global economy.[[46]](#footnote-46) The trade established by the VOC is called the hub of global economy in this century.[[47]](#footnote-47) Since the main goal of the VOC was trade with Asia, calling the VOC a hub in global economy emphasises yet again the trade qualities that provided the Netherlands a leading position in the world. The textbook *Geschiedenis Werkplaats* also acknowledges these wonderful trade qualities of The Netherlands and especially the VOC. In this book the VOC is called a great example for the upcoming trade capitalism during the seventeenth century.[[48]](#footnote-48) By calling the VOC a great example, the book indicates that the Netherlands and VOC were better in trade than other nations or companies. Others could thus learn from the trade skills of the major Dutch company. This is a very daring thing to say as Irwin made clear that England made great profits on the Asian trade as well and established before the Dutch a national East India Company. The English company had similar intentions and procedures as the VOC.[[49]](#footnote-49) Furthermore, the book completely ignores the already existing, quite modern trade present in Asia.[[50]](#footnote-50) According to J.M. Blaut, who gave insight in colonizers methods, this silencing is often done to establish a division between modern Europe and less-developed other nations.[[51]](#footnote-51) Listing solely the VOC as an example company seems to be done to establish a sense of proudness while silencing the trade qualities of other nations and trade companies and thus establish -as Blaut argued- the idea of Dutch modernity and underdeveloped Asia.

Interesting to elaborate upon is the introduction of two personages, Jacob and Pieter, in *Memo*. Not much is mentioned about them, just a small introduction and story about their occupations: *“*Pieter and Jacob represent two different types of people in the ‘The Golden Age’. Pieter was a true fortune-hunter who invested in tulips. Jacob was a typical trader, who worked hard to create a fortune.”*[[52]](#footnote-52)* (Personal translation). It is interesting that this passage mentions that two types of people are listed out of the ‘The Golden Age’, this makes it seem that there were only two kinds of people in that timeframe. It leaves out a great amount of other possible occupations. Remarkable is that they speak about two types, even though the occupation of both personages are similar. Both are traders, Pieter who deals in tulips and Jacob the so-called typical trader who is characterised by his hard work. This view indicates that typical Dutch citizens in the seventeenth century were all traders.

Using tulips for trade is a nationalistic choice. Tulips are often viewed as typical Dutch as they grow in the Netherlands and are frequently used as a symbol for the Netherlands on various tourist souvenirs, but when reading about ‘The Golden Age’ in Irwin’s book this product is not what made The Netherlands wealthy. It was spices obtained in Asia instead.[[53]](#footnote-53) Perhaps the book used tulips because it is nowadays still viewed as a typical Dutch product, whereas spices are not. This makes it easier for students to identify with a tulip trader than a spices trader. Dutch students are thus supposed to identify themselves with traders and not with other types of people during that era. The book does not invite to identify with slaves or slave owners. The role of slavery in achieving the great economic benefits in Asia is not even mentioned in the book. This is contradicting the information provided by van Rossum who shows in his book that the VOC and Dutch individual settlers engaged themselves with slavery.[[54]](#footnote-54) According to Weiner, who examined national memory of slavery and colonialism, it is due to this exploited labour that the Dutch economy could compete in the global trade system.[[55]](#footnote-55) As the slaves were so important, including an enslaved personage could be an interesting identification character instead of silencing their existence.

*Heroism*

When reading *Memo* you will find Dutch heroism described throughout the information about ‘The Golden Age’ in the book. First heroism is addressed when speaking about the rough living conditions on board of ships in which a majority of the ship crew died from dangerous diseases or during battles with pirates.[[56]](#footnote-56) But the book implicitly mentions that all these casualties were worth it, since the spices obtained in the east were of great value.[[57]](#footnote-57) As the following citation shows: “But it was worth the effort. Pepper, was for example, worth its weight in gold.”[[58]](#footnote-58) (Personal translation). This carries the message that achieving wealth was the ultimate goal for the Netherlands, that the economic benefits were more important than the lives of Dutch citizens. Or to view it from a different perspective; that Dutch citizens were so brave that they risked their lives to contribute to the economic prosperity of the Netherlands.

Later in the book Jan Pieterszoon Coen is introduced, an important Dutch general governor of the VOC in Asia who established Batavia, the chief city of the Netherlands in Asia out of which most of the Dutch trade in Asia was organised.[[59]](#footnote-59) During the entire chapter he is described as a great, brave man:

Directly after his nomination for governor Coen started building a fort in Jakarta. […] But suddenly the English were there as well who right in front of our noses, without any warning, started to build a fort. Coen attacked them by setting the English castle on fire. Unfortunately, the English arrived a couple of days later with a superior force consisting out of eleven ships. You might expect a heroic fight, because how could the Netherlands with solely seven ships fight the eleven well-armed English ships? Coen solved it by picking up soldiers in the Moluccas. When he came back the fort was still owned by the Dutch and with the use of a thousand VOC-soldiers he conquered the English and established Batavia.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Stating that directly after his nomination he engaged himself in a fight to establish Batavia the indication of an ambitious and eager to work character is provided. The decision from Coen to pick up soldiers from the Moluccas indicates that he is besides a brave man who dares to fight the well-armed English army also an intelligent man. Instead of letting the English conquer the fort or trying to fight the English with a smaller army, he made the well-chosen decision that it is better to pick up soldiers from another area. Due to this decision and fight the Dutch were able to establish Batavia.

Coen’s life and his behaviour is interesting for analysis of nationalism. As I just described he is portrayed in a positive way even though he was highly engaged in violent acts. *Memo* and *Geschiedenis Werkplaats* approach the Dutch cruelties different. *Geschiedenis Werkplaats* silences violent Dutch behaviour. *Memo,* on the other hand, does acknowledge some of the violent acts. For example, the murdering of almost the entire population of the Banda island, a mission led by Coen. This was done in order to gain monopoly on the spices produced there.[[61]](#footnote-61) In the text they also wonder whether Coen should be remembered as a wonderful stakeholder for the VOC or as a cruel governor.[[62]](#footnote-62) But the thought of Coen as a man with a brutal character soon vanishes when a couple of paragraphs later, on the same page, he is named ‘a man of the world’.[[63]](#footnote-63) This presents Coen, yet again, as an admirable person. Later in the chapter he is complimented as a man with great intentions and a highly qualified governor.[[64]](#footnote-64) This personage of him is celebrated with a statue in Hoorn.[[65]](#footnote-65) Coen is thus controversially represented with more emphasis on his achievements than on the path that led to his victories. A passage of the ‘Hoornse Kroniek’, the local newspaper of the city Hoorn, in 1648 discussed in the *Memo* book matches the controversial portrayal of the book; “Admired by the great and feared by the evil / The governor partly carried out great services.”[[66]](#footnote-66) (Personal translation). The chronicle celebrates Coen’s work by appreciating his services but also implicitly acknowledging less attractive behaviour. By saying ‘mede’, translated as ‘partly’, the newspaper silently recognizes that less great actions occurred even though not elaborated upon. Besides that, the Dutch are implicitly called the great and the Banda inhabitants and possibly more indigenous Asian populations the evil. This role division is most likely due to the fear the Banda population must have experienced when Coen murdered the inhabitants of the island as well as that the behaviour of this population group was disliked by Coen.[[67]](#footnote-67) The Dutch are called the great as they speak admirable of Coen as we have seen in the previous analyses. The emphasis on a positive Dutch representation is thus also present in this chronicle and non-explicit misfortunes are mentioned but with a lack of clarity. We see a similar strategy in the history education books; either the violent acts are silenced or in some way declined and justified, this will be further addressed in the next chapter.

*Dutch nationalistic self-image*

Knaap acknowledged in his book that the Netherlands is creating an image of the VOC that matches a desire for a positive identity.[[68]](#footnote-68) This lines up with the statement made by Christou that national history is constructed in a way that glorifies the nation in order to create the nation’s desirable self-image.[[69]](#footnote-69) A positive, glorifying image is exactly what the Dutch history education books seek to establish by drawing on positive qualities like trade skills, a global economic position and heroism. Furthermore, we have seen that certain happenings, like the slave trade, are silenced as these possibly do not match the desired positive identity. The national narrative of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century thus consist out of positive characteristics while silencing horrible acts. Students will therefore receive a very single-sided narrative in which they are inspired to believe that the Netherlands has a great past to be proud of, that Asia was an underdeveloped continent in the seventeenth century and that economic prosperity is worth more than life.

**Chapter 4: Justification by the Misbehaving Orient**

Discussed in the theoretical framework is the concept orientalism. We have seen that this theory establishes a superior and inferior position between the western and (former) colonized nations.[[70]](#footnote-70) When reading the education literature I found out that *Geschiedenis Werkplaats* did not engage itself much with orientalism. The authors rather created a very positive image of the Dutch history without including representations of an inferior oriental Asia or active participation of Asia at all. A narrative for Asia was completely dismissed in their version of history. *Memo* did include orientalist representations who will be discussed in this chapter. With the help of these examples an answer will be provided on how orientalist representations are included in Dutch history education.

An orientalist representation is already present in the introduction text of the early modern times in *Memo,* where China and Japan are called impervious and mysterious.[[71]](#footnote-71) The portrayal of an mysterious orient is a common orientalist representation to state the difference of the orient. It establishes an opposition between the mysterious and impervious orient and the normal, rational self.[[72]](#footnote-72) This mysterious orient is established by a western perspective, as for the Chinese population China is not mysterious but the norm. We thus teach students that attend history classes in the Netherlands western thoughts even though some might have different backgrounds.

Remarkable present in the *Memo* education book is the presentation of positive versus negative manners. The Netherlands is represented with good manners and in case of conducting violence their behaviour is justified with the irresponsible behaviour of the orient. The orient is solely represented with immorality. As we already saw in the previous chapter the inhabitants of the Banda island were indirectly called ‘evil’, whereas The Netherlands was called ‘the great’. Even though this passage was not written by the author of *Memo* it is still included in the book without providing any contradicting statements. Dutch students are still exposed to the example of the good Netherlands versus the bad Asia. This good versus evil divide is very interesting as it teaches students that the Netherlands is apparently better than the Asian nations. Positive versus negative features are not the only orientalist representations in the text. Oriental patterns of justification and stereotyping are present as well. I will elaborate on them further.

The murdering of the Banda inhabitants by Coen’s army is in the book justified by engaging the bad behaviour of the Banda population previous to that action. The Banda population killed admiral Verhoeff. Furthermore, the population betrayed the Dutch on previous made trade contracts.[[73]](#footnote-73) By using the murder committed by the population and discussing the broken contracts the book explains how violent and untrustworthy the Banda inhabitants were. Noticeable is that the murdering of the Banda population is discussed in solely one paragraph, while the justification of the act takes up four paragraphs, all of similar length as the paragraph about the act.[[74]](#footnote-74) There is thus more attention for justifying the violent behaviour of the Dutch soldiers than for the action itself. Discussing the negative behaviour of the indigenous population and the justification of the criminal acts conducted by the Netherlands are prioritised above describing the actual murders carried out by Coen’s army.

With regard to stereotyping we see a negative stereotype for all the Banda inhabitants. This creates the perspective of an uncivilized oriental population, very different from the civilized Dutch population as described in the former chapter.[[75]](#footnote-75) It is striking that stereotyping is used at all times with regard to the inhabitants of the Banda island, whereas stereotyping Dutch citizens is solely used when describing positive characteristics like the trade qualities. An example of this can be found in the following citations. The first citation is of an anonymous Dutch attendee at the Banda murdering’s used in the book *Memo*: “Everything that happened there was so horrible that it left us speechless. Only God knows who is right. We all, as practicing Christians, were filled with disgust and we did not enjoy these affairs.”*[[76]](#footnote-76)* (Personal translation). After this citation the author of *Memo* continues with; “But, the Heren XVII[[77]](#footnote-77) wrote in 1615 that it was better to conquer the population of the Banda island, murder them and populate the island again. It seems like Coen was just following their advice.”*[[78]](#footnote-78)* (Personal translation). The citation of the anonymous source informs us that the Dutch population present at the Banda conflict did not enjoy the murdering. It is not mentioned why they still proceeded with this crime, but as the book argues that Coen was the leader at the Banda conflict a likely possibility is that they followed the advice from their leader Coen and the governors. As the anonymous source berates the violent behaviour it acknowledges that the Dutch knew the difference between right and wrong. But as the acts were an advice from the governors they were possibly forced to conduct them. By including the anonymous source and the advice from the governors the idea is provided that the Dutch were not an evil population as a whole, it was the governors who had violent intentions.

To clear the air for the VOC governors the following citation can be found at the same page;“The leaders of the VOC sometimes thought Coen was too violent, especially with regard to the murdering of the Banda population.”[[79]](#footnote-79)(Personal translation). This seems to indicate that leaders of the VOC did not agree with the violent acts of Coen, especially not during the Banda case, which contradicts the former statement where the governors were called the advisers of the murdering. As the governors are no longer held accountable for the action by the book, Coen is now the only one responsible. All Dutch citizens are thus not stereotyped with bad behaviour and even the governors who first seem to have advised the Banda murdering are no longer associated with the conflict. Besides this, the statement also tries to express that Coen is an exception to the VOC. Who apparently, as the citation states, generally did not engage itself in such violent acts. If they had done so other governors would have been called too violent as well. This statement is rejected by Knaap as he showed us that the VOC was inherently connected to war and armed conflicts. Sometimes even at ten or more places in Asia at the time. This means that other governors had to be engaged with violent acts as well.[[80]](#footnote-80) *Memo* thus seems to unjustly dismiss the VOC and the overall Dutch population from conducting violent acts by solely drawing attention to the violent character of Coen.

The vocabulary used by the book *Memo* is another tactic to diminish negative connotations with regard to the murdering of the Banda population. The book solely speaks of ‘the murdering of the Banda inhabitants’ while providing the information that Coen’s army murdered almost the entire population of the island. Only the inhabitants that fled into the mountains were not killed but starved from hunger. The book does not use the term ‘genocide’ that is defined by the United Nation convention on the prevention and punishment of the Crime of Genocide as an act who has the intention to destroy the entire or part of a national, ethnic or racial group[[81]](#footnote-81). The murdering acts on the Banda island meets this definition of the term and can thus be applied. Shannon O’Lear and Stephan Egbart, who researched the use of the term genocide, argue that the word genocide is often intentionally eliminated because the word invokes more attention and action than using other terms like ‘mass violence’, ‘crimes against humanity’ and possibly ‘murder’.[[82]](#footnote-82) The education book avoids drawing attention or limits the attention given to the murdering of the Banda population by avoiding the term genocide.

Orientalist representations are thus included in the Dutch history education by referring to the misbehaviour of the oriental people and negatively stereotyping the oriental population. The Netherlands on the other hand is represented with a positive character and if the Dutch conducted bad behaviour this behaviour gets justified or assigned to one particular person instead of a Dutch institution or its entire population. Furthermore, the vocabulary used to describe certain events is carefully chosen to not invoke too much attention to certain shocking events. If students regard this information as facts and the truth, what is very likely as Montgomery showed us, they gain a perspective in which the Asian population becomes associated as overall negative. The Asian population as a whole becomes untrustworthy and violent. The Dutch population, on the contrary, is yet again glorified. Even though they have some violent actors in their society as well, but the difference between Asia and the Netherlands is that the Netherlands has only a few or a single violent person whereas the Asian population consists out of such people. Students attending Dutch havo history classes thus receive a single-sided story that can influence their perspective on the Asian population. Furthermore, students with Asian backgrounds might not recognize and identify themselves with this narrative. Due to this they will become an out-group as they do not meet the dominant ideology.

**Chapter 5: Conclusion**

My aim with this thesis was to find out how havo-level history books about ‘The Golden Age’ in the Netherlands are influenced by eurocentrism. My goal was to discover present power relations and hidden messages in the Dutch national narrative in order to help acknowledging the way eurocentrism is embedded in Dutch history education. This is important because history education shapes students perspective on their nation, racial groups and power hierarchies.

I discovered during the analysis that havo-level students in the Netherlands receive history information that creates a positive identity for the Netherlands. Students are taught a history that consists out of successful trade skills and heroic behaviour. Negative behaviour of the Dutch like engaging in slave trade is barely mentioned. The students are asked to identify with Dutch traders and not with the inferior population of the past like the slaves. Furthermore, negative stereotyping of the oriental population is constantly present while the Netherlands is only stereotyped with regard to positive characteristics. When speaking negatively about the Netherlands the action is reduced to a small group or a single individual. The Dutch negative behaviour also gets justified or its impact is not fully acknowledged. For example, when specific less powerful vocabulary like ‘murdering’ instead of ‘genocide’ is chosen to explain the attack on the Banda inhabitants. This way of approaching history maintains European superiority and provides students with a one-sided narrative of history and establishes the idea of a superior, well-behaved, modern Netherlands and an inferior, violent, underdeveloped Asia. This can be problematic with regard to students thoughts about people from Asian descent. Furthermore, Dutch students from Asian descent will not feel included in the national narrative. They construct the out-group that will break the desire to create a unity in the nation by means of history.

After a discourse analysis of the books *Memo* and *Geschiedenis Werkplaats* I can argue that eurocentrism is embedded in Dutch havo-level history education books by means of glorifying the Dutch identity as it invites students to identify with successful characters and justifies negative behaviour or uses a less provocative vocabulary when describing violent events. Furthermore, the education books establish a superior position by creating binary oppositions between population groups and silencing certain narratives.

As I analysed only two history books with the use of orientalism and nationalism my thesis can be viewed as a start to dismantle eurocentrism in Dutch history education. But there are more education levels in the Netherlands than solely havo and different teaching methods that continue to develop over time. Furthermore, there are also other concepts than orientalism and nationalism related to eurocentrism who will be interesting to analyse. There is thus enough space for following research on this topic that hopefully other scholars or researchers find interesting to focus upon to help acknowledging the presence of eurocentrism in the Dutch education system and help declining racism.

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67. Berents et al., *Memo*, p.140. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
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76. Berents et al., *Memo*, p.141. Dutch citation: ‘Alles wat gebeurde was zo afschuwelijk dat we erdoor verstomd waren. Alleen God weet wie gelijk heeft. Wij allen, als praktizerende Christenen, waren vervuld met afschuw over de manier waarop deze zaak werd afgehandeld en we hadden geen plezier in dergelijke aangelegenheden.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. The Heren XVII were the leaders of the VOC, based in the Netherlands, who were in charge of the company. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Berents et al., *Memo*, p.141. Dutch citation: ‘Maar…. de Heren XVII hadden zelf in 1615 geschreven dat het beter was de inwoners van Banda ‘te vermeesteren, de principalen uit te doen roeien ende te verjagen ende het land liever met heidenen wederom te doen publeren’ (bevolken). Het lijkt erop dat Coen precies dat bevel uitvoerde.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
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