10   Why is there no post-colonial debate in the Netherlands?

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10.1   Introduction

The era of decolonisation coincided with Europe's changing status from a continent of emigration to a destination for immigrants. At least five to seven million post-colonial immigrants came to Europe. In today's Portugal, the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom, first- and second-generation post-colonial immigrants comprise up to 6 to 8 per cent of the population. These countries differ, however, markedly with respect to how they deal with their colonial pasts. In the Netherlands, traces of the colonial past are everywhere, but rarely in an explicit post-colonial context. The flourishing cultural market for ethnic literature and cuisine, the well-visited post-colonial ethnic festivals and the serious attempts to integrate the history of slavery into the Dutch historical canon, all these phenomena are just fragments of a consciousness that the Netherlands was once an important colonial power, with all its moral implications. Moreover, in comparison to France and the UK, the Netherlands was, for example, relatively late in acknowledging its role and responsibility in the international slave trade, nor has it yet come to terms with its colonial war against the Republic of Indonesia shortly after 1945.[1]

And this is not a matter of colonial amnesia; the facts of the Dutch colonial wars are openly exposed in television series. What is missing is moral indignation. There is no sense of continuity with the colonial past and the concepts of post-colonialism and multiculturalism are hardly connected. This applies both to literature and to academia. Of course, as Pattynama has made clear in the previous chapter, second-generation Indo-Dutch authors like Alfred Birney and Marion Bloem clearly position their work in multiculturalism, but this does not change the general pattern, as observed by Boehmer and Gouda (2009: 39).

> So the status of the Netherlands as an ex-colonial power remains unproblematised, and consequently the manner in which the history of colonialism might link up with the formation of contemporary national and migrant identities is left insufficiently examined.

The lack of resonance explains why colonial amnesia was unnecessary. There were national stirrings concerning atrocities during the colonial war in Indonesia in 1969, not by coincidence during the Vietnam War. It was already forgotten the day after, disappearing into the margins, and could never become a central theme in post-colonial Netherlands, as was the Algerian War of Liberation in France. Here, the pledge to put the past to rest had been part of a negotiated ending to a violent and cruel decolonisation process. This was in vain, as we know now, because the book was reopened in the 1990s, at the time that civil war raged in Algeria. There was a sense of urgency to stop the work of forgetting and to acknowledge how the violent decolonisation process had marked the national histories both of Algeria and France.

If France suffered amnesia, in the Netherlands the proper diagnosis would be the absence of a post-colonial debate.[2] Let me first define 'post-colonial debate' by quoting Van Leeuwen (2008: 12) who refers to it as

> a critical and systematic reflection on the political, historical and cultural consequences of Dutch colonialism, per se, and for the power relations in our contemporary society and for relations with Indonesia, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles and other former colonial powers.

This chapter is an attempt to explain why such a debate has been practically absent in the Netherlands. I will not deal with the question of why it is important to have this post-colonial debate. Even if we differ on how much of the post-colonial thinking that has made such progress in the Anglophone world we would like to take on board, we can easily agree that it is both a matter of *l'intérêt bien entendu* as well as a moral obligation to look critically at one's national past. (A mildly post-colonial position is expressed in e.g. Oostindie 2009.) What I will try to uncover are the causes of this absence of debate. For that, we may have to look at the decolonisation process itself, transnational mechanisms, the way in which colonial boundaries are transmitted to the metropole and the visibility (or lack thereof) of post-colonial immigrants. And, of course, our search should include the identity formations of the various post-colonial migrant groups in the Netherlands, as well as the roles of intellectuals and the media. And this would only be the first step towards a comparative understanding of the European 'post-colony'.

10.2 The decolonisation process

The Dutch decolonisation process began immediately after the Japanese capitulation in August 1945. Four traumatic years of protracted negotiations

and colonial wars followed, before a settlement was reached. The transfer of sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia took place on 27 December 1949. The Dutch, who had been around in the archipelago for more than three centuries, and their colonial interest groups, in particular, had great difficulty in accepting the new situation. What Algeria was to the French, so, with a slight variation, was Indonesia to the Dutch: part of their national identity. Whilst the conservative French considered Algeria simply a part of metropolitan France, their Dutch counterparts saw the unification of the Indonesian archipelago, the Netherlands Indies, as a Dutch creation. If it had only been Java's independence they might eventually have accepted this as an outcome of Dutch colonial policies, perhaps even with some pride. That the Javanese-dominated republic became master of the entire archipelago caused, however, a lot of resentment in the Netherlands. These emotions were quite an impediment to the Dutch seeing their proper interests in improving their relations with Jakarta. In the early 1950s, more than 100,000 Dutch were still living in Indonesia, Dutch was still one of the official languages – as was English in India – and the leadership of the republic was Dutch-educated. In spite of the dirty colonial warfare – the Dutch cannot be acquitted of war crimes –a lot of goodwill was still left. At the political level, however, tensions rose so rapidly that Dutch-Indonesian relations became practically unmanageable. In the mid-1950s, the heyday of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Indonesian revolutionary fervour increased. The Dutch, who had kept West New Guinea, were branded as a colonial power by Indonesia, which decided to break diplomatic relations completely with the Netherlands. This took place in 1956, not coincidentally in the same year the Suez Canal was confiscated by Nasser.

When the Indonesian revolution came to a halt amidst violence and bloodshed in the mid-1960s, and Suharto rose to power, an entire generation had grown up practically outside Dutch culture. In colonial times, Dutch was never conceived of as the first language of Indonesia, but on the eve of the Japanese occupation in 1942, about 860,000 Indonesians nevertheless had some command of Dutch (Groeneboer 1997). During the occupation, Dutch had been banished and in 1956, lost its status as an official language in Indonesia. It was even outlawed and could no longer be used in schools or any other public institution. Meanwhile, much of the exchange that had existed between Dutch and Indonesian intellectual and literary circles shrunk to contacts at the individual level or ebbed to Indonesian students, for example, those who came to study in Rotterdam at the economics department of Nobel Prize winner Jan Tinbergen. The few platforms for public intellectual exchange between Indonesia and the Netherlands that had come into existence in the 1930s and 1940s, however, collapsed in the early 1950s (Nieuwenhuys 1978: 394-428).

The developments in Indonesia definitely had repercussions for cultural relationships between metropolitan Netherlands and the Dutch West Indies. The popularity of the Dutch language was already somewhat on the decline among the educated in the 1940s, since Afro-Surinamese nationalists promoted Sranan and on the leeward islands of the Antilles, an official status for Papiamentu was advocated. In the eyes of nationalists, Dutch became the language of colonialism and, particularly on the largest Antillean island, Curaçao, Papiamentu became the vehicle of nationhood. In Surinamese plural society, there was no common vernacular and therefore the position of Dutch continued to grow even after decolonisation in 1975.[3] There was, however, not much enthusiasm for the way Dutch was tying the Antilles and Surinam to the Dutch cultural zone. The spread of Dutch language and culture had never been key to Dutch imperial ambitions anyway. But with the loss of cultural relations with Indonesia, the idea that Dutch constituted a language zone of any international consequence disappeared altogether. Only the political far right indulged itself with illusions of a Dutchophone commonwealth, including Flanders and South Africa.

Concomitant with the diminishing importance of Dutch language in the post-colonial realm, intellectual engagement with colonialism and its consequences almost disappeared in the Netherlands. This stood in marked contrast to France, where the Algerian War from 1954 to 1962 brought the tensions of empire right to the heart of the nation, as it considered Algeria just part of its metropolitan heartland. It was in the middle of this conflict that Sartre made his analysis of the dehumanising character of colonialism, which turned the colonised into a thing: into the 'other'. Together with his rejection of the universalist pretentions of Enlightenment, this set the parameters of a post-colonial debate long before post-colonialism became an academic discipline. French was not just the language and philosophy of hegemony, but continued to be the language of counter-discourse as well. This has been spelled out excellently in Majumdar's (2007) *Postcoloniality: The French dimension*.

Apart from the fact that many post-colonial thinkers in the Anglophone world feel indebted to Sartre, and of course to Foucault as well, his contribution has also resonated in France itself and has encouraged the country's attempts to uncover its post-colonial amnesias. Even though it has been argued that there is little reflection on the condition of France as a post-colonial state and society, a lot is going on in comparison to the Netherlands (Hargreaves 2007: 26). The political and social contexts of these societies certainly differ. This, in turn, influences the extent to which academic and political elites were prepared to revisit the decolonisation process and how decolonisation history had been recorded in pre-eminent historiography. When the French government, for example, acknowledged in 1997 that it had fought a colonial *war* in Algeria and no longer used the words '*événements*' or 'police actions',[4] it did so against the backdrop of

the bloody civil war in Algeria in the 1990s, the reverberations of which were felt in France. That the Netherlands was not reminded in such graphic way about its own decolonisation process could therefore be an obvious explanation of why the term 'police actions' for its war in Indonesia is still in use. But I would not take this as a sufficient explanation. It seems to me that intellectual traditions do play an independent role, and recent publications concerning French post-colonialism tend to confirm this impression.

The historian Achille Mbembe, born in Cameroon, accused 'France' of '*ne pas penser de manière critique la postcolonie*'. He did this in a short essay in *La fracture coloniale* (2005), a book that is an attempt to map France as a post-colonial society and to come to terms with the colonial past that has been now 'haunting' France for decades (Mbembe 2005: 143; Bancel & Blanchard 2007: 40). There is some irony in the fact that his assertion was printed in a book that attracted hundreds of reactions in France – both approving and disapproving. It suggests that there is a French tradition of lively conversations about silences, while the Dutch habitually remain silent about the untidy things they dig up from their past. At least, there is nothing that would ever justify the publication of a book entitled *Post-coloniality: The Dutch dimension*.

10.3   Dutch post-colonial migrants and Dutch minorities policies

Apart from lacking a towering figure like Sartre, we have seen how the revengeful aftermath of decolonisation and the dramatic shrinking of Dutch's status as a language in its former colonial realm played a major role in the avoidance of a post-colonial debate in the Netherlands. The second factor is that post-colonial migrants are not perceived as a distinct group in minority discourses. Though many Dutch have their roots in the former colonies, they do not share a 'post-colonial' label. This modest visibility can be attributed to a number of factors. First (setting the Netherlands apart from France, the UK and Portugal), post-colonial migrants make up only half of the immigrants from outside Europe. Most non-European immigrants in France, the UK and Portugal are from former colonial territories. In these countries, perceptions of immigration and migrants are still linked to the colonial past, which as a matter of fact is even the case in contemporary Spain. Here, anxieties about immigration from North Africa seem to hark back as far as the Reconquista, disregarding the fact that most immigrants come from China and Latin American countries (see Agrela 2002).

The visibility of, and anxieties about, newcomers are linked to the national imagination. In that respect, the *repatriated* from Indonesia were accepted as victims of revolution and chaos. It was grudgingly of course because the Netherlands was a poor emigration country at the time. Most

of all, the colonial war in Indonesia was presented to the Dutch public as an aftermath of World War II, as a noble effort to 'liberate' the Indonesian people from Sukarno, who had collaborated with the Japanese during the war. Those repatriated from Indonesia were placed in the role of victims, their 'colonial complicity' to colonialism only to become an issue in the early 1980s, as I shall explain later on. The situation for the West was quite different. In the course of the 1960s, the Dutch government was facing fairly rapidly expanding migratory flows from the Antilles and Surinam, which were fed by the combination of economic decline and rising political tensions overseas – culminating in strikes and rebellions – and the successful post-war economic recovery of the metropolis. It was against this backdrop that the Dutch government decided to urge Surinam and the Antilles to apply for independence in the early 1970s. Even though the Surinamese began to arrive in large numbers less than ten years after the last waves of repatriates from Indonesia, they found a radically changed political-cultural setting. In this respect, the year 1968 marked a watershed, dividing the immigrations from the East and the West into two totally unrelated narratives of decolonisation. This, in spite of the fact that the immigrants shared many important characteristics, as most of them were steeped in Dutch culture or at least in a colonial version of it.

Although experiences with post-colonial migrants in the 1970s played an important role in the formulation of the 'minorities policies' at the end of that decade, post-colonial immigrants themselves did not figure in them as a single category. First of all, the Indische Netherlanders did not become part of the 'minorities'. They had been declared to be fully integrated more than a decade earlier (Willems 2001: 197-203). This meant that more than half of the post-colonial migrant population in the Netherlands was excluded from the minorities discourse and later on from the multicultural discourse as well. The parameters of the minorities policies were social marginalisation and political exclusion. Labour migrants were both politically excluded, as they were not citizens and thus socially marginalised.[5] The Surinamese were citizens albeit socially marginalised ones, and the same applied, if only to a lesser degree, to the Antilleans. Indische Netherlanders were neither socially nor politically marginalised. On the contrary, the vast majority did pretty well on both accounts.

The problems with post-colonial migrants played an important, but secondary and not necessarily distinctive, role in the formulation of the 'minorities policies' around 1980. First and foremost, the fact that the circular migration of labour migrants from the Mediterranean came to a halt after the Dutch government had closed its borders to them, drove the Dutch to rethink their migration policies. The labour migrants already in the Netherlands – called 'guest workers' at the time to emphasise, at least nominally, the temporary nature of their stay – became permanent residents and brought over their families, instead of returning to their relatives.

Second, after train hijacks by some radical Moluccan youngsters in the 1970s, it became clear that some minorities would continue to make political claims. The Moluccan case convinced the government of the Netherlands that integration was more than a matter of newcomers learning how to adapt to society. Some kind of negotiating mechanism had to be put in place as well. That also applied to Surinamese newcomers. While the spokesmen of the over 100,000 Surinamese who had come to the Netherlands between 1970 and 1978 argued that their presence in the country was only temporary, the Dutch authorities rightfully were convinced that they had come to stay. None of these concerns of how to integrate the newcomers were necessarily post-colonial in character. On the contrary, particularly with regard to the question of how to transform visitors into citizens, the distinction between labour migrants and post-colonial migrants lost its relevance.

When, around 1980, the Dutch government became aware of the fact that the Netherlands had turned into an immigration country and published its first policy memoranda to address the problem of 'minority formation', only scant reference was made to Dutch colonial legacies. This awareness of being a multi-ethnic society led to two important reports in 1979: one written by Penninx for the Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (Scientific Council for Government Policy Scientific Council for Government Policy, WRR) (WRR 1979) and the other by Campfens (1979) for the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Recreation and Social Welfare. From both reports, particularly the latter, it became clear that Canada's experiences with multiculturalism influenced Dutch minorities policies, even to the extent that we can consider Dutch policies as moderate multicultural policies. Dutch multiculturalism prioritised education and political participation of 'minorities', for example, by granting voting rights to non-Dutch residents at the municipal level. But if Dutch multicultural policies did apply some of the mechanisms of Canada's multiculturalism, they did not take on board the post-colonial philosophy behind them.[6] The paradigm of social marginalisation, rather than post-colonialism, suited the progressive self-image of a staunchly conformist society, which indeed had already absorbed the first waves of post-colonial immigrants almost 'without a trace'.[7]

For their part, post-colonial migrant organisations were not at all interested in a common post-colonial discourse. In 1979, at perhaps the only 'post-colonial' meeting that brought together Surinamese, Antillean and Moluccan organisations, the complete lack of synchronisation between various post-colonial experiences became apparent. The only thing in common that was mentioned was their irritation about Dutch conformism. Neither race nor religion was considered to be a post-colonial marker of difference. In that respect, the situation in the Netherlands was markedly different from the UK as well as France. As James (1974: 154) remarked in his

essay 'Black intellectuals in Britain': 'There is a systematic persistent tendency to call all members of the "Third World" black.' Gilroy (1993: 1), on the very first page of his famous *The Black Atlantic*, mentions the symbiotic antagonism between 'black and white'. In France, colonial boundaries had been drawn between French secularism and religion, as was the case in Algeria where Islam formed the central colonial boundary. This boundary was brought back home to France (Silverstein 2004: 51, 123). Neither race nor religion constituted dividing lines, per se, in Dutch society; as a consequence, they did not act as mobilising mechanisms for minorities. This may explain why Dutch post-colonial migrant organisations contented themselves with a rather dull critique on Dutch conformism.[8]

Should we conclude from this that there was no post-colonial boundary in the Netherlands? In that case it would make little sense to discuss colonial legacies in the context of contemporary Dutch society. I would, however, argue that there does exist a post-colonial boundary, as in any other post-colonial society in Europe, but that the Dutch one is rather hard to trace, precisely because it is not a racial or religious one, but a social-cultural one. The counterpoint to the 'racial blindness' of the receiving society was its heavy emphasis on assimilation. A handful of books and articles looked back on the Indische repatriation and its aftermath as an almost invisible integration process, though probably at the price of turning into a merely functional assimilation (Ex 1966; Surie 1971). Indische Netherlanders had to take courses on proper housekeeping, the Dutch way. Lesson number one was how to do it as cheaply as possible. Only those who followed the entire course were eligible for 'how to party the Dutch way'.[9] Many may have lost their interest in the subject by that time. One may conclude that if race hardly played a role to the Dutch – which is not entirely true – it was mainly because every newcomer was put into a 'cultural laundry' and came out of it as Dutch, at least functionally speaking. This cultural laundering was a necessity to cross a cultural boundary, a post-colonial 'ethnic' boundary. And here we have analogies to the UK's racial boundary and France's religious one.

Let us take one step further, seeing how this 'assimilationist divide' connects with Dutch colonialism. Dutch official documents on immigrants systematically distinguish between 'Western' and 'non-Western' immigrants. The word 'Western' is not used in a strictly geographical sense, but as a way of measuring the distance from Dutch mainstream culture. This could be abstracted from its colonial origins and applied to all newcomers from outside Europe, the US and Japan. In 1979, all the minorities (post-colonial and labour migrants) were lumped into the single category of 'non-Western allochthonous native' residents. Purely for reasons of statistical technicalities, country of birth was the criterion for being considered 'Western' or 'non-Western'. Immigrants from Indonesia (regardless of their ethnic

background) became 'Western allochthonous' residents and those from Surinam became 'non-Western'. The fact that most immigrants from Indonesia were Dutch citizens explains, for example, why *all* immigrants from Indonesia are counted as 'Western'. The entire distinction between people who are allegedly capable of functioning in our culture and those who are allegedly not, was deeply rooted in the Dutch colonial past. It was the flexible cultural divide that had always been in use in the context of colonial Indonesia; it simply resurfaced in the Dutch minorities policies. Or to phrase it more precisely, it had never gone away but was repatriated after the decolonisation of Indonesia. In the 1950s, the Dutch government, for example, was quite reluctant to admit Dutch citizens if they were, in the language of those days, 'rooted in Indonesia' or 'Oriental Dutch' (Meijer 2004: 335). In this transitional episode, the colonial category of 'Western' or 'European' was narrowed down to those who were considered by the Dutch authorities to be fully acculturated to the Dutch way of life.

While the British had their obsession with colour and the French with secularism and religion, the Dutch cultivated their distinction between 'Western' and 'non-Western'. In all three cases, we are dealing with colonial and post-colonial boundaries. In the Dutch case, the divide was directly derived from the way in which they had once drawn the bureaucratic and legal boundaries in the Netherlands Indies. Historically, these were based on a mixture of religion, ethnicity and national origin, but not of race as such. This point is illustrated by the fact that the Japanese, subjects of an independent Asian power, were legally treated as equal to Europeans in colonial Indonesia from 1899 onwards. The bureaucratic colonial boundaries of the late colonial state, shored up by many statistical and legal devices, are still present in Dutch post-colonial boundaries. They are far more difficult to discern than racism or 'Enlightenment fundamentalism', but are therefore no less powerfully present.

Paradoxically – but understandably – post-colonial migrants did not emerge as a separate category after the large immigration of Surinamese in the 1970s. The old colonial boundary proved to be perfectly applicable to both labour and post-colonial migrants and, as result, the post-colonial migrant was partly subsumed into the category 'non-Western'. On average, however, the position of the post-colonial migrants was completely different from that of the labour migrants from the Mediterranean who came from economically and socially arrested regions. After all, the reason they had come to Northern Europe was to escape from these conditions. In contrast to this, in the late 1970s, the largest and most dominant group within the post-colonial migrants were Dutch repatriates from Indonesia, who had been a colonial elite, and simply disappeared into Dutch society. They were the truly 'invisible immigrants' (the term is derived from Smith 2003). This set the norm for other post-colonial immigrants, if not for all immigrants.

10.4   The post-colony and its fragments

Post-colonial identity discussions in the Netherlands took rather divergent directions. But before we start to discuss this fragmentation, things should be put into correct perspective. In general, post-colonial boundaries are differently framed for Asia than for the West Indies and Africa. Central to the post-colonial 'othering' are the legacies of Orientalism and slavery, which led to different types of struggles. But it is important to see that there have always been conscious attempts to bridge the gap. The Universal Races Congress of 1911, the anti-imperialist movement of the 1920s, the anti-fascist movement of the 1930s and the Non-Aligned Movement of the 1950s and 1960s were platforms where the two struggles came together. The most recent attempt was made in the 1980s, when post-colonialism became closely linked to cultural studies and, particularly with a rereading of Gramsci, to the so-called 'cultural turn'. A few examples among many others of the impact of the cultural turn are seen in India's famous Subaltern Studies Group and the appearance in Great Britain of cultural studies pioneer Hall and the aforementioned Gilroy. Even if one may wonder about the lack of cross-fertilisation between the same Subaltern studies and writings about the Black Atlantic, these intellectual domains use the same theoretical baggage and are very much aware of the racist notions underpinning British identity. Of course – and here is the difference with French, Dutch and probably other European post-colonialism – there is synergy with the academic community in the US, after all the most powerful and most cosmopolitan academic community in the world.

There is no reason to assume that a coherent post-colonial debate exists outside the Netherlands. It is fragmented everywhere, but what is missing in the Dutch case is the ambition to achieve an overarching theoretical perspective on its colonial legacy. Absent is the idea that other post-colonial immigrant groups might have the same type of post-colonial questions and that these questions may even be relevant to Dutch society at large. On the contrary, there is some irritation about the Anglophone post-colonial debate, as it is considered over-theoretical and somewhat pretentious. The way in which post-colonial identity discourses are fragmented and positioned in an often hierarchical relationship with each other plays its own role in the absence of the post-colonial debate.

Let us have a look at how this fragmentation is constructed, particularly at its inherent logic. In the Netherlands, post-colonial identity politics can be divided along two axes. One concerns the politics of 'alterity'; the other stresses the 'similarity' with 'hegemonic' national identity. The alterity axis runs from Sartre's 'anti-racist racism' and underlines the problematic of colonial boundaries and the radical difference in experience. These identity politics aim at a fundamental change of metropolitan memory politics.

The identity politics of 'similarity' do not aim at change, but at inclusion. This is particularly the case with regard to the role World War II plays in the imagined community of the receiving societies. Whether in Japan or the Netherlands – and probably also in France – post-colonial immigrants were excluded or only partially included or, even worse, turned into scapegoats. Stories of shame were heaped on the shoulders of the three million brought home, when the capitulation in 1945 ended Japan's Pan-Asian colonial expansionist dreams altogether (Watt 2005). Less dramatic, but still unfriendly, was the reception for the 580,000 *retornados* coming back to Portugal. They were looked down upon as colonial parasites now coming home to rely on their metropolitan relatives (see Ovalle Bahamón 2003).

In 1998, the Dutch government commissioned an extensive research project from the Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (Dutch Institute for War Documentation, NIOD) to report on the allegedly cold reception of Dutch people who came back from concentration camps or prisoner of war camps in both Europe and Asia (Bossenbroek 2001). From this project it clearly emerged that it had been difficult for the Dutch who had stayed at home to imagine what these returnees had gone through. And that was also absolutely the case for the 'repatriates' (the majority of whom was born in Asia) who on average had suffered more than the metropolitan Dutch. One third of the Dutch prisoners of war and 10 per cent of the internees lost their lives during Japanese occupation. Material losses in terms of possessions, salaries and entitlements were immense.

What happened to the Indische Netherlanders nonetheless did not fit the meta-narrative of metropolitan Netherlands: a country occupied and liberated. In Indonesia, a colonial society had been occupied by an Asian power. That humiliated the Dutch who had until then been the (politically, but also economically, oppressive) masters of the Indonesians. The whole scheme of occupation and liberation became twisted when transplanted from the Netherlands to Indonesia. And twist is exactly what marks the fourteen-volume official national history on World War II (authored by NIOD director Lou de Jong and appearing between 1969 and 1991). De Jong's simple but effective scheme of good versus bad, Dutch versus German and the collaborationist shades in between misrepresented colonial realities. In the 1980s, some tried to argue that Dutch rule had not been that bad, but hardly anyone listened. In fact, in the 1990s when the above-mentioned NIOD project was conducted, this entire debate had already been swept under the carpet. What was left was the hegemonic notion of the victim – in Dutch a new word was constructed for it: '*slachtofferschap*', i.e. victimhood – a notion that always seems to imply the loss of historical agency.

Victimhood overshadowed the story of alterity within the group of Dutch who had been repatriated. This alterity is related to a racial-cum-

class divide within this group. With some simplification, one can say that a substantial minority was white and born in the Netherlands; another minority was of colour but belonging to the colonial elite; and a substantial minority was of colour and had never been in the Netherlands. This divide, to a certain degree, runs parallel to the divide between Western and non-Western, though is simultaneously incongruent with it, thus calling it into question. The racial divisions, however, run through Indische identity politics and were reinforced after the Japanese occupation.[10] Though one should be careful about tying racial categories within European colonial society to different post-war identity politics, a distinction can still be made between the identity politics of 'similarity' claiming rehabilitation, war pensions, back pay of salaries that were withheld during internment and everything on an equal footing as the Dutch who had been in Europe during the War. The other story traces back to the Indo-Dutch emancipation against the (white) prejudice of the colonial elite. This story stands for alterity, which advocates resistance to assimilation, resistance to the Dutch dividing line between Western and non-Western and, to some extent, glorifies a mestizo culture. The story of Tjalie Robinson and his Tong Tong movement of the 1950s and 1960s was both one of a revival and a continuation of the Indo-Dutch emancipation movement that had constituted such a powerful force in colonial days. But in contrast to the colonial situation, it was not an emancipation that sought acceptance by colonial elites and that was heavily tilted towards metropolitan European cultural hegemony. The cultural agenda of Robinson was inspired partly by what he considered to be mestizo cultures in Mexico and Brazil.[11]

The emancipation of the Indo-Dutch (in colonial times first named Indo-European and later on Indische Netherlanders) that had already begun in the 1880s was far from complete when they arrived in the Netherlands in the 1950s. This was the task Robinson took on with his Tong Tong movement. He died, however, in 1974 (see Willems in this volume). In the course of the 1970s, public opinion became more responsive to the lasting damage World War II had caused to those who had suffered from persecution and imprisonment. The discourse on Indische alterity became a secondary issue in comparison to this discourse on the war. In this regard, the popularity among Indo-Dutch of Jean Gelman Taylor's *The social world of Batavia* (1983) (about Batavia's mestizo culture that disappeared under the pressure of white imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century) can be explained in two different ways. The book was taken as a vindication of the historical mestizo roots of Indische identity, but also as a recognition that the same mestizo narrative was historically doomed to an inferior position vis-à-vis the hegemonic white one.

Let us now shift to the identity politics that originated in the Dutch West Indies and, in particular, Surinam. The rise of Afro-Surinamese and Afro-Antillean consciousness – and how young black intellectuals propagated

Sranan or Papiamentu from the 1950s onwards – led to a division of identity politics in the West Indies. In Surinam, the already strained relationship between Hindustani, Javanese and Afro-Surinamese became increasingly tense after World War II, notably in the 1950s and 1960s. The Surinamese plural society was in itself a source of fragmentation of the 'post-colonial discourse'. The divisions between Hindustanis and Afro-Surinamese are deep. Afro-Surinamese nationalism, being the driving force behind Surinam's independence, was resented by Hindustanis, most of whom did not share the ideal of an independent Surinam. This resentment has somewhat diminished recently, but it has not changed the divergence of their identity politics. As a result, today there are four main groups of post-colonial discourses; of them, commemoration of the war on the Indische side and the trauma of slavery on the Surinamese side receive most public attention. There is no relationship whatsoever between these two. The other two identity discourses, concerning the Hindustani and Indo-Dutch, are more or less secondary and equally unrelated, though they share some important characteristics. The Hindustani discourse boasts about their loyalty to the House of Orange and their easy integration into Dutch society, while maintaining their own culture, thanks to their own hard work. This is almost the same story as the one we heard from the Indo-Dutch. Hindustani identity politics are articulated in competition with the Afro-Surinamese and stress successful integration. When the Afro-Surinamese and Afro-Antillean communities in the Netherlands succeeded in placing the Slavery Monument in Amsterdam, Hindustani residents in The Hague responded by offering a Gandhi monument to their municipality as a sign 'of their integration into Dutch' society.

10.5 The 1980s and 1990s: 'Globalisation' and Dutch post-colonial identity politics

The Indo-Dutch discourse on alterity lost much of its distinct mestizo flavour with the death of Robinson in 1974. The other post-colonial identity discourses took equally dramatic turns. The anti-colonial movements of young Moluccans, leftist Antilleans and Surinamese reached their peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The language was of anti-colonialism, even of Black Power. Notable chapters in this sprit were that of the Moluccan youngsters, the 1969 revolt on Curaçao, the 1973 strikes in Surinam, the train hijackings; these were the years of anti-colonialism, sometimes perceived too literally as a fight against oppression. It is not a coincidence that during the uprisings in Surinam and Curaçao, 'Black Power' was heard often, and that even the Moluccan youngsters drew their inspiration from the Black Panthers. Neither is it a coincidence that the first train hijacking and the independence of Surinam both took place in 1975. After the Moluccan

terrorist acts between 1975 and 1978 and army sergeant Bouterse's coup d'état in Surinam in 1980, political militancy dwindled.

Internationally and in the Anglophone world, in particular, the late 1970s and early 1980s marked the beginning of an emphasis on cultural trauma, identity politics and, in academics, an industry of diaspora studies and cultural studies. There is no need here to elaborate on the connections between the rise of electronic media, the cultural turn in human sciences and the fragmentation of grand narratives. What matters here are the parallels between the emerging search for 'roots', its ensuing focus on the cultural trauma of slavery for the Afro-Surinamese and Afro-Antilleans, the 'nostalgia' of immigrants from Indonesia and a reinforcement of the already strong connection of Hindustanis to South Asia. To complete the list, let us add the narrative of the Indo-Dutch's mestizo roots that had become marginalised in the days of high imperialism. While the colonial legacy moved from the political to the personal, the old colonial boundaries began to lose some of their weight. Identity discourses for Moluccans and Indische Netherlanders, as well as for Afro-Surinamese and Afro-Antilleans, began to converge. Indische Netherlanders and Moluccans shared an increasing cultural connection with Indonesia, whereas Afro-Surinamese and Afro-Antilleans became increasingly oriented towards the commemoration of slavery.

In the 1980s, there was a general decline in *political* transnationalism among Moluccans and Surinamese. According to Steijlen (see Smeets & Steijlen 2006; Steijlen 1996a), the train hijackings paradoxically led to the Moluccans' integration into Dutch society, which went very well, along with their cultural emancipation in the Netherlands. For the Surinamese, the coup d'état by Bouterse and his associates marked the dissolution of the strong political transnationalism between Amsterdam and Paramaribo. But even if tendencies in terms of identity, history, culture and transnationalism – and the languages in which they are framed – move in the same direction, they do not have a common point of reference. The counterpoint of these attempts of immigrants to anchor themselves in their new country is a reshaping of their relations with their countries of origin. Every post-colonial group engaged in the general tendency of intensifying contacts with their country of origin by way of remittances, solidarity with relatives suffering from violence (Moluccans), family visits or simply holidays. The dividing lines between the different post-colonial identity discourses may have become less politically informed and less hierarchically positioned towards each other. However, the identity formations around the themes of the trauma of slavery, the Indian diaspora and the imagining of Indische and Moluccan as 'Asian' became increasingly linked to *globalised* rather than *national* post-colonial identity discourses. The questions surrounding these identity formations are of a fundamentally different order to the questions about Dutch post-colonial boundaries between 'non-Western' and

'Western'.[12] This becomes even more pertinent when we shift our focus to the intellectuals and the media.

10.6   The role of intellectuals

In Great Britain, post-colonialism and cultural studies as academic subjects are inextricably linked to multiculturalism. A central position is taken by the aforementioned Hall, as one of the founding fathers of cultural studies. He was born in Jamaica and brought up in Kingston, amidst the 'signs, music and rhythms of this Africa of the diaspora, which only existed as a result of long and discontinuous series of transformations' (Hall 1990: 231). He is not a lone voice in Great Britain. Other prominent authors in this field also have roots in the former British colonies. Among them are the aforementioned Gilroy, Modood and Parekh. They, too, have played an important role in debates about post-colonial identities and 'Britishness'. Member of the House of Lords Parekh chaired the Commission into the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, sponsored by the Runnymede Trust. Its report incensed part of its English audience by contending that the word 'Britishness' no longer fitted a future multicultural UK because of its racist connotations (see Parekh 2000).

In contrast to Great Britain, in the Netherlands, multiculturalism and post-colonialism are neither philosophically nor historically linked. Sometimes this may just be a matter of coincidence. Within the relatively small circles of intellectuals engaged in this debate, personal relationships make a difference. The *négritude* movement, for example, was fostered by a personal friendship between Senghor and Césaire. Such friendships did not exist in the Dutch case. Contacts between Dutch intellectuals and novelists from the Eastern and Western corners of the empire did exist in the 1930s, but disappeared in the 1950s.[13] At that time, Sartre was pioneering post-colonial thinking and laying down the groundwork for the subversion of the 'universal claims of enlightenment' with his concept of the 'other'. He was a spider on the web of political thinkers about the anti-colonial struggle, writing prefaces to classics by Memmi (1966), Fanon (1961) and Senghor (1948). For writing about post-colonialism, one is inclined to look at Foucault, whose publications were so influential in shaping the field of cultural and post-colonial studies. Moreover, in May 1968, Foucault worked at the University of Tunis, which would have provided another link to the post-colonial cause, although as Stoler (1995) has explained at length, he did not seem to go the extra mile to reach post-colonialism. By contrast, the relationship between academic work and personal experience is manifestly present in Bourdieu's work. During his military service in the colonial army in Algeria between 1958 and 1960, he carried out field-work among the Kabyle. Concepts like 'social capital' and 'symbolic capital' that have

enriched the social sciences originate from that research. In the 1990s, Bourdieu took a stand against what he called the 'ghettoisation' of Algerians, whose entry to France was practically blocked (from 800,000 down to 100,000 visa permits per year), because of the fundamentalist violence in Algeria (Bourdieu & Leca 1995).

The Netherlands has the example of the late sociologist Van Doorn, who had been drafted for military service in Indonesia between 1945 and 1949. He was the co-author of a book published in 1970, *Ontsporing van geweld* ('*Derailment of violence*') about what we now may consider war crimes committed by the Dutch colonial army (at that time the word 'excesses' was used instead of war crimes). This book created a modest political row at the time, as Pattynama has described in the prior chapter of this volume. Van Doorn also published a book and some essays on Indonesian colonial history, but he was generally considered to be a non-conformist conservative and never took a position against colonialism as such. At the very end of his life, however, he publicly denounced Islam-bashing by the extreme right in the Netherlands, anchoring himself on a perceived tradition of religious co-existence practised in colonial Indonesia (Van Doorn & Hendrix 1983; obituary of Van Doorn in *NRC Handelsblad* 15 May 2008). The same mechanism of the subversion of national history, in which colonial society is portrayed as oppressive, collaborationist and shameful, was applied by the Japanese returnees (the *hikiagesha*, meaning 'salvaged') and the French *pied-noirs*. Some spokespersons defended their colonial background as being multiculturally *avant la lettre* and, in that respect, more advanced than metropolitan Japan or France (Watt 2005: 251). But turning the tables on the perception of European colonial societies as being basically racist and intolerant does not constitute a post-colonial debate. There is perhaps only one writer in the Netherlands who has made some consistent efforts in that direction, the Surinamese-born Anil Ramdas. He wrote in a post-colonial style and has, on quite a few occasions, demonstrated his familiarity with what is going on in this field outside of the Netherlands.[14] Although as a widely read journalist he had access to public debates, his influence was greatly diminished because of his solitary professional position.

All over the world, scholars of human and social sciences have been drawing their inspiration from Gramsci, the Frankfurter Schule and Foucault. Encouraged by the academic prestige of cultural studies, they have left classical Marxism behind. Post-colonialism as an academic trend has made progress in the US, Australia, Latin America, India and even in Indonesia; in the Netherlands some scholars relate to it. But as far as there is a Dutch post-colonial academic tradition, its centre of gravity lies within literary sciences. It concentrates on the pantheon of novelists writing in Dutch: Louis Couperus, E. du Perron, the Surinamese Albert Helman and Edgar Cairo, the Antilles' Frank Martinus Arion and Cola Debrot. And

although their books sometimes sold tens of thousands of copies, their work is not advancing a post-colonial debate. In spite of their often politically powerful messages, these books have become part of Dutch literary tradition. They are treated just as literature, something that belongs to a realm far removed from the mundane matters of day-to-day politics in a multicultural society. There is limited space for how the colonial past can be imagined in the Netherlands.[15] Moreover, it is difficult to compare the impact of post-colonial literary work to authors like Sartre, Parekh and Bourdieu, who engaged with the lower world of politics. Such a position is rare in the Netherlands at present. Frank Martinus Arion, a public intellectual and a popular Dutch novelist, is probably an exceptional case, although he is not active in the metropolitan Netherlands, but rather in Curaçao. Despite the fact that his work is topical for understanding the desperate social situation for many Afro-Antilleans – a problem spilling into the Netherlands due to uneducated, unskilled Antillean youngsters roaming the Dutch cities – the political impact of his work in the Netherlands is fairly limited.

In other words, the immense amount of historical and literary production that finds its inspiration or roots in the colonial past and the post-colonial present is sitting on coffee tables, not fuelling debates. Its attraction lies in its exoticism or even outright Orientalism. In that respect, it is nothing new. This Orientalism had already existed in colonial times and has always been a bestseller. The legacy of the Indo-Dutch, mestizo culture, in particular, has become a commodity, an ethnic top trademark. And while it is commercially attractive, its 'exotic' alterity makes it harmless as it does not question, but reinforces, the distinction between 'non-Western' and 'Western'. The hegemony of remembrance of the war does the rest needed to eclipse the presence of Indische identity as a possibly disturbing postcolonial heritage. The attempt to create the Indisch House – a centre for commemoration and Indische culture – in The Hague is a case in point.[16] This was initiated by the Dutch government as part of the commemoration of the war, but in that capacity it never became a fair representation of the histories and cultural legacies of the Indische Netherlanders.

Considered to be fully integrated into Dutch society, the only way to receive subsidies for cultural expression of Indische identities is under the heading of the war. Rather inconsistent with the government's position of ignoring the cultural dimension of 'Indische' is that some of representatives – former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot provides an outstanding example – refer to 'Indische' as being multiculturally *avant la lettre* in defence of religious tolerance towards Islam. And here we arrive to the intricacies as well as dangers of 'memory politics'. The notion of colonial multiculturalism contains some serious flaws, it would mean that we need, for example, to look away from the fact that European colonial society was deeply suspicious of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

Islamic revivalist movement on Java (Van Leeuwen 2008: 305-306, 315-316). The idea of Dutch-Asian coexistence is also inconsistent with a commemoration of the war that portrays Europeans as victims of Asian aggression (first from the Japanese and subsequently of the Javanese revolution). It is impossible to do justice to the nuances of history – and definitely would be asking too much of politicians – but how the Indische past plays in the 'memory politics' in the Netherlands is glaringly inconsistent.

10.7   The media and the absence of a post-colonial debate

Though there is a diversity discourse in the Netherlands, it has hardly resonated in policymaking. Neither did it have any reverberations in mainstream public opinion. Dutch integration policies, as I have argued elsewhere, are basically assimilationist and barely address the issue of cultural diversity (Bosma 2009). In contrast to what many may believe, in Dutch society most of the activities of post-colonial migrants in the cultural sphere are not subsidised by the Dutch government. In the media, the position of post-colonial migrants – of any migrants, as a matter of fact – is one of underrepresentation. In the mid-1990s, only 1 per cent of people employed in the media were of non-Western allochthonous descent, while according to official Dutch sources, at that time more than 10 per cent of the population belonged to this category. Over the past ten years, the numbers might have improved – there are no recent figures available – but probably not by much. There are no figures for Dutch universities or the higher echelons of enterprise and government, but there is no reason to assume the situation is any better there. However, I must add to this that presently the political representation of non-Western allochthonous residents is on a par with their proportion of the Dutch population. This is the result of the minorities policies of the early 1980s, which, as mentioned, took inspiration from Canada. As far as the priority areas of political empowerment and citizenship for newcomers are concerned, the Dutch moderate multicultural policies have become a success, despite what populist politicians in the Netherlands claim in this regard. But in terms of allowing cultural diversity into how the nation presents and perceives itself, the performance of the Netherlands is rather bleak.

What this means can be illustrated by the contrasting example of Great Britain. In 2007, there was a nation-wide commemoration of the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade, as enacted by the British Parliament in 1807. These celebrations were steadfastly promoted by Afro-British politicians – some of whom held cabinet positions in the Blair government – and by Afro-British journalists. The BBC created a special web portal linking national debates, historical snapshots and radio and television

programmes. Most fascinating was the way in which the 'regionalisation' of the bicentenary was announced:

> Think your area had no connection to the history of slavery and abolition? Then think again. BBC Local teams have found stories in every corner and community of the United Kingdom.[17]

For a number of reasons, such a nationwide involvement in commemoration, fanning out to every hamlet in the country, would be unthinkable in the Netherlands. First of all, the chances for a nationwide commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade or slavery would be very slim, since slavery was abolished at an embarrassingly late stage for a country that considers itself progressive (in 1860 in Indonesia and in 1863 in the Dutch West Indies). There have, however, been some isolated attempts to bring the commemoration of slavery to the local or municipal level in the Netherlands. A group of Surinamese in Amsterdam, for example, has been advocating a different commemoration spanning 30 June and 1 July (already celebrated as Emancipation Day) that is more inclusive. As one of its spokespersons told a newspaper:

> There is a common history of us, the descendants of the slaves and white Dutch, a common history that should not be ignored, but it is time that we look each other straight in the face. *(NRC Handelsblad* 1 July 2008)

This is exactly the same type of overture that was made to overcome amnesia about the Algerian War. It is also the official point of view of the Nationaal Instituut Nederlands Slavernijverleden en Erfenis (National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy NINSEE), as specified on its website.

> The mission of NINSEE is to develop and position itself as the national symbol of the shared legacy of Dutch slavery and the collective future of all Dutch people. We strive to shed light on the history of Dutch slavery and its impact on Dutch society from varied and diverse perspectives, on an international and national level.[18]

Yet the shared legacy is becoming multifarious, if only because major Dutch cities comprise populations that are almost half of 'non-Western' origin. This underscores the need for a post-colonial debate in the sense of a systematic contribution to understand how Dutch society has changed and will further change in the future.

Notes

1   See Oostindie (2001). For the Indonesian-Dutch conflict, see Van den Doel (2001). Some newspaper articles have also pleaded for apologies for Dutch war crimes against Indonesians. This happened after residents of an Indonesian village took legal action against the Kingdom of the Netherlands (see *NRC Handelsblad* 18 October 2008).

2   A French example of such an interrogation is Blanchard, Bancel and Lemaire (2005). In 2002, the Belgian government decided to offer its apologies to the family of Congolese statesman Patrice Lumumba and the Congolese people for its responsibility in the murder of the (see Gillet 2007: 71).

3   For a concise discussion on language and nationhood in the contemporary Dutch West Indies, see Oostindie (2005a: 125-131).

4   For decades, the Algerian War remained a '*guerre sans nom*', a blank page in French history, according to Stora (1992).

5   Moluccan former soldiers of the colonial army who came to the Netherlands in 1951 were in a comparable position. In the 1970s, almost 80 per cent of them were stateless and unemployment was high among second-generation Moluccans.

6   For the post-colonial backgrounds of Canadian multiculturalism, see Day (2000).

7   For comments on this conformism, see Bagley (1973) and Verwey-Jonker (1971).

8   As for the Afro-Surinamese, this changed in the early 1980s when racism did become a serious issue in the Netherlands.

9   CCKP (1969).

10 For a proper understanding of this divide, one should know that all white Dutch people in Indonesia were interned in camps during Japanese occupation, while many of the Indo-Dutch, because of their partly Asian descent, remained outside. But, and here comes the caveat: many Indo-Dutch men were in camps as prisoners of war and the women and children who stayed outside the camps were increasingly confined to districts; their lives, too, became increasingly miserable towards the end of the war.

11 An authoritative biography on Robinson by Willems (2008).

12 A more extensive discussion of this theme is offered in Bosma (2009).

13 We refer to the so-called 'Forumgroup' (see e.g. Oostindie & Maduro 1986: 75).

14 Among his many publications, we would mention Ramdas (2000).

15 For a discussion on this reception, see Pattynama (2007).

16 The history of the Indisch Huis demise is extensively discussed in Van Leeuwen (2008: 225-272).

17 www.bbc.co.uk/local/abolition; accessed in 2012.

18 See www.ninsee.nl; accessed in 2012.