Bringing History Home

Postcolonial Immigrants and the Dutch Cultural Arena

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Three Dutch-language monographs published in 2008-2009 by Ulbe Bosma, Lizzy van Leeuwen and Gert Oostindie in the context of the interdisciplinary research programme *Bringing History Home*, present a history of identity politics in relation to 'postcolonial immigrants'. This term refers to some 500,000 people who since 1945 arrived in the Netherlands from Indonesia and the former Dutch New Guinea, Suriname or the Antillean islands in the Caribbean. Bosma traces the development of postcolonial immigrant organizations. In interaction with government policies, these organizations moved from mere socio-economic emancipation struggles to mere cultural identity politics. Van Leeuwen takes such cultural identity politics as the starting point for her analysis of Indo-Dutch and Dutch Indies cultural initiatives and the competing interests at stake in the Indies heritage discourse. Oostindie discusses these developments in terms of community development and change within Dutch society at large. He introduces the notion of a 'postcolonial bonus'. In postcolonial Netherlands, this bonus was available to immigrants on the grounds of a shared colonial past. Today, this bonus is (almost) spent. The review discusses the three monographs, as well as the coherence of *Bringing History Home* as a research programme. Legêne argues, that notwithstanding valuable research outcomes, the very category of postcolonial immigrants does not constitute a convincing category of analysis.

The institutional setting of a research programme

In 2006, three research institutes of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) – KITLV, IISG and the Meertens Instituut – collaborated on the NWO-funded research programme *Bringing History Home: Postcolonial Identity Politics in the Netherlands*. The aim was to investigate the identity politics of 'postcolonial migrants' by studying their social integration and mobility within Dutch society and their endeavours to create a distinct place for their

communities and countries of origin within the Dutch political agenda.[1] *Bringing History Home* promised to challenge institutionalised disciplinary divides in the Netherlands that in themselves can be characterised as colonial legacies: divides between Cultural Anthropology (as the study of 'others') and Ethnology (as the study of an ethnic 'self'), and between Colonial History (a past that properly belongs 'over there') and Dutch history (the past at home). KITLV [the Royal Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies] is itself rooted in colonial times and an academic tradition of Indology and Colonial Ethnology. Today, the focus is on area studies and the colonial past has become a subject for archiving and critical research. IISG [the International Institute of Social History] was founded in the 1930s and initially focused on European movements, political parties, leaders and ideologies, but has gradually widened its remit in terms of both subject matter and geography. The Meertens Instituut, which traditionally specialised in ethnology and Dutch folklore and dialect studies, has now also taken on Cultural Anthropology and Cultural Studies, in order to investigate the cultural diversity in Dutch society resulting from recent immigration from all over the world.

Bringing History Home does indeed trade in ideas of the self and the other, and how the colonial past impacts on cultural diversity in contemporary society; however, the programme did not really bridge the institutionalised disciplinary divides. The monographs published more or less strengthen the historical research profiles of their respective parent institutions, suggesting that the academic traditions of each may be stronger than the critical data and thoughts evoked by the interinstitutional research programme. In this review, I will attempt to present a synthesis of the three monographs and explain why, in my view – despite valuable research outcomes – the programme as a whole has not had the impact promised by the coalition of research institutes. In brief: the authors studied a history 'brought home' to the Netherlands, but took their own academic home-bases too much for granted.

The three Dutch-language monographs – amounting to almost 1,100 pages – have been published under the common denominator of 'Postcolonial History of the Netherlands'. Lizzy van Leeuwen, an anthropologist initially connected to the Meertens Instituut, is the author of *Our Indies Heritage* (2008); historian Ulbe Bosma (at IISG) contributed with a volume called *Returned from the Colonies* (2009); and, *Postcolonial Netherlands* (2009) was written by historian Gert Oostindie, who is also director of KITLV and project leader of *Bringing*

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1 Programme text: http://www.iisg.nl/cgm/postkolonialemigranten.php (latest access 5/12/2010). I would like to thank Ruben Gowricharn, Matthew Mead and the referees for their valuable comments, and Ninette de Zylva for the English editing.

Bringing History Home: Author and project leader Gert Oostindie, Director of KITLV and Robbert Dijkgraaf, President of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, at the final programme debate, 1 December 2009.
Photograph: Alexander Tromp, KNAW.

History Home. Two more edited volumes will be published in English. Since their publication dates have not yet been set, the following discussion will focus only on the three Dutch books that have already been published.

Bringing History Home: a programme

Firstly, I will discuss the three concepts central to the programme of *Bringing History Home: Postcolonial Identity Politics in the Netherlands,* namely home, identity politics and the postcolonial. 'Home' here is understood as the Netherlands after decolonisation. The emphasis of each author is different, and each suggests a slightly different periodisation, but broadly they sketch the contours of a country with a national and a colonial history. In colonial times, these histories were entangled as a result of circular migration. For reasons of work, family, military service, education, tourism and the like, Dutch people from all walks of life travelled to and from the colonies in the East and/or the West, as did (at different times) an increasing number of (mainly upwardly mobile) Indo-Dutch, Javanese, Surinamese and Antilleans. After decolonisation, this circular migration pattern more or less came to an end. Key periods of political transition occurred from 1945 to 1950, when Indonesia became independent; 1958 to 1963, when the Netherlands gave up their position in Irian Jaya/ Papua; around 1954 and 1975, when Suriname first gained autonomy and subsequently became independent; and in 1954, 1978 and 2010 – the years marking various revisions in the political relationship between the Netherlands and the (autonomous) islands of the Netherlands

Antilles, which today still go to make up the Kingdom of the Netherlands. During each of these transitional periods, people migrated to the Netherlands. Since 1945, around 500,000 people have arrived in this way: some 230,000 people from Indonesia and Papua; 187,500 from Suriname and 80,000 from the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba (Bosma, 30). The Netherlands has become their new home.

Meanwhile, this new home has been transformed from a predominantly agrarian and industrial society into a 'post-industrial' one. Following the economical and authoritarian years of post-World War II recovery and reconstruction, government and state institutions expanded with the development of the social welfare state. A 'polder model' of socio-economic consensus politics developed, public life gradually secularised and the composition of the family changed. The Netherlands also had to reposition itself within the international context of Europe, the East-West Cold War divide, and the North-South centre-periphery axis. *Bringing History Home* discusses the strategies of immigrants, government institutions and others in coping with these many societal changes.

Here, the second central concept of *Bringing History Home* emerges: identity politics. Referring to publications by Stuart Hall from the early 1990s, the authors approach 'identity' as a dynamic social construct that is part of a political process. They also draw from Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic,* in which the discourse of tradition that emerged among postcolonial immigrants is analysed.[2] However, each of the three authors approach identity politics in a different way. Bosma discusses it as a process that develops within various political, institutional and social realms with many different actors; in Oostindie, it is a deliberate strategic choice made by certain groups to achieve certain goals; whereas Van Leeuwen sees identity politics as a given that hardly anyone escapes, since it produces hegemonic cultural essences in a cultural arena that also defines cultural oppositions.

Bosma, following Gilroy, focuses on the contradictions inherent in identity formation among postcolonial immigrants with a diasporic 'double' consciousness. Despite the inequalities of the former colonial order, these people have a deeply felt longing for a certain 'beautiful and splendid' essence that harks back to the colonial past. In the Dutch case, these immigrants imagine cultural links with Africa, South-East Asia, India or Latin America, which help them position themselves in the here and now and cope with the social inequalities of contemporary Dutch society (Bosma, 242 and further). Bosma's central thesis is that government policies gradually tuned into such identity politics. This 'culturalisation' directed postcolonial immigrants away from their economic and social struggle for integration into Dutch society. Van

2 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass. 1993).

Leeuwen takes this culturalisation as her point of departure for an analysis of identity politics in the public sphere. She concludes that the construction of an apparently coherent Indies community, with an essential Indies culture, has been an act of collective postcolonial construction by both the postcolonial immigrants and Dutch society at large, in which class and race hierarchies were ignored, while fitting into a hegemonic post-World War II discourse of national consensus (Van Leeuwen, 18). Oostindie, while acknowledging this interaction, focuses on the connection between identity politics and citizenship. Citizenship implies hard notions of legal rights, entitlements and duties and soft notions of identity, identification and belonging. He discusses how postcolonial immigrants organised their communities in order to 'make' identity politics by creating a profile of ethnic and cultural otherness. The intention being both to enhance the bonds within a given community and to create connections (build bridges) to society more broadly (after Putnam, 2000; Oostindie, 58).[3] He states that only those immigrants who successfully integrated into Dutch society were able to play this identity card, following the rules of 'strategic essentialism' (Oostindie, 13).

The last concept in the three studies requiring separate discussion – the concept of the 'postcolonial' – is given multiple meanings throughout all three books. The postcolonial can simply refer to a period in time: after colonialism, in the years of decolonisation and its aftermath. It is also used as a label: the term 'postcolonial immigrants' is used as an umbrella concept to describe the 500,000 people who at different moments left a (former) Dutch colony and settled in the Netherlands (Bosma, Oostindie). This postcolonial label is also applied to political, social or religious leaders and spokespersons from these immigrant communities, as well as creative artists. Those who play a public role are regarded as members of 'postcolonial elites' (Van Leeuwen, Oostindie). Immigrants' offspring are labelled as second (and third) generation postcolonial immigrants.

This second meaning of the postcolonial is central to the whole programme. However, I will argue that the case for using this term as a label for one distinct group within Dutch society is not convincingly made in *Bringing History Home*. Here, it is relevant that 'postcolonial' also refers us to Postcolonial Studies. Postcolonial Studies is a broad term indicating a research interest in issues relating to former colonial relationships, colonial histories, experiences and frames of reference, which in various ways still have an impact on today's society, both in the former colonised countries and in Europe. Gyan Prakash, for instance – influenced by Edward Said's critique of Orientalism – stated in 1995 that we have to face the question of 'how the history of colonialism and colonialism's disciplining of history can be shaken loose from

3 Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York 2000).

the categories and ideas it produced'.[4] At that time, his focus was on a more or less fixed polarity between coloniser/colonised. But this distinction has since become nuanced and more complicated. It was within this context of academic debate on the impact of classification processes rooted in a colonial past, that my expectations of a critical approach to the institutional academic setting of *Bringing History Home* ran high. However, despite the references to (early works by) postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy or the Subaltern Studies group to which Prakash belongs, the programme has been explicitly positioned as being *not* 'Post Colonial'. Oostindie only suggests that Van Leeuwen may have been inspired by such an approach (Oostindie, 263). I will return to this in the discussion below, but first present a summary of the central arguments in the monographs. Each has a specific focus: on institutional policies (Bosma), cultural initiatives (Van Leeuwen) and individual responsibilities (Oostindie) or, in short, on politics, *pasars* (festival like markets), and passports.

Politics, pasars and passports: three approaches to identity politics

Politics

Ulbe Bosma's monograph *Returned from the Colonies: Sixty Years of Postcolonial Migrants and Their Organisations* is based on a database of 2,600 organisations of, for and with postcolonial migrants, founded since 1945. This inventory has been a crucial source for the research programme of *Bringing History Home*. The organisations were identified by IISG-researcher Marga Alferink and have been integrated into a larger database of some 6,000 immigrants' organisations in the Netherlands. Included are political and cultural organisations, religious and social welfare organisations, educational institutions, journals and websites or initiatives aimed at development cooperation with counterparts in countries of origin. These organisations are private, non-governmental, or more or less informal: foundations, associations and membership organisations; individual networks and virtual communities. Most organisations were aimed at one or more specific categories of immigrants in the Netherlands, defined by overlapping criteria such as gender, age, 'national' background (Suriname, Netherlands East Indies, Indonesia, Curaçao), or 'ethnic' affiliation (such as Afro-Surinamese, Antillean, Indies, Indo-Dutch, Javanese-Surinamese, Moluccan, Papuan, Surinamese Hindustani). The database can be accessed at: www.iisg.nl/research/migrantenorganisaties.php.

4 Gyan Prakash (ed.), *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton NJ 1995) 4-5.

Bosma approaches the postcolonial immigrants' identity politics from both a Dutch and an overseas historical perspective, with a special focus on the Netherlands East Indies. There, an overall (racial and cultural) distinction had been dominant between 'Europeans' (and those set equal to Europeans), 'Foreign Orientals' and 'Natives'. Many postcolonial immigrants had belonged to the upwardly mobile 'European' middle classes: they had been schooled workers in the emerging technologically advanced overseas industries; members of the police and armed forces; or employees of the civil administration and education system. In late colonial society, they had improved their class and status, while organizing themselves through trade unions, political parties and other bodies. To them, this had also changed the immediate meaning and impact of the dominant racial and cultural divides of late colonial society. The meaning of belonging to or being equal to Europeans had changed again, when these emancipation processes became entangled with political nationalist movements. New divisions emerged within society – this time along political lines.

When, after decolonisation, the people who emigrated to the new 'home' established new organisations to further the interests of their members, their options were limited. Dutch approaches to integration policies implicitly echoed the history of the late nineteenth century 'social question' (i.e. the poor standard of living of the emerging Dutch working class, poor housing conditions, illiteracy, child labour among the working class urban poor). The modern political parties, religious institutions, the labour movement, women's organisations and political parties had followed emancipation strategies to empower the people and put pressure on capital and government to ensure better wages, regulations, legislation and education. According to Bosma, understanding of the problems of the new postcolonial immigrants in the Netherlands post-1945 often followed such lines of class analysis and emancipation discourse. It lacked reflection on the specific links between class, culture and race that had been essential to colonial society, and that had taken on a new role in postcolonial Dutch society. In addition, the Dutch government was suspicious of social movements that expressed minority interests instead of the common cause, and Dutch trade unions and political parties were reluctant to take up the cause of immigrants as a specific group. They were regarded as competitors in the labour and housing markets. The result of this was a fragmentation of immigrant organisations along ethnic lines, each trying to further the interests of their own specific group, while struggling internally with the legacy of the ethnic and political conflicts left over from colonial society.

Gradually these organisations also had to cope with the emergence of a new overall distinction between Western and non-Western Dutch citizens. Repositioning themselves within this polarity, which essentially mirrored former colonial distinctions, became part of a new emancipation process in which, according to Bosma, 'identity politics' along ethnic lines replaced the

economic and social struggles of the first years of settlement. Meanwhile, from the end of the 1970s, neoliberal government policies no longer accepted the initial categorical organisations as counterparts in negotiations on their economic and social interests, and embraced multiculturalism. Respecting diversity was cheaper than promoting social equality. In this political climate, class differences were suppressed 'and "identity" separated itself from the notion of a collective, in order to become a matter of personal experience' (Bosma, 47).

Many examples (with many exceptions) illustrate how organisations of Indies, Indo-Dutch, Moluccan, Papuan, Surinamese or Antillean immigrants – which had started out as social or political emancipation movements – increasingly gained a cultural profile that better fitted Dutch government integration policies. Bosma explains the large number and broad diversity of organisations identified in the database in terms of their historical background in colonial 'plural society', where differences between the population had been translated into a far-reaching process of 'pillarisation', characterised by separate organisations, religious institutions, schools, entitlements to jobs and other distinctions (*cf.* Furnivall, 1944; Bosma, 84).[5] Major leaders and spokespersons had emerged in late colonial society, such as Zaalberg or Douwes Dekker in the Netherlands East Indies, De Kom and Doedel in Suriname and Da Costa Gomez and Croes in Curaçao. However, in the Netherlands, these overseas histories gradually became a repertoire for identity politics unrelated to the issues for which such historical leaders in the former colonial societies had actually campaigned.

Today, postcolonial immigrants in proportionate numbers have succeeded in participating in parliament, government bodies, trade unions and political parties. Their historical legacies of struggle in a colonial context have been canonised into a cultural repertoire through biographical books, statues and the naming of organisations and streets. Bosma fears that instead of empowering, this canonisation of historical characters in cultural terms will provide the offspring of postcolonial immigrants with bridges to a disconnected past based within 'a political and social context that within a short time will no longer be understood' (Bosma, 100). The communities concerned organise themselves in historising debates around issues such as *tempo doeloe* (the Indies in the good old times), World War II, slavery or indentured labour. However, such cultural identity politics in many cases refer to victimhood, rather than to emancipation struggle.

5 J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy* (Cambridge, New York 1944).

Pasars

In *Our Indies Heritage,* Lizzy van Leeuwen has taken this culturalistic discourse as a starting point for an anthropological approach to the formation of Indies culture in the Dutch cultural arena over the past decades. Van Leeuwen is interested in the aspirations of members of different generations of Indies and Indo-Dutch postcolonial elites, who have been and still are involved in Indies identity politics. She focuses on conflicting interests and arguments in processes of identity formation among the Indies community in interaction with Dutch society at large. Conflicting interests are at stake among first generation immigrants, between first and second or third generations, among certain competitive individual cultural actors, and between commercial and cultural interests. She discusses this, drawing on an impressive number of cultural initiatives and expressions, initiated by individual Indies immigrants, their organisations, governmental bodies, established cultural institutions, universities and religious institutions. She thus traces the emergence of an 'Indies culture' in the Netherlands expressed, for instance, through popular music (Indorock), Indies movies and TV programmes, Indies literature, journals such as *Mousson*, manifestations such as 'Are you Indies' or 'Pasar Malam Besar', institutions such as the Indies Scientific Institute or Stichting Tong Tong and (government sponsored) monuments and museum initiatives.

Van Leeuwen argues, however, that the emergence of Indies culture in the Netherlands has mainly served the interests of Indies elites. It has not enabled lower class Indo-Dutch immigrants to counter the differences they had to face in terms of class, culture and race. She refers here to the impact of the deep-rooted differences with which most Indies people had lived in the colonial context of the Netherlands East Indies, as also discussed in Bosma. These differences affected migration experiences. For *totoks,* or those who had belonged to the white colonial elite, and for Western educated middle class Indo-Dutch migrants, immigration as a rule was uncontested, whereas many lower class Indo-Dutch families, regarded as 'rooted in the Indies' and unfit for Dutch society, were not admitted so easily. In the Netherlands, such differences played out differently. All immigrants were supposed to forget the colonies and help Dutch society recover from the damage and losses incurred in World War II. Settlement meant (enforced) integration, and immigrants met with little understanding. Van Leeuwen states that the response from the Indies community has been instrumental in suppressing class and ethnic differences. For instance, the systematic denial and refusal with regard to justified financial claims for the loss of salaries and property overseas during and after World War II became a common 'Indies' rallying point, although it mainly served the *totoks,* who within Dutch society at large could move between an Indies or a Dutch identity. Meanwhile, it diverted attention from the political and social problems that the majority of Indo-Dutch postcolonial immigrants were facing. (This has only recently been largely resolved, through a reluctant acknowledgement of these financial claims by the Dutch government.) More

recent public discourse on Indies war experiences in and outside of Japanese internment camps during World War II might also be regarded as such a diversion. New war monuments and a national commemoration of the final colonial years during World War II emphasise the shared experiences of *totoks* and Indo-Dutch communities in late colonial society, rather than potential differences. Also, repeated attention to the war and decolonisation experiences now also appears to prioritise the first-generation immigrants' relationship to the 'homeland'. Government action, like the financial 'Gesture' [Dutch: *Gebaar*] as compensation for the hostile or indifferent way Indies immigrants were received after their 'repatriation' underlines that it is the last years of overseas colonialism that define the Indies community, and not the interests, claims and aims of the younger generations born and raised in the Netherlands.

This shift between generations is important in terms of identity politics. Some two decades after decolonisation, former soldiers in the Dutch army asked for a critical investigation and evaluation of the end of colonialism in Indonesia and Dutch war crimes during the Indonesian Revolution. Meanwhile, the notion of Indies culture emerged together with a sense of (white elite) Indies nostalgia and a longing for *tempo doeloe*, the 'colonial good old days'. This Indies nostalgia, dominated by the middle and upper classes, turned into a hegemonic discourse among Dutch society at large and found expression in Indies literature and films. 'Indies' nostalgia contributed to a shared multiculturalism and the creation of new common cultural bonds in a secularising society in which representation of an Indo-Dutch culture was initially denied or prevented. *Tempo doeloe* was quite literally typecast on TV by the popular 'Tante Lien' ['Auntie Lien'], largely ignoring Indo-Dutch voices and perspectives and postponing political introspection on the legacies of colonialism. To some extent, *tempo doeloe* also provided a 'compensatory outlet' (*cf.* Cashmore 1997; Van Leeuwen 19)[6] for the lower class Indo-Dutch community, who met with serious discrimination within Dutch society. In response, and encouraged by the (subsidised) multicultural trend, Indo-Dutch youngsters developed an alternative ethnic identity: an *Indonesian* ethnic present, unrelated to a nostalgic or silenced *Indies* colonial past. The postcolonial fiction created by these youngsters was widely appreciated, and thus helped Dutch postcolonial society to restore its self-perception as a tolerant and flexible society – an image that had been damaged by hostile responses to other (Muslim) immigrants in Dutch society. Here again, 'Indos' actually performed a role of (or were used as) nicely integrated unproblematic immigrants (Van Leeuwen, 277).

6 Ellis Cashmore, *The Black Culture Industry* (London 1997). An omission in her study is Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (Oxfordshire 2004).

HEIMWEE(?)
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NEDERLANDS-INDIE/INDONESIE
M.M.V.
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AYA ZIKKEN
MARGARETHA FERGUSON
ROB NIEUWENHUYS
MARIJKE MERCKENS
ALBERT VOGEL
GAMELANMUZIEK EN DANS
TOEGANG F 7,- CJP F 5,-
VOORVERKOOP:
HOT - ORANJE BUITENSINGEL 20
DEN HAAG - 070 - 857800
BZZTôH - STILLE VEERKADE 7
DEN HAAG - 070 - 632934

▲
'Nostalgia (?) Evening', is the title of a cultural event in The Hague on 17 January 1977, organized by publisher BZZTôH, publisher of the literary magazine *Bzzletin*. Authors who had contributed to volume 42 of this journal on Nostalgia, reflected on their Indies past, alternating with gamelan music and dance. Cover design: Jack Prince.
International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Today, Indies youngsters are moving away from the hegemonic notion of Indies culture, from the decolonisation traumas and existing taboos concerning earlier colonial hierarchies and engagements. They also try to address issues such as racism within the Indies community or the role of and respect for indigenous foremothers of the Indo-Dutch community. Van Leeuwen concludes that the broad acceptance of 'Indies Culture' as a folk culture within the Netherlands, the success of 'Tante Lien' or the *Pasar Malam Besar* festival (since 2009 called Tong Tong Fair), the war monuments and commemorative museum initiatives, have been paid for with a denial of the differences that existed among postcolonial immigrants. The Indo-Dutch community did not succeed in emancipating itself through liberation from stereotypical and discriminatory representations. Instead, Indies culture (stereotypically connected to food) was promoted at the cost of an explicit struggle against racial discrimination, the loss of the Petjoh language and Indo-Dutch ways of life and cultural expressions outside a general frame of exoticism.

Passports

The last volume of the series, *The Postcolonial Netherlands* by Gert Oostindie, has much overlap with each of the other two volumes in its description of the various postcolonial groups, their organisations, government policies and cultural activities. But again, its central thesis is different. Oostindie approaches the colonial background of the various postcolonial immigrant groups as a cultural capital instrumental to their settlement in Dutch society: a 'postcolonial bonus'. The benefits of this cultural capital included a good command of the Dutch language, experience with the Dutch educational system, continuity with respect to employers or family relationships and, most importantly of all, an (almost) uncontested right to full citizenship in the Netherlands, together with a general acceptance of a transnational orientation. The award of this postcolonial bonus was motivated by feelings of responsibility and guilt about the Dutch colonial past and the trauma of decolonisation. Leaders of (organisations of) immigrants have used this bonus to further the interests of the members of their communities: to help them settle, obtain support for transnational initiatives, request inclusion in the labour and housing markets, and in national histories, public life and political institutions. Oostindie concludes that this postcolonial bonus has now more or less expired, as these postcolonial immigrants are now settled Dutch citizens: their histories as postcolonial migrants alone no longer give them a reason to organise themselves along ethnic lines, and feelings of guilt in Dutch society are hardly ever mobilised these days. Historical research and history curriculums in school have been opened up to the perspectives of postcolonial immigrants; the repertoire of public rituals has been broadened to include colonial experiences; diplomatic relationships with Indonesia and Suriname have more or less become normalized; and the formal bonds with the

Netherlands Antilles and Aruba have been renewed. In short, the Netherlands is becoming more and more postcolonial, having finished with decolonisation and having acknowledged its colonial past and its legacies in a historical and cultural sense (Oostindie, 136-141).

Oostindie explicitly states that his book is intended to initiate a debate on how postcolonial migrants did or do refer to their colonial backgrounds – how they have spent their postcolonial bonus – in current discussions on Dutch identity and what it means to be Dutch. He sees many discrepancies caused by identity politics that made selective use of past experiences. The postcolonial elites organised bonding among their communities by referring to only those common elements that best fitted the purpose of any given aim. An example is the aforementioned case of the Indies claims for financial compensation for war experiences. People in the colony who had been eager not to 'become too Indies', and Indo-Dutch immigrants who in colonial times had also been the most race-conscious, now made common cause for recognition as war victims. At the same time, they complained about internal racism rooted in colonial hierarchies, and were 'extraordinarily offended' by discrimination within Dutch society. Another example of such a postcolonial discrepancy is the selective (moral) attention paid to Dutch slave history, which time and again is connected to the WIC [Dutch West India Company], the transatlantic slave trade and the historical background of many Surinamese and Antillean people, but seldom associated with the VOC [Dutch East India Company] and the extensive intra-Asian and inter-Asian slave system.

Alongside what he sees as selective references to past experiences and policies aimed at strategic bonding, Oostindie is also critical of omissions by postcolonial leaders in terms of bridging: they have failed to enhance commitment among their communities for other (postcolonial) immigrants and their legacies, and for expressions of identity politics within Dutch society at large. And whereas many initiatives were initially taken to maintain transnational bonds between immigrant communities and their countries of origin, or to develop new transnational links – as in the case of Hindustani Surinamese people and India, or Afro-Surinamese people and Africa – such initiatives did not play a large role in bridging between communities inside the Netherlands. One of the mechanisms that contributed to the effect of bonding within communities more than to the building of bridges to others, was the fact that postcolonial immigrants' initiatives and organisations mainly had to address the Dutch government in order to achieve their aims. Communities had to canvas the government for financial support; government policies and funds created the political climate in which postcolonial migrant groups operated. The government opened up the housing and labour markets, created opportunities for transnational initiatives, and supported the formation of a culture of remembrance that acknowledged the colonial past.

In addition to the legacies of colonialism and World War II, the Dutch government had to establish new international relationships with, for example, Indonesia and Suriname. While colonial histories became better known in the Netherlands and the transnational bonds of the postcolonial immigrants were acknowledged, their histories more or less disappeared from history in their countries of origin. Today, the Dutch Government is instrumental in developing new relations with the former colonies through its international cultural policy. However, these policies, on a far less moralising note than in the Dutch historical debate, approach the colonial past as interesting shared histories that have resulted in a shared cultural heritage. This difference in discourse results from the difference in stakeholders and the interests at stake: bilateral economic and political relations in an international arena, or separate identity politics in a cultural arena at home. Here at home, according to Oostindie, other changes also occurred in the transnational historical profile of postcolonial immigrants. Whereas transnational initiatives mostly depend on individual choices, 'new silences' have emerged within the postcolonial communities. An example is the silence among the '1975 generation' of postcolonial immigrants from Suriname about why they left Suriname and what they expected from migration to the Netherlands.

Oostindie is also critical of historians. Historians have provided the postcolonial elites with the histories they asked for, too often in a moralising tone and employing politically correct representations of the past; government has financed historical research projects aimed at the inclusion of colonial histories into postcolonial Dutch history; museums have developed exhibitions in this field and school curriculums have been adapted accordingly. In his view, much of this has been done in a valid and relevant way, and he himself has contributed to it. However – as mentioned above – new inconsistencies and new silences have emerged in the meantime, and postcolonial immigrants have developed interests in new forms of forgetting, amnesia and oblivion. Oostindie concludes that it is ironic that the positive response to postcolonial identity claims has muted the justified anger about denial, but has also diminished the meaning of the communities concerned. Their request for recognition was one of the anchors of community development and mobilisation. Its acceptance by Dutch society, with a solid position in the Dutch canon of history and culture, has been positive for everyone involved and has improved Dutch self-esteem. The memorials and new rituals will help prevent the colonial past from being forgotten. However, distinct postcolonial 'communities of remembrance' are disappearing; the overall context today is one of shared and inclusive citizenship. Mobilising a postcolonial identity now is a matter of free choice, to which the postcolonial bonus is no longer relevant.

Bringing History Home?

The three publications that make up *Bringing History Home* contain a wealth of details and many critical views that deserve further discussion. Using precise historical data, Bosma underlines that, contrary to populist views among politicians and policy makers, postcolonial (or all?, SL) immigrants were not pampered; in fact, they had to make themselves visible before their voices were heard. Van Leeuwen challenges cultural actors and academic authors on Indies culture and history to critically reflect on how they actually *made* these voices heard, and whether their role in the creation of the postcolonial identity politics of certain dominant group interests ended up confirming class, cultural and ethnic hierarchies. And Oostindie, wishing to set a new agenda, pleads for greater introspection within postcolonial communities, specifically addressing 'prominent members' of postcolonial groups. However, the three books together have not created a common playground (or battlefield) for further discussion of postcolonial identity formation. The views and observations presented simply point in too many directions.

Oostindie concludes that the distinction between postcolonial communities and Dutch society at large no longer provides valid grounds for postcolonial identity politics. However, who was it that actually made this distinction in the first place? His notion of a postcolonial bonus places a broad range of people and groups in one group, as compared to other (immigrant) groups without this bonus. But the category as such is not convincing. All groups float and change over the decades and generations; each group entered the Netherlands at a different time and in a different context; some groups are not mentioned at all; some are labelled as exceptions. My conclusion on *Bringing History Home* would therefore be that, in the end, the category of postcolonial migrants does not make for a valid category of analysis. However, *Bringing History Home* does not draw a conclusion for the programme as a whole. Instead, Oostindie argues that, in the beginning, postcolonial immigrants *were* members of postcolonial communities, whereas today they have postcolonial identity as an option – as a matter of free choice (for instance, Oostindie, 137, 245). In other words: the subject of *Bringing History Home* – the collective history of postcolonial immigrants – has been closed, although the postcolonial immigrant still exists as an identity that individual citizens can choose. Bosma discusses the problem of categorisation as the arbitrariness of government monitoring policies. He notes that postcolonial immigrants, together with other categories of people, exist in statistics that initially served socio-economic analysis. But such 'hard' economic and demographic data on the Dutch population at large in later years was substituted by soft cultural data to construct specific groups within the Netherlands (Bosma, 282-283, 310). Bosma's own categories of analysis follow this data shift, from externally defined socio-economic communities to imposed or self-perceived identity

groups. Here, the same problem therefore occurs as with Oostindie: in his analysis 'postcolonial immigrants' are still a valid category, although the socio-economic data that define the group are no longer valid.

What makes this analytical loop in *Bringing History Home* even more problematic is that the different categories of postcolonial immigrants are described in some sections in highly subjective wording, reminiscent of the earlier essentialising ethnological traditions, with their typical mix of visual, historical and legal criteria. Only Van Leeuwen is more consistent in her sensitivity to the hegemonic claims and interactions implied in such descriptions, and nowhere does she suggest that postcolonial immigrants form one category of analysis. Nevertheless, her analytical categories referring to class, race and profession or education lack explicit criteria, whereas her approach to the emergence of an Indies culture repeats another problem of categorisation: the well-established dominant cultural hierarchies between high art and popular art, folklorisation and exoticisation.

As mentioned in the introduction of this review, the issue of categorisation is central to Postcolonial Studies. Oostindie, discussing the state of the art, concludes that (with some exceptions) Postcolonial Studies in the Netherlands is almost non-existent. His explanation follows from the findings of *Bringing History Home*, thus creating another analytical loop: Postcolonial Studies never did take root in the Netherlands, because there was no reason for it, unlike in the UK, for instance, where it emerged from contestations based in colonial legacies of inequality, discrimination and suppression of immigrant groups. In other words, Postcolonial Studies 'happened' in some countries as an aspect of the postcolonial history of that country, whereas it did not happen in the Netherlands, where such conflicts did not occur. This statement marginalizes or even ignores certain postcolonial debates, both inside and outside Dutch academia, for instance those related to gender studies.[7]

7 Examples are the fierce debate at the Winter University Womens Studies in Nijmegen, 1983; or Maayke Botman, Nancy Jouwe and Gloria Wekker, *Caleidoscopische visies. De zwarte, migranten en vluchtelingen-vrouwenbeweging in Nederland* [Kaleidoscopic Visions: the Black, Migrant and Refugee Womens' Movement in the Netherlands] (Amsterdam 2001); also relevant are initiatives by the former International Institute and Archive of the Womens' Movement IIAV (now Aletta); or museum initiatives such as Imagine IC in Amsterdam.

Academic institutions in the Netherlands long have been resisting their influence. But apart from this, I do not understand why *Bringing History Home*, despite its reference to authors such as Gilroy and Hall, ignores how the very problem of categorisation challenges the *Humanities*. The research programme is positioned in an ongoing international debate on academic approaches and perspectives in which the choice to 'make' a category of postcolonial immigrants needs more explanation than just writing the category into Dutch post-1945 (national) history. The three books together have not convinced me of the analytical value of the umbrella label of postcolonial immigrants as one distinct group with a specific trajectory in post-war Dutch society, as distinct from other immigrants, or other classes of people. The three studies each in their own way show, that a group labelled 'postcolonial immigrants' does not exist as such. This is not to say that this group *no longer* exists, as Oostindie suggests; I would say that this category, gathering everyone with a personal relationship to Dutch colonialism in the East or the West into one category, has no 'history brought home'. ◀

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List of reviewed publications

Bosma, Ulbe, *Terug uit de koloniën. Zestig jaar postkoloniale migranten en hun organisaties* [Returned from the Colonies: Sixty Years of Postcolonial Migrants and Their Organisations] (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2009, 448 pp., ISBN 978 90 351 3242 9).

Leeuwen, Lizzy van, *Ons Indisch erfgoed. Zestig jaar strijd om cultuur en identiteit* [Our Indies Heritage: Sixty Years of Struggle for Culture and Identity] (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2008; 400 pp., ISBN 978 90 351 3339 6).

Oostindie, Gert, *Postkoloniaal Nederland. Vijfenzestig jaar vergeten, herdenken, verdringen* [The Postcolonial Netherlands: Sixty-five Years of Forgetting, Commemorating and Suppressing] (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2009, 333 pp., ISBN 978 90 351 3497 3).

De kunst van het verbergen

Een lichtzinnige naziprins en de Nederlandse monarchie

GITA DENECKERE

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The Art of Dissimulation: A Frivolous Nazi Prince and the Dutch Monarchy
Annejet van der Zijl's biography *Bernhard. Een verborgen geschiedenis* [Bernhard: A Hidden History] deftly interweaves the family history of the 'Zur Lippe-Biesterfelders' with the social decline of the minor German aristocracy in the period of the German Empire, World War I and the Weimar Republic. This results in a probing description of a time and a milieu in which anti-democratic, extreme right-wing forces came to full bloom. The exact consequences of Prince Bernhard's anti-democratic attitude for the Dutch monarchy as an institution are less well examined, however. The fact that Bernhard as a person perhaps did not have character to play the role of dictator, does nothing to lessen the danger posed by the popularity he enjoyed among 'the people' in the extreme circumstances of World War II and, more specifically, its final phase.

'Soms schijnt de dynastie meer bedreigd, dan het publiek, dat Oranje toejuicht, wel beseft', schreef de minister van Oorlog Jan de Quay op 9 juni 1945 in zijn dagboek. Zijn sombere gedachten waren ingegeven door prins Bernhard, die in de roes van de bevrijding plannen aan het smeden was voor de toekomst van een vernieuwd Nederland, een dictatuur met Wilhelmina en zichzelf als 'Bevelhebber Nederlandsche Strijdkrachten' aan het hoofd. De koningin zelve maakte de prins evenwel onschadelijk door hem een 'militair sierambt' en een riante onkostenvergoeding te verlenen. Maar hoe schadelijk was Bernhard, meer bepaald in de context van de Tweede Wereldoorlog, voor de Nederlandse constitutionele monarchie? De knap geschreven en goed gedocumenteerde biografie van Annejet van der Zijl geeft op die vraag geen ondubbelzinnig antwoord.[1]

'De monarch verhindert de dictator' (Joseph Roth)

In een manuscript getiteld 'Der Monarch verhindert den Diktator' (1937) zag de joodse schrijver Joseph Roth (1894-1939) de verkiezingsnederlagen van