

# A Series of Firsts

## Australian & Dutch Representations of the Dutch East India Company (VOC)

Master thesis

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## Abstract

Museums are often seen as objective providers of the truth. In this thesis, that notion is contested and, instead, the idea is explored that museums actively construct representations. These representations are steered by politics and discourses. Nonetheless, most visitors to historical museums are unaware that they are being confronted with representations of the past, that they are shown only specific histories and that these representations are displayed towards *certain ends*.

The thesis focuses on the history of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and its representations in the Netherlands and in Australia. In both countries, this history is seen with a certain amount of pride. Literature and museum exhibitions have been investigated to see *how* these countries represent the VOC and analyzed to understand *why* these representations are used. Discourses and political movements such as nationalism, colonialism and post-colonial theory are revealed behind some of these representations of the VOC. The representations in each country are very different, due to the different reigning discourses which have influenced museums and literature. In the Netherlands, these representations have altered over time along with changes in the dominant discourses. In Australia, the discourses have changed but the representations have not yet followed suit. Therefore, a suggestion is made for the use of reflexive representation, through which museums, in their exhibitions, uncover representations and the political powers behind them. Visitors will then be confronted with the subjective and interpretative work of museums and will no longer accept a museum's representation of history as an objective fact. History is revealed for what it is: merely *one* version of the past.

**Keywords:** Dutch East India Company – VOC – Representation – Discourse – Nationalism – Post-colonial theory – Heritage – Museums – Authority – Politics – Western Australia – The Netherlands – *Batavia*.

## Table of Contents

<p>1. <b>Abstract</b> 2</p> <p>2. <b>Table of Contents</b> 3</p> <p>3. <b>Introduction</b> 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Motivation</i> 5</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Research Questions</i> 5</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Outline</i> 5</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Limitations</i> 6</p> <p>4. <b>Theory &amp; Methods</b> 7</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Culture /Museum/Heritage</i> 7</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Objective vs. Representation</i> 8</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Poetics of Representation</i> 10</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Politics of Representation</i> 12</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Nationalism</i> 13</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>(Post-)colonialism &amp; 'the Other'</i> 15</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Source Critique: Literature</i> 17</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Exhibition Analysis</i> 19</p> <p>5. <b>The VOC</b> 21</p> <p>6. <b>A Dutch Perspective</b> 24</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>1900s</i> 24</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>After 1945</i> 26</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>1980s</i> 27</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Now</i> 28</p>		<p>7. <b>Dutch Politics</b> 31</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>1900s</i> 31</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>After 1945</i> 31</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>1980s</i> 33</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Now</i> 34</p> <p>8. <b>The VOC &amp; Australia</b> 35</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Explorations &amp; Shipwrecks</i> 36</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Finding the Wrecks</i> 38</p> <p>9. <b>An Australian Perspective</b> 40</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Literature</i> 40</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Exhibitions</i> 43</p> <p>10. <b>Australian Politics</b> 47</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>1960s</i> 47</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Now</i> 50</p> <p>11. <b>Future Representations</b> 51</p> <p>12. <b>Conclusion</b> 53</p> <p>13. <b>Acknowledgements</b> 54</p> <p>14. <b>References</b> 55</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>News</i> 59</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;"><i>Exhibitions</i> 60</p> <p>15. <b>Images</b> 61</p> <p>16. <b>Appendix I</b> 62</p> <p>17. <b>Appendix II</b> 67</p>
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## Introduction

We are told and taught about the past in different ways. We hear about it in school or at the university. We read about it in the newspaper or in books. We watch it on TV or on the internet. We learn about it in museums. All of these different channels combine to provide us with an understanding of the past.

But which aspects of the past do we familiarize ourselves with? What do we find important, relevant or useful for the future? Which histories do we collectively choose to remember and which do we actively try to forget? Which stories necessarily fade in comparison to all the others that we must remember? Although most individuals will accumulate somewhat different versions and views of the past, there is often a national perspective that is understood and accepted by most citizens. Schools are essential to achieve this collective knowledge, but museums are equally important. After all, the first museums arose more or less simultaneously with ideals of nationalism and were seen as the ideal tools to create a sense of unity amongst the nation's population (Bennett 2009). The word *create* is important here: history and histories are used towards a certain end. There is always an agenda involved and it is important to acknowledge the existence of such an agenda, even if it may not be possible to avoid.

How are nationalist ideals created? The keywords here are cultural identity through pride. The goal is to tell stories of the past which fill the population with pride to be descendants from those heroes. However, one country's heroic history may be, and often is, another country's sore spot. Different perspectives of the same history will, therefore, exist in different countries. Foreign histories are easily and often looked down upon. The own history is elevated above the histories of other nations to encourage patriotic emotions. However, there are exceptions and this thesis is about one of those exceptions.

It started as an accident: the Dutch were the *first* – documented – Europeans to discover the continent of Australia in 1606 (Playford 2006: 15). By chance, one of the ships of the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*; VOC) wandered too far east and found hitherto unknown land. It was the beginning of nearly two centuries of occasional Dutch activity around Australia. Then, in 1788, the British sent the First Fleet of convicts and colonists to the east coast of Australia and the Dutch were forgotten (Gerritsen, Cramer & Slee 2007: 3). The facts of the VOC's discoveries laid buried under the robes of British colonial rule for over a century, until the beginnings of Australian independence demanded a closer look into the past. Suddenly, a history was discovered that was much older than many people had realized. Furthermore, it was refreshingly non-British and yet reassuringly European, an ideal combination for the construction of an Australian national identity.

## *Motivation*

My encounter with Australia was no accident: I had written to the Western Australian Museum's Department of Maritime Archaeology inquiring if I could do an internship there. I knew the museum housed material from the VOC ship *Batavia*, the subject of my BA thesis. I was curious to see it and I believed I might have some 'native' knowledge I could contribute with. With this in mind, and a welcoming letter from the museum in my pocket, I set out for Fremantle, a harbor city just outside Perth, the capital of Western Australia. I was, however, entirely unprepared for the extent to which the Dutch history was emphasized and prided in Western Australia. It almost felt as if I had stepped into a Dutch colony with more patriotism than the home country. This, I thought, was curious. Why was the VOC so important to the Western Australians?

## *Research Questions*

This question formed the basis for my research and forms the center of my thesis:

- How is the history of the VOC and (by extension) the history of the Dutch represented and used in Western Australia?

To narrow down the subject, a number of secondary research questions have been proposed which will guide the thesis in smaller steps towards answering the main research question. These secondary research questions are:

- How is and was the history of the VOC represented in the Netherlands?
- Why were these representation used in the Netherlands?
- How is the history of the VOC represented in literature in Western Australia?
- How is the history of the VOC represented in museums in Western Australia?
- Why are these representation used in Western Australia?

## *Outline*

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to first construct a theoretical basis or perspective from which these issues can be examined. This theoretical basis will include ideas of culture, the theory of representation, an explanation of nationalism and a critical evaluation of (post-)colonialism and how we (have) see(n) 'the other'. This theoretical chapter will also contain the methods used in this thesis or an explanation of how each theory was applied to the sources. For instance, the theory of the poetics of representation was used as a method to evaluate the exhibitions. At the end, the literary sources and the exhibitions will be introduced and the methods by which they were analyzed will be explained.

After this theoretical and methodological foundation has been constructed, a brief overview will be presented of the VOC. This history will then be expanded to assess the Dutch representations of the VOC over the last 100 years and why these representations were used. Special attention is paid to the changing political climate after World War II and, more recently, under the influence of post-colonial theory.

In a similar manner, literary sources and museum exhibitions in Western Australia will be examined to analyze how the VOC is represented there. This will be put into a historical frame, starting with the early interest in the Dutch and the discovery of the first wrecks until today. This historical frame will then be analyzed from a political perspective, focusing on nationalism and independence movements, as well as notions of European supremacy. This will reveal the *purpose* of these representations. It will become increasingly obvious that the representations in both literature and museums (governmental institutions!) are no longer in sync with present political attitudes in Western Australia. Therefore, the thesis will conclude by making a few suggestions for future representations of the VOC that might be more in line with contemporary politics.

### *Limitations*

Unavoidably, this thesis is bordered by limitations. In focusing on Western Australia, the other Australian states are excluded from this analysis. This limitation was based on practical reasons: I was unable to visit exhibitions in these other states to use them as sources. It may be argued that a focus on Western Australia differs from the nationwide perception, considering the fact that most of the Dutch-Australian interaction happened on this coast. However, this makes Western Australia a relevant example. In addition, there is a limit to the amount of exhibitions I have visited and the literature I have read. I have attempted to include a variety of exhibitions in different cities in both countries, while focusing on 'bigger' museums. The latter is done with the reasoning that the representations of these museums will have more of an impact, since they receive more visitors. As for literature, I have similarly focused on well-known authors, whose books have been received by larger audiences.

It must be realized that the representations and perspectives I am showing are merely one, or a few, of all the possible existing representations in these countries. I do not claim to cover every possible view, merely the dominant ones. Finally, it must be emphasized at all times, that this thesis is also written from a specific (cultural) perspective, namely mine. It is influenced by my personal background of being born and raised in the Netherlands and my academic background formed by studying archaeology and museology in a post-colonial climate. This is not the only perspective or even the only correct perspective, it is merely one of many. However, in explaining the theories used to construct my perspective, I hope that the reader may be able to critically analyze this perspective and see it for what it is: one subjective view among many. At least, it is openly and admittedly subjective.

## Theory & Methods

Analyzing material or looking at sources requires a perspective or point of view. This is where theory comes in: it provides a framework or a direction from which to examine the sources. Researchers might feel that the way they see their material is ‘commonsensical’ or ‘natural’. However, just because a theory or theoretical field matches so well with our (cultural, political, social) perspective, does not mean there are no other perspectives that one could have used. For example, many anthropologists today look at cultures around the world from a perspective of similarity and common humanity. Although it seems a natural way to look at fellow humans, a century ago the perspective was completely different: human beings were analyzed according to evolutionary theories and theories of physical and mental progress and development. The material of study is, in both cases, the same. The researchers, formed by the cultures and times they live in, are not: they are using different perspectives, different theories.

The theories one uses, therefore, greatly shape the results one arrives at and the conclusions one can draw. Disregarding the impact of theories on research would mean denying the extent to which they have shaped the outcomes. In this chapter, I will attempt to uncover and explain a number of theories which I have used throughout my research. These are the perspectives I have chosen to use, among the many that were available to me. Theories do not work alone: a perspective requires an object to observe. I have based my research almost entirely on two types of sources: literature – both academic and popular – and museum exhibitions. After a review of each theory, the use of this theory on the material is explained. At the end, a source critique of the consulted literary sources will be included along with the methods used to analyze the museum exhibitions.

### *Culture/Museum/Heritage*

The word *culture* is used in many different ways, for instance with positive undertones (high culture) or with negative implications (popular culture). It can refer to objects, immaterial things or a combination of both. Considering the fact that so many different definitions and interpretations of the word culture exist, it is useful to pin down the definition which is used throughout this thesis. From the social science perspective, *culture* is “used to refer to whatever is *distinctive* about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation or social group” (Hall 2010a: 2; my emphasis). Culture is an important aspect of the way in which we understand the world and how we produce and exchange meanings. People who belong to the same culture (whether this is a national culture, a linguistic culture or a culture of a musical genre) understand and interpret the world in roughly the same way. To make matters more complicated, people generally belong to different groups and communities and also belong to different cultures. When we are speaking to someone from the same nation (a shared national culture) we are able to easily express shared concepts and meanings – for instance, the celebration of a national holiday – that we would have difficulty explaining to someone from a different nation who does

not share this particular culture. However, we might all be able to understand each other if we discuss a shared culture, such as classical art.

Museums have often been termed the storehouses of culture. Applying the broad definition of culture expressed above, museums can collect extremely varied cultural artefacts. This has allowed for a wide range of types of museums to arise such as ethnographic museums (based on the cultural artefacts of different ethnic or national groups), art museums (based on the artistic culture of various geographic regions or historical periods) or even creationist museums (based on religious culture). However, all of these museums, as varied as they are, have two main tasks: managing their collections and displaying them. These two tasks appear in some form in every definition of a museum (Lidchi 2010: 155). However, what is frequently forgotten is that museums not only display culture, but are themselves also a significant part of culture (Ibid.: 168).

History is generally used to refer to a specific part or aspect of the past. History can be as simple as a description of the lifetime of one person or as complex as ‘the history of the Roman Empire’. Histories are almost always selective in the sense that they highlight only a small number of the total of events that happened. For instance, a history of the Roman Empire will focus on key events, rather than describe everything that happened on every day in every part of the empire. *History*, thus, is a limited or selective part of the *past*. *Heritage*, although often confused with *history*, can be explained as the *use* of history. Steven Hoelscher defines heritage as “the present-day uses of the past for a wide array of strategic goals” (2011: 202). Therefore, when one applies history towards a certain modern goal, one is speaking of heritage. Heritage is put to use to mobilize people and resources towards creating change. Despite cultural heritage’s emphasis on preservation, the real goal is always change (Hafstein 2007: 75).

### *Objective vs. Representation*

Over the past few decades, there has been a debate whether museum displays function as simple reflections of reality or as *representations* of reality. Representations are defined as *constructions* rather than *reflections* and they are, therefore, not objective. There are two central points at the basis of this debate: the meaning of objects and the meaning of language.

It is proposed that objects do not carry within themselves a fixed and natural meaning. The meaning of an object is constructed and produced by us “who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable” (Hall 2010b: 24). These meanings are culturally constructed: the meaning of the same object can be different between different cultures. The meaning can also change over time (Lidchi 2010: 168). A single object such as a cow can be a sacred creature in one culture and a source of food in another. Therefore, it is important not to see objects as objective evidence and to always make a distinction between their unchanging *physical presence* and their fluctuating *meaning* (Ibid.: 162). Objects in



themselves cannot express this meaning. Objects are dumb (Crew & Sims 1991: 159). It is us humans who assign a meaning.

One of the ways in which we can express the meanings of the concepts in our minds is through language. Language, as well, is not fixed: words change meaning over time. Words for the same object or concept in different languages may carry (slightly) different meanings and associations. According to certain language theories, all meanings are produced within history and culture (Hall 2010b: 32) and hence meaning changes continually with context, usage and the passage of time.

Museums are often seen as objective, authoritative, descriptive and neutral. However, in reality, curatorial practice is highly interpretative. Every object in the collections was collected with a specific purpose in mind (Lidchi 2010: 163). Further meaning for each object is created by the curators and designers by placing it in context with other objects or by supplementing it with texts. In giving meaning to 'dumb' objects, the curatorial voice carries a great weight – and great responsibility (Lavine 1991: 151–152). In this way, every object placed in a museum becomes a rhetorical object, covered with layers of meaning (Bennett 2009: 146). Therefore, an exhibition is a highly subjective and constructed representation of reality. Most visitors, however, are unaware of this process. Especially because the curatorial voice is largely invisible, rarely self-critical and strongly authoritative. The sense of authority additionally heightens the notion of authenticity (Crew & Sims 1991: 163). Within Western society especially, we tend to think that objects are objective – it is even in the word! – and that museum exhibitions displaying objects are natural entities, factual and real (Macdonald 2003: 3).

Museums rarely contradict this view. In an educational booklet, the Western Australian Museum writes that “the most interesting and unique finds are arranged in a manner which displays them to best advantage, accurate information is printed, and then everything is placed in the display case in the museum” (Western Australian Museum Education Section undated: 18). This description of the curatorial practice does not even hint at the extremely subjective nature of the finds that are selected, the information which is written and the manner in which they are displayed. Still very few museum exhibitions draw attention to the fact that they are created by people and that they are founded on the cultural assumptions of these people and the times and places they live in (Karp & Lavine 1991: 1). Rarely are these assumptions discussed, although they are the basis on which all choices are made: what to collect, what to display and how to represent it. Museums allow their visitors to become comfortable with the illusion that they are surrounded by an ‘objective truth’ or a ‘real, factual history’ (Bennett 2009: 126). However, museums do not reflect the past ‘as it really was’. They use varying meanings of objects and language to create representations of a version of the past or present. It is this view of museums as active creators of representations, rather than museum displays as objective reflections, that is used throughout this thesis.

## Poetics of Representation

Accepting the fact that museum exhibitions are representations, the next step is to determine *how* such representations are created. To understand how representations are created in exhibitions, an analogy with how representation works through language is useful. The study of how language creates meaning is called *semiotics*, and the way in which representation works is called the *poetics of representation* (Hall 2010a: 6). There are different theories of semiotics, but the one used here is the *constructionist approach*, which is based on the idea that things do not mean, it is we who construct their meaning through concepts and signs (as mentioned above; Hall 2010b: 25). This is a significantly different perspective than, for instance, the *reflective approach*, according to which meaning lies within the object or idea and language simply reflects this meaning (Ibid.: 24).

Using the constructionist approach, we must now investigate how language creates these meanings. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, there is a difference between the actual object (the *signifier*) and the concept in your mind associated with the object (the *signified*) (Hall 2010b: 31 & Lidchi 2010: 164). The relation between these two is dependent on cultural codes and is not permanently fixed. For instance, my concept of a dog is influenced by the fact that I have one as a pet. Someone who keeps dogs for hunting may have a very different concept of the same thing. Both of us, when confronted with the same *signifier* (the dog), interpret its meaning differently, we see it differently *signified*. Once we have a concept for something, these concepts function together as a “system of mental representation which classifies and organizes the world into meaningful categories” (Hall 2010b: 28). A second system of representation – a language – is needed to then communicate this meaning. For instance, in explaining my concept of ‘dog’ above, I combined it in my mind with the concept of *my* dog into a mental system of representation. I then used the words for DOG and PET to express my meaning through language. In this definition of language, I could have used any system of signs, regardless of whether it is based on words, images, objects or sounds (Ibid.: 19). As long as the person I am communicating with reads these signs with the same cultural code – for instance, we both understand this sign ♥ to mean ‘heart’ – it does not matter if the sign actually ‘looks like’ the real object it is representing. Neither the symbol (♥) nor the word HEART look exactly like the actual human heart, yet we understand the meaning of these arbitrary signs because we have learned them (Ibid.: 27).

Once we have understood an object and the signifier has produced, in our minds, a signified, we can progress to a second, deeper level of meaning. Most basic concepts can be associated into wider cultural themes or concepts. Roland Barthes termed the first, which is a more descriptive level, a level of denotation. The second level, which is more associative, he called that of connotation (Hall 2010b: 38). Using the same example from above, the ♥ symbol’s denotation is that of ‘a heart’, while its connotation is that of ‘love’. Signifiers, regardless of whether they are words, objects or another kind of sign, often derive their meaning from being combined with other signifiers. The same signifiers can be used to derive different meanings, depending on how they are combined and the context in which they are used (Bennett 2009:

147). A heart symbol combined with several others, the colour red and shown on a small card carries the meaning of ‘the five of hearts’.

Theories of signifier, signified, denotation, connotation and meaning through context can all be applied to analyze how museum exhibitions create representations. The practice of producing meaning through the ordering of the components of an exhibition is called the *poetics of exhibiting* (Lidchi 2010: 153 & 168). The various objects, texts, colours, sounds, interactive displays and other elements of an exhibition all contribute to creating meaning, usually about a central theme or topic. Depending on this topic, and the perspective that is represented by an exhibition, the same objects can be used to mean different things. For instance, if we take a golden ornament (signifier), which we interpret as a ‘crown’ (signified), an exhibition may suggest different connotations of the same object. An exhibition on the skill of the goldsmith may highlight design elements: the crown would carry connotations such as ‘art’ or ‘craftsmanship’. In this setting, the crown may be displayed with a magnifying glass, small details may be emphasized and the text may identify the maker of the crown. The same object could also be used in an exhibition about colonial conquest, functioning as an example of the colonial exploitation of South America’s resources and the treatment of the indigenous population. In this case, the crown will carry negative connotations such as ‘colonialism’, ‘dominance’ or ‘exploitation’. It might be juxtaposed to contemporary images of conquests, accompanied by shackles or explained with critical texts.

As this example illustrates, the curators and designers of an exhibition have great power to create meanings in their exhibitions. Objects are used as tools towards the creation of meaning and variation occurs especially in their connotations. Although the same crown could carry all the above-mentioned connotations, only one or a few of these will be emphasized in a given exhibition, other connotations will be disregarded. Even though meaning is most obviously created through language and text, one should not underestimate the power of other signs and elements. For instance, putting an object in a glass case makes it seem more distant and often adds value. Putting the same object in a full-scale reconstruction evokes authenticity and makes the object seem more ‘real’. Photographs often work in the same way to heighten the sense of reality, although they are in truth constructions (Lidchi 2010: 171–173).

Authentication is also used in *in situ* exhibitions or dioramas, through which the visitors are provided with the illusion of experiencing someplace exotic ‘as it really is’ (Nederveen Pieterse 2005: 166). When museum exhibitions represent other cultures, two general strategies are applied: *exoticizing* (emphasizing differences) and *assimilating* (highlighting similarities) (Karp 1991b: 375). Traditional ethnographic museums, with *in situ* exhibitions, are usually exoticizing, while many art museums use assimilating strategies. Both of these strategies are founded on the dichotomy of self and ‘other’ (more below; Nederveen Pieterse 2005: 169). Understanding the exhibition strategies that underlie the curatorial choices that have been made and comprehending the ways in which meanings are produced, are crucial to analyzing the exhibitions presented further on in this thesis. The *poetics of representation* will be used as an analogy to reveal the *poetics of exhibiting* present in each exhibition.

## *Politics of Representation*

Once one looks beyond the seemingly objective surface of exhibitions and sees that they are intricate constructions of meaning, the next question is: *why* are these representations used? Why are certain choices made and towards which goals are these representations created? Analyzing the causes and effects of representation is called the *politics of representation* (Hall 2010a: 6). This perspective generally takes a discursive approach as its point of origin.

*Discourses* are ways of creating knowledge about a specific topic. They enable us to talk about that topic and suggest conduct associated with it. An example of a discourse is the discourse of globalization. We can talk about trade, travel or the homogenization of culture as the results of globalization or from a globalization perspective. If we imagine trade as part of globalization, we assume certain effects. Although both trade and travel are old activities and topics, seeing them as part of globalization is new. This is typical for discourses: they are often historically specific. Therefore, the discursive approach focuses less on ‘language’ in general, and more on “specific *languages* or meanings, and how they are deployed at particular times, in particular places” (Hall 2010a: 6). When several discourses or statements operate as a system or a ‘body of knowledge’ this is referred to as a *discursive formation* (Lidchi 2010: 191). Discourses and discursive formations provide ways in which to analyze topics and, in doing so, limit other ways in which that topic could be viewed. Postmodernism, as a discursive formation, for instance, includes specific moral, legal, political, environmental and educational discourses.

Uncovering the discourses that underlie our thought processes and actions is crucial to understanding them. Revealing these discourses is important because discourses construct knowledge and, according to Michel Foucault, knowledge and power directly imply one another (van Dommelen 2010: 106). Therefore, it is futile to study culture and histories (knowledge) without also studying their use as heritage (power). To put it differently, and in a museum context, the information and knowledge presented in museum exhibitions are constructed by discourses and are created by power. At the same time, the information and knowledge in museum exhibitions creates power as well, such as by changing the visitors’ perspective on a certain issue. As such, museums not only display culture but also create it. Let us use ‘environmentalism’ as an example to look at this cyclical loop. A discourse of environmentalism currently exists within the Western world. A museum exhibition, centred on the topic of whaling in history, is expanded to include information about the depletion of whale populations, the changes in the marine environment and organizations such as the WWF. This knowledge is deemed important by the curatorial staff because, through (governmental, institutional or oppositional) power, environmentalism has become ‘an issue’. This power is then passed on to the visitors as they are encouraged to not only assume the same perspective as that presented by the museum, but also to *act* upon it.

The relationship between knowledge and power allows knowledge to not only present itself as the truth, but also “has the power to *make itself true*” (Hall 2010b: 49). Stuart Hall explains this notion with the following example:

... it may or may not be true that single parenting inevitably leads to delinquency and crime. But if everyone believes it to be so, and punishes the single parent accordingly, this will have real consequences for both parents and children and will become 'true' in terms of its real effects, even if in some absolute sense it has never been conclusively proven (Ibid.: 49).

Therefore, knowledge has the power to create truth, even if this knowledge was not true to begin with. Since museum curators, as the creators of knowledge within their exhibitions, carry the same power, it becomes immediately obvious which responsibilities lie within this profession. The role of museums and exhibitions in the production of social knowledge has been termed the *politics of exhibiting* (Lidchi 2010: 184–185). This is also why it is important to uncover the discourses that underlie museum exhibitions and the effects these exhibitions may have. Although individual writers will create different labels, they will still be “operating within the limits of the *episteme*, the *discursive formation*, the *regime of truth*, of a particular period and culture” (Hall 2010b: 55). Museum exhibitions, therefore, tend to reflect the governing assumptions of their time and context. Usually these assumptions are represented and understood as natural and given to such an extent (they feel natural because they are an integral part of how we think), that neither curators nor visitors will notice them, until a passage of time reveals them “as time – and context – bound” (McLean 2008: 287).

From the perspective of the politics of exhibiting, both collections and exhibitions can be seen as historical, social and political events. Although museum representations are created through power, most exhibitions tend to keep this power invisible and rarely address it (Nederveen Pieterse 2005: 165). To discover the knowledge-power relations underlying an exhibition, it is useful to examine the discourses or discursive formations which have led to the specific body of information which is represented in the exhibition. Afterwards, the effects and consequences of the exhibition on society can be assessed. These two steps will be used throughout this thesis to understand the politics of exhibiting behind various exhibitions. This requires first an understanding of the political climate during the time of the exhibition and in the specific place (the reigning discourses). Then, the effects of the exhibition on society can be analyzed. As always, it must be continually remembered that museums, even if they seem objective, neutral and factual, are profoundly political (Anderson 2006: 178).

### *Nationalism*

Nationalism can be considered a discourse and, as such, it can produce knowledge and exert power. Although it might seem natural for us now to think in terms of nations and national identities, nationalism and the notion of the nation-state were created. These ideas emerged around the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As old as most nations represent themselves to be, they are all modern constructions (Hylland Eriksen 2002: 100). What, then, is a nation? Benedict Anderson defines a nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (2006: 5–6). Nations are limited by their imagined borders and are imagined as being supreme in power (sovereign). It is important to remember

that there is a difference between *nation* (as an imagined political community) and *state* (as a real political entity), although these two often overlap. Nations are, therefore, ideological constructions which try to link cultural groups and the state into a common identity – a national identity (Hylland Eriksen 2002: 99).

National identities work to unite a large group of individuals into a community and provide a sense of ‘brotherhood’ amongst people who are largely strangers. Even if this community is full of inequalities, nationalism works to create a sense of equality (Anderson 2006: 7). National identities are most easily forged in relation to others: “the very idea of the nation presupposes that there are other nations, or at least other peoples, who are not members of the nation” (Hylland Eriksen 2002: 110). A national identity is, in essence, exclusive: not everyone can ‘be’ French.

The *nation*, as an imagined community, is identified by a *national identity*. This identity can be expressed either as *patriotism* (a personal love of country) or it can take the form of *nationalism* when the national identity is expressed as domestic and foreign, economic, social, and political policy (Kaplan 2011: 153). Nationalism, in Europe, was closely linked to linguistic cultural differences. Multi-lingual states or empires fractured along linguistic lines – although there are exceptions, such as Switzerland. Nonetheless, multi-lingual nations can be difficult to unite. The political conflicts in Belgium (Flemish and Walloons) or Spain (Spanish and Basque), for instance, occur along the linguistic borders.

The emergence of nationalism in (former) colonies occurred differently. In many cases, the violent suppression of the indigenous populations by the colonial powers led to sparks of resistance. After the decolonization of the post-World War II era, many of these feelings of resistance formed the beginning for independence movements which later created nations and nationalism (Kaplan 2011: 152). Independence in Australia and the American colonies worked differently yet again. Here, a large portion of the population consisted of (British or Spanish) settlers and ‘creoles’ (Europeans who were born in the colony). Both the British and Spanish pursued a policy in which they differentiated between those born in the homeland and those born in the colony. The colony-born individuals, creoles, were often excluded from higher office. This was justified by using theories of the impact of climate on culture and character (e.g. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried von Herder), which made it easy to proclaim that creoles “born in a savage hemisphere, were by nature different from, and inferior to, the metropolitans” (Anderson 2006: 60). Ironically, this categorization of creoles as different and inferior in turn led the creoles to construct the following reasoning: if they could not be true Brits/Spaniards, the ‘home borns’ could not be true Australians/Americans (Ibid.: 57–58). As such, they created their own identity, which in time would lead to the emergence of nationalism.

How is a feeling of national identity created amongst the population of the nation? How can a state effectively pursue nationalism? To create a national society, which feels like a family or community, out of thousands or millions of people – most of whom would never meet –

requires extraordinary imagination. Since identification with individuals of a nation cannot rest on experienced social relations, the solution is found in a shared *culture* – shared knowledge, representation and symbolism (Macdonald 2003: 2). This shared culture is created from a history which is actively made and which eliminates other histories (Bennett 2009: 141). As such, using a “nationing rhetoric is never an innocent choice; its consequences have to be assessed partly in terms of the alternatives it excludes” (Ibid.: 155).

The museum often becomes – alongside formal education – one of the best vehicles for creating and distributing these histories and shared cultures. A museum can assume a symbolic meaning for the nation it represents and, as such, national museums often emerge alongside nationalism. Museums are used to forge identities, to form ideologies, to maintain national myths or to provide a cultural cement for a diverse community (McLean 2008: 283–285). In creating these national identities, the recent and distant past is ‘nationalized’ (Bennett 1988: 89). Events that occurred within the same territory are annexed into the national history. Key events are specified as being stereotypical of the nation or as foundation myths, although in reality they occurred during a time when the nation, as an idea, did not yet exist. In fact, most of the actors in such histories would have identified themselves on the basis of their hometowns rather than as citizens of the state (Sigmond 1998: 5). In this way, a national history is crudely constructed out of a series of loosely connected events and local political events are blown up to represent the entire nation (Anderson 2006: 118). Although this process of nationing is profoundly political, it occurs at such a deep level that it is almost invisible and frequently overlooked (Ibid.: 182–183).

The emergence of national identities and the back-projection of nationalism onto the past will be used to understand the various representations advocated during certain time periods in both the Netherlands and Australia. Nationalism will be used as a discourse to understand the politics of representation, both in literature and exhibitions. Certainly, an understanding of the specific political situations surrounding the creation of certain national myths and histories is necessary for an analysis of the exhibitions and books that were created as a result of these ideas.

### *(Post-)colonialism & ‘the Other’*

To understand the discourse of nationalism and the political situations in the Netherlands and Australia, it is necessary to look at colonialism and post-colonialism. In this respect, these two nations provide opposites: the Netherlands was a colonial power, with colonies in the Indies, Suriname, South Africa, the Netherlands Antilles and elsewhere. Australia, on the other hand, was itself a colony.

Australia’s road to independence began in 1901 with the federation of the six colonies. In 1907, Australia gained autonomy and officially became a ‘dominion’ under the UK. During the First World War Australia fought, for the first time, under its own command and as an

autonomous federation. In the spirit of European nationalism, this point is often chosen to mark the birth of the Australian nation. Up until then, it had been problematic to create an Australian national identity in the 'European style':

*This was perhaps the greatest impediment to the formation of an Australian past. The fact, as it was often expressed at the time, that the Australian nation had not been forged in war – that it had not played any major role in the theatres of 'real history' – meant that it could not lay claim to a past which might be represented on the same footing as the pasts of other [European] nations (Bennett 2009: 137).*

Since then, the Australian nation has developed and, slowly, the state has become more independent. The final phase of decolonization was achieved in 1986, when under the Australia Act the UK severed their constitutional ties and completely withdrew politically from any role in the Australian government.

*Post-colonial* refers to the periods discussed above, in which Western colonial rule was withdrawn from their overseas territories and during which the former colonies gained independence (Kaplan 2011: 152). For most countries, this is linked to the post-World War II period of the 1940s and 1950s. *Post-colonialism* is often used to define the ongoing process of resistance and reconstruction which has its origin in the power-imbalance created by colonialism. Finally, *post-colonial theory* critically examines the experiences and effects of colonialism and imperialism, both within Europe but especially within the former colonies – the so-called settler/invasor societies. As a theoretical field it has analyzed many different aspects, including migration, slavery, representation, resistance, race, gender, difference and place (Kreps 2011: 71). Considering the variety of topics that have been discussed within post-colonial theory, it is understandable that it has permeated various academic fields, such as anthropology, archaeology, history, political science and literature.

One of the directions in which post-colonial theory has developed is in questions of identity (ethnic, racial, gender, local, national, religious, historical or otherwise). During the colonial period, a dichotomy between self and 'other' was uncontested. This notion of strict difference, of superiority/inferiority, was taken for granted and was fundamental to the way colonizers behaved with regards to their colonies. Its effects could be seen in all manner of policies, from education to administration to cultural. Creating this dichotomy of self/other was achieved by consistent *stereotyping*: "the creation and consistent application of standardised notions of the cultural distinctiveness of a group" (Hylland Eriksen 2002: 23–24). However, under the effects of post-colonial theory this dichotomy has been criticized and altered. Neither 'the self' nor 'the other' are seen as meaningful or stable categories anymore (Nederveen Pieterse 2005: 170). Some advocate the use of 'selves' and 'others' to reflect the understanding that we often identify on many different levels in many different ways – our identities are constructed of layers of identities rather than one identity. We are no longer one thing (e.g. British), we are many things at once (e.g. European, Parisian, female, young, Jewish, intellectual, single) and we identify differently depending on the situation.



Museums, as institutions which not only represent identities but also create identities, have not been left unaltered under the effects of post-colonial theory. Especially ethnographic museums, which were more or less founded on this dichotomy of self and 'other', have been heavily criticized. Successively, many have changed their exhibitions and modes of representing 'others' (Wagner 1998: 89). The idea that museums should tell us who we are and who we are not still exists, but it no longer relies on exclusion and sharp boundaries (Karp 1991a: 15). Instead of dichotomization, some have suggested that representation should instead focus on complementarization: a we/you relationship, rather than an us/them relationship (Hylland Eriksen 2002: 28).

At the same time, complementarization still allows for the incontestable existence of difference and different perspectives, without placing value on these differences. As Svetlana Alpers pointed out: "our way of seeing can open itself to different things, but it remains inescapably ours" (1991: 30). Our way of seeing, as mentioned before, is a perspective founded on discourses. Post-colonial critique has advocated the need to understand these discourses and to critically reflect upon the self to understand the power relations embedded within the work one creates (Kreps 2011: 72). Not only should museums apply different ideas of identity, self and 'others', but the museum should critically reflect on these ideas and, where possible, uncover them. Where these changes can be seen in museums, these can be explained:

*as part of an on-going process of decolonizing Western museums, defined here as a process of acknowledging the historical, colonial contingencies under which collections were acquired; revealing Eurocentric ideology and biases in the Western museum concept, discourse and practice; acknowledging and including diverse voices and multiple perspectives; and transforming museums through sustained critical analysis and concrete actions (Ibid.: 72).*

Theories of post-colonialism, as we have seen, are thus closely linked to theories of nationalism, identity, 'others', discourse and the politics of representation. This combination of theories will be used here to fully understand Australian politics throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and today, as well as to analyze the Dutch situation over the course of the last 100 years. The political views and reigning discourses that underlie both literature and exhibitions will be revealed. It will become obvious that the current representations in Australia have not yet been examined from a perspective of post-colonial theory. As such, a process of decolonizing the museum is recommended. To do so, post-colonial theory and concrete models of representation such as complementarization, reflexive representation and the use of multiple voices and perspectives will be offered to suggest how museums in Western Australia could create representations that are more in line with the current discourses and political attitudes within their nation.

### *Source Critique: Literature*

The research for this thesis is almost entirely based on two types of sources: literature and exhibitions. To begin with literature, a distinction can be made between popular literature (which includes fiction as well as non-fiction) and academic literature. The primary difficulty

with using popular literature is, generally, that references are absent and information cannot be verified. However, for the purpose of this research that was no obstacle. The aim was, after all, not to find ‘factual’, ‘true’ information, but to find the representations being used in literature. As such, a critical reading of these works of literature with the use of the theories of the poetics & politics of representation can suffice to uncover these representations and, afterwards, to uncover the underlying discourses. For the latter, it is important to have an understanding of the political situation and the contemporary discourses surrounding the period in which the book was written. No popular literature from the Dutch perspective has been included, partially because the other types of sources are so extensive and partially because it is difficult to determine which of the abundant literature on the subject had an exceptional impact.

The Australian perspective relies heavily on popular literature, since there is a much smaller group of writers who have written on this subject with great success. In the earlier period, the 1960s and 1970s, Hugh Edwards was probably the most influential. A diver, journalist and amateur VOC enthusiast, he discovered one of the four VOC wrecks in Australia and dove on several others, leading and participating in expeditions as well. Besides publishing many newspaper reports and articles, he also wrote several books. These usually included sections about the histories of the wrecks as well as stories about his diving and digging expeditions surrounding them. In more recent years, Mike Dash (2009) and Peter Fitzsimons (2011) wrote on the subject of the VOC ship *Batavia*. Both books became best-sellers and have been widely read in Australia (and translated abroad). Dash’s book is more academic than Fitzsimons’, although both include references and have used extensive (academic) literature as sources. Nonetheless, both are ultimately novels with fictional aspects. They are excellent examples of a contemporary perspective. Finally, the work of Phillip Playford must be mentioned. A geologist by training, he became interested in the wreck of the VOC ship *Zuijtdorp*<sup>1</sup> in the 1950s. Although not academically trained in archaeology or history, his work on this specific wreck has made him somewhat of an expert and much of his work includes both academic and non-academic sections (2006).

The use of academic literature is not without its limitations. Although such work is generally well referenced, it does not escape from being moulded by the existing discourses. As such, academic literature can also be analyzed for its representations, rather than for the information it provides. While critically reading these works, one must have a basic understanding of the reigning theories in the disciplines within which the text was written. For the Dutch perspective, academic literature is most strongly focused on the works of one of the most influential maritime historians on the subject of the VOC, Femme Gaastra (2009). This is accompanied by the works of other historians (Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008) and museologists with a background in history (Mörzer Bruyns 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> The letter *ij* in Dutch, when written by hand, becomes joined to resemble an *ÿ*. Although this letter is generally written as *y* in English translations and transcriptions (e.g. *Zuytdorp*), I have chosen to use the Dutch form of *ij* which is considered correct in modern typed spelling. Furthermore, since there were no spelling rules at the time, names of places, people and ships were continuously spelled differently. *Zuijtdorp*, which is one of the Old Dutch versions of the name, is often modernized to *Zuiddorp*.

For the Australian perspective, academic literature is most strongly based within the discipline of (maritime) archaeology. As a scientific profession, maritime archaeology emerged in Australia when the Department of Maritime Archaeology was created within the Western Australian Museum. Since then, the museum's Department of Maritime Archaeology has remained on the forefront of the discipline within Australia – and is highly regarded around the world. Much of the academic literature on the subject is, therefore, written by the staff of this department, who are both maritime archaeologists and museologists. Thus, a distinct similarity can be found between the representations of these museological archaeologists in their exhibitions and in their publications. The academic literature includes both those who were formerly employees of the museum (e.g. Graeme Henderson) and those currently working there (such as Jeremy Green, Michael McCarthy and Myra Stanbury). Other publications are generally also from either the disciplines of archaeology or maritime archaeology (e.g. Michael Nash). An exception is provided by the work of historian Henrietta Drake-Brockman. After researching the case of the *Batavia* wreck for a novel, *The Wicked and the Fair* (1957), she realized she had collected so much factual information on the subject that she decided to write a second (academic) book on the same topic. This book, *Voyage to Disaster* (orig. 1963), still forms the basis for most research on the *Batavia* and has been foundational for most novels on the subject ever since.

### *Exhibition Analysis*

Apart from literature, the second main source used for the research of this thesis is exhibitions. Once again, the exhibitions were analyzed to uncover their representations. 'Seeing' these representations is not always easy: mostly because (looking from within the perspective of the same reigning discourses) they seem so natural that they are invisible. Finding them requires a very critical 'reading' of the exhibition, which in my case was easier for the 'foreign' exhibitions in Australia than for the exhibitions at home in the Netherlands. The method used for this research was the following. All exhibitions except for one (due to logistical difficulties) were visited more than once, with a period of time in between to mull over the exhibition. First of all, the structure of the exhibition was analyzed: what is the main aim of the exhibition, what are the themes discussed throughout and in what order? Then the details of the exhibition were examined, the individual labels were critically read and the various displays assessed. A photographic record was kept of all the exhibitions (including all texts and most of the displays) for further review. Finally, time was taken in each case to understand: what is this exhibition trying to say?

Two replica ships and three exhibitions were analyzed for the Dutch perspective (see "References – Exhibitions"). The exhibitions are all in different museums. *Schipbreuk* is housed in a provincial museum which has so far mainly focused on the history of the province Flevoland since it was created out of the IJsselmeer less than a hundred years ago. It has been concerned primarily with nature and modern culture. *Schipbreuk*, a temporary exhibition, tells the much older history of the VOC ship *Batavia*. *Nederlands-Indië* is housed in an ethnographic museum

in Amsterdam which is in the process of reorientation to become a museum of world culture. The exhibition is part of the permanent exhibitions which are geographically organized. Although there is still a strong accent on culture, *Nederlands-Indië* also includes a historical aspect and a critical tone towards former colonization. Finally, *Zie je in de Gouden Eeuw*, is focused on a century of Dutch history from a maritime perspective. It is a permanent exhibition housed in the newly refurbished and completely renewed maritime museum in Amsterdam, which reopened in October 2011. It provides a very current view of the VOC and the Dutch Golden Age.

For the Australian perspective four exhibitions were reviewed, all of them part of the Western Australian Museum (WAM; see “References - Exhibitions”). One of the exhibitions was in Geraldton, a regional centre of the WAM. This exhibition is fairly new and was created specifically for the local population and tourists. Almost all of the material in the exhibition comes from another site of the WAM, the Shipwreck Galleries in Fremantle where both the Department of Maritime Archaeology and their collections are housed. This museum building has three exhibitions and the majority of its exhibition space is dedicated to the subject of the VOC. These galleries were made during different time periods over the last two decades. The *Batavia Gallery* focuses on the wreck of the *Batavia*. The *Dutch Wrecks Gallery* includes the *Batavia* as well as the other VOC shipwrecks in Australia. The third and newest exhibition, *From Hartog to De Vlamingh*, is concerned with exploration rather than specific shipwrecks and also includes discoveries by other nations and their East India Companies.

In analyzing both literature and exhibitions, one should bear in mind that meaning is not only created by the author/curator, but also by the reader/visitor. It is imaginable, and even logical, that others who have visited these exhibitions or have read these same books will see different representations or will have made different interpretations. This is because we all construct meaning differently. Nonetheless, through an extensive critical analysis and by reproducing (as best as possible) the thought-processes that led the author to see certain representations, it is hoped that the reader will be able to see the same representations.

## The VOC

*The Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie<sup>2</sup> was the most powerful single commercial concern the world has ever known. General Motors, British Tobacco, Ford, The Shell Company, Mitsubishi, Standard Oil – any of the other giant holdings of today are on the level of village bootmakers compared with the might and power and influence once wielded by the VOC (Edwards 1970: 7).*

It is not uncommon to hear the power and influence of the VOC praised in these terms. The VOC was created in 1602 as a trading company with the purpose to import spices from the Indies (Gaastra 2009: 19). After a few years of experiments, all led by small short-term trading companies, it had been proven that trade with the Indies was possible, that it was profitable and that the Portuguese no longer had to be feared on the oceans. The success of some of these ventures led to more companies being called into existence and in a few years' time the European markets were saturated while prices in the Indies had sky-rocketed. This was not good for business and so, under pressure from the government of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands<sup>3</sup>, the VOC was created out of the existing trading companies in six Dutch cities (Ibid.: 19). The VOC was given a monopoly to trade with the Indies and other companies were forbidden to trade with 'the East'. Furthermore, as a representative of the Dutch Republic, the VOC was given the authority to build forts, trading posts and factories in the Indies, as well as defend these with soldiers (Ibid.: 21). Over the years, the VOC was often funded by the Dutch Republic to represent them at sea during periods of war. In fact, many peace treaties between the Dutch Republic and other European states explicitly excluded the Indies and the distant seas, allowing war to continue between the trading companies (Ibid.: 58).

The VOC rapidly set up a system of administration, created a capital in the Indies (Batavia, built on the ruins of Jayakarta, today's Jakarta), set up plantations and factories, transported soldiers from the home country to defend forts and tried to enforce their monopoly on spices. This was done partially through diplomacy and trade agreements with local princes and rulers and partially by harsh – and often bloody – suppression of the population (Gaastra 2009: 49). As the VOC gained a stronger position in the Indies, they set up an intra-Asiatic trade network (Ibid.: 39). The latter is often taken as the reason for the exceptional success of the Dutch East India Company over all other East India Companies. The Asian market was barely interested in European goods, so the trading companies were using silver and gold bullion to buy spices and other goods in Asia, an expensive practice. The VOC realized that by setting up a trade network within Asia, they could buy these spices without having to import bullion. Namely, they would import goods from India or Japan, that were valued in the Indies and trade these for spices. They would then trade a small fraction of the spices again in Japan and so they created a complex system of trade within Asia that required little import of bullion from Europe (Ibid.:

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<sup>2</sup> *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* in modern Dutch spelling and abbreviated as VOC. Literally translated, it means the United East-India Company. To make a distinction with the [British] East India Company, the term 'Dutch East India Company' is used when referring to the VOC in English.

<sup>3</sup> *Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden*, also known as the Republic of the Seven United Provinces (*Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Provinciën*) and various other names. It is commonly shortened to the 'Dutch Republic'.

39). Thus, the *retourschepen*<sup>4</sup> were free to bring other goods to Batavia, such as bricks for the construction of warehouses or spare parts for the company wharf on the island Onrust. These ships would then return home laden with spices and other luxury items such as wax, indigo, porcelain, coffee, tea or silk.

The VOC functioned by a complex system of councils. It was led by the *Heren XVII* (Gentlemen Seventeen), who were representatives from the six cities who had founded the VOC. These six chambers were represented more or less in proportion with their financial investment in the company, but assurances were made that the chamber of Amsterdam, by far the largest, could only have eight seats and not a majority (Gaastra 2009: 21). Besides the *Heren XVII*, the chambers each had their own administration with their own councils and separate administration centres were set up in Batavia (1619) and later at the Cape of Good Hope (1652). The VOC worked diligently to create factories, warehouses and small centres of administration and soon they had posts throughout much of South-East Asia: in India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Formosa (Taiwan), China, Japan, Malaysia and, of course, Indonesia. The Company was backed financially by something entirely new: stock (Ibid.: 22). It is sometimes said that “kings and emperors are interested in the possession of land and that citizens are interested in trade” (Sigmond 1998: 6). Since the VOC was in the hands of citizens rather than the nobility (both the shareholders and the representatives for the chambers were citizens, if wealthy ones), their primary aim was trade rather than colonization. The bookkeepers of the Company soon realized that the most effective way to earn money was by creating a small but efficient network of trade posts, rather than to aim for mass colonization (Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008: 161).

The VOC existed until it was declared bankrupt in 1798 and all of its assets and possessions were taken over by the Dutch Republic (Gaastra 2009: 179). It is at this point that the forts, refreshment stations and cities of the VOC became official colonies of the state. Blame for the collapse of the VOC is pointed in many directions: the effects of the fourth Anglo-Dutch war (during which many East Indiamen were captured by the English and possessions were destroyed), the failure of the *Heren XVII* to adapt to changing situations or population strain caused by the high death toll in the Indies (Ibid.: 153 & 181). However, although the Company struggled for several decades, resulting in a bigger and bigger debt, it was time and again bailed out by the Dutch Republic – until 1798. It seems that the Dutch Republic had difficulty imagining that it could avoid financial ruin without the existence of the VOC and the support it provided to the Republic (Ibid.: 179).

The precise impact of the VOC on the Dutch Republic, financially and otherwise, has been heavily debated. Certainly the cities of the six chambers flourished under the activities of the VOC, which required warehouses, administrative offices and wharfs (fig. 1; Gaastra 2009: 36). Beyond that, it created business for banks, auction houses and local markets. It created a

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<sup>4</sup> Literally ‘return ships’, this term did not so much designate a ship’s design or type, but referred to the function of the larger ships that travelled back and forth between the Indies and the Dutch Republic. These are often called ‘East Indiamen’ in English.

market for the import of ship-building materials (such as Scandinavian timber) as well as a network for export within the Republic and to other European states. It also drew employees from other states in Europe to the Republic. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 25% of all sailors and 33% of all soldiers in the Dutch Republic were in the direct employ of the VOC (Ibid.: 88). The share of those indirectly involved in work provided by the VOC would have been even greater.

Figure 1: One of the VOC's wharfs and warehouses in Amsterdam, J. Mulder, 1726



It is clear that the Dutch East India Company was extensive compared to the other East India Companies (some blame its mammoth size for its collapse), but there is debate as to how much bigger it was. Some sources say that the VOC made more profit and sent more ships to the Indies than all other European East India Companies combined. The early 17<sup>th</sup> century explorer and hero Sir Walter Raleigh is credited to have complained of the Dutch that they had as many ships as all other civilized European states together. Although this statement is probably an exaggeration, many scholars estimate it to be quite close to the truth (Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008: 160). The VOC has been called the “largest multinational corporation in the world” (Broeze 1995: xvi), “the richest corporation in the world” (Gray 2008: 1) and the world’s largest trade organisation (Gaastra 2009: 153). Undeniably, the VOC played its part in contributing to the Dutch Republic’s *Gouden Eeuw* (Golden Age) which coincides roughly with the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The starting point of the *Gouden Eeuw* is often placed at the year 1602: the year the VOC was brought into existence.

## A Dutch Perspective

*We should make it clear that our little country is not only on a level with England, but surpasses the whole world in skill (Drake-Brockman 2006: 24).*

Francisco Pelsaert, a merchant in the employ of the VOC, wrote these words in the 1620s. Similar sentiments are no longer expressed in the Netherlands. Although there is a certain sense of pride in “our little nation,” the Dutch know they have been surpassed by other nations. Attitudes and perspectives change over time. The Dutch have looked back upon the VOC, the *Gouden Eeuw* and these histories with different eyes over the last 100 years. In four time periods (1900s, 1945, 1980s and now) the dominant perspectives of the Dutch on the history of the VOC will be described. In other words, the different representations of the VOC will be unveiled.

Figure 2: On the roadstead of Bantam, J.H. Isings, 1913



1900s

The first place most Dutch citizens came into contact with the history of the VOC was in elementary school. At the time, history was taught through the use of *schoolplaten*: large, colourful images that depicted specific important historic events. They functioned as illustrations to accompany the school teacher’s lessons. These images were usually poster sized and several of them would be hanging on the classroom’s walls, as the class progressed chronologically through the nation’s historical events. The VOC was represented in the image ‘*Op de reede van Bantam, 1598*’ [On the roadstead of Bantam, 1598] in which a magnificent fleet of the VOC is shown anchored off the exotic coast of Java (fig. 2). The fleet is surrounded by



smaller 'native' crafts. The date probably marks the arrival of the 'Second Fleet' in Bantam which occurred early in 1599. Interestingly, this point is chosen as the 'origin of the VOC,' which was, of course, only called into existence in 1602. The splendour of the Dutch fleet combined with the exotic landscape results in an idealized and peaceful image of the Dutch activities in the Indies. The success of the venture and the greatness of its achievements can be seen in the lavish decorations on the sterns of the ships, which are in stark contrast with the small and bare native crafts. This representation of the predecessor of the VOC can be summed up as: powerful, peaceful, rich and successful. On the other hand, the Indies are represented as: natural (as opposed to cultural), plain, poor and unadvanced. A notion of **Western superiority** is evident.

Representations could also be seen in the streets. During this period in time, the early leaders of the VOC were immortalized in many statues. In 1893, a statue was erected of Jan Pieterszoon<sup>5</sup> Coen (who had been Governor-General in charge of the VOC's operations in the Indies in the 1620s) in his hometown of Hoorn. The placement of the statue was accompanied by ceremonies and a series of celebrations (Westfries Archief, 10 July 2011). In 1619, Coen had ordered the foundation of the city of Batavia. As it was long phrased in schoolbooks: "1619: *Jan Pieterszoon Coen sticht Batavia op de puinhopen van Jacatra [sic]*" [1619: Jan Pieterszoon Coen founds Batavia on the ruins of Jakarta] (Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008: 158). This man's 'accomplishment' of burning down a 'native' city to build a 'Dutch' city in its place, was represented as the starting point of Dutch settlement in the Indies. Coen, and the other influential men of the VOC, were represented as heroes and founders of the (colonial) 'nation' (Gaastra 2009: 9-10).

World exhibitions and museums such as the *Koloniaal Museum* [Colonial Museum] in Haarlem (founded in 1871, renamed the *Koloniaal Instituut* [Colonial Institute] in 1910) focused on the Indies from a different perspective (Muskens 2010: 64). Although the history of colonization was elongated to include the activities VOC, the exhibitions were strongly centred on products. The *Koloniaal Instituut*'s main goal was to educate the Dutch public about the goods grown in and exported from the Indies (Ibid.: 117). More importantly, the wealth received from these products was emphasized. World exhibitions were events where colonial powers could show off and compare the wealth and products that they were extracting from their colonies. Furthermore, they displayed the colonial cultures, people, buildings and religions, often by reconstructing entire 'native' villages. In these media, the VOC was represented as the predecessor of the current 'trade' with the Indies. The wealth of the exotic products was taken by the colonial power and, considered a fair trade at the time, the colonial power in turn worked to 'civilize' the colony and to encourage progress: technological, educational, political and religious. To legitimize the perspective that it was a good thing that the colonial power was in charge of the colony, such exhibitions often referred back to one of Jan Pietersz. Coen's famous phrases: "*daer can in Indiën wat groots verricht worden!*" [there in the Indies something

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<sup>5</sup> Commonly abbreviated to Jan Pietersz. Coen. The patronymic 'zoon' (son) was often used for surnames and, while it was always pronounced in full, it was usually abbreviated to sz. in writing.

great can be achieved]. The exhibitions often put Coen's phrase in the durational present ('is being achieved') (Tropenmuseum, *Nederlands-Indië*). As such, they represented the state and colonial power as a continuation of the VOC. Both the VOC and the colonial state were represented as: creating progress, providing wealth, civilizing and as positive forces. It represented **colonization in idealized terms**.

### *After 1945*

Shortly after 1945, the *schoolplaat* depicting the VOC in Bantam was removed from schools (Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008: 118–119). It was not replaced by a new image until 1960 with '*Binnenkomende vloot vóór Amsterdam, ± 1665*' [Incoming fleet outside Amsterdam, c. 1665] (fig. 3). The fleet depicted in this image is no less spectacular and rich and the 'native' crafts surrounding it are no less small and simple. However, the background in this picture is no longer the exotic landscape of Java, but the wealthy cityscape of Amsterdam. As such, the image carries connotations of the wealth the VOC brought to the Dutch Republic and Amsterdam, as well as the wealth of its vessels. The removal of the Bantam image, however, says more about the representation of the VOC in the post-World War II era. By removing this incident from history, as it were, the VOC and its activities in/exploitation of the Indies were removed from the Dutch educational system and the national consciousness. Simultaneously, the date 1619 was removed from history books and timelines (Ibid.: 158). The VOC was represented as: insignificant, non-existent and hidden – a representation of **negligibility**.



Figure 3: Incoming fleet outside Amsterdam, J.H. Isings, c. 1960

In the same period, the *Koloniaal Instituut* underwent several name changes: to *Koninklijke Vereeniging Indisch Instituut* [Royal Society Indian Institute] in 1945 and five years later to its current name, *Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen* [Royal Tropical Institute] (Muskens 2010: 66). Along with its name, the main function of the museum changed as well. Its scope was enlarged to include cultures and countries that were not (former) colonies of the Netherlands and focus was moved from products to peoples and cultures. The VOC was entirely excluded from this museum as well and was no longer linked to the histories of these countries. In the immediate post-World War II era, the VOC had more or less ceased to exist in Dutch history.

### 1980s

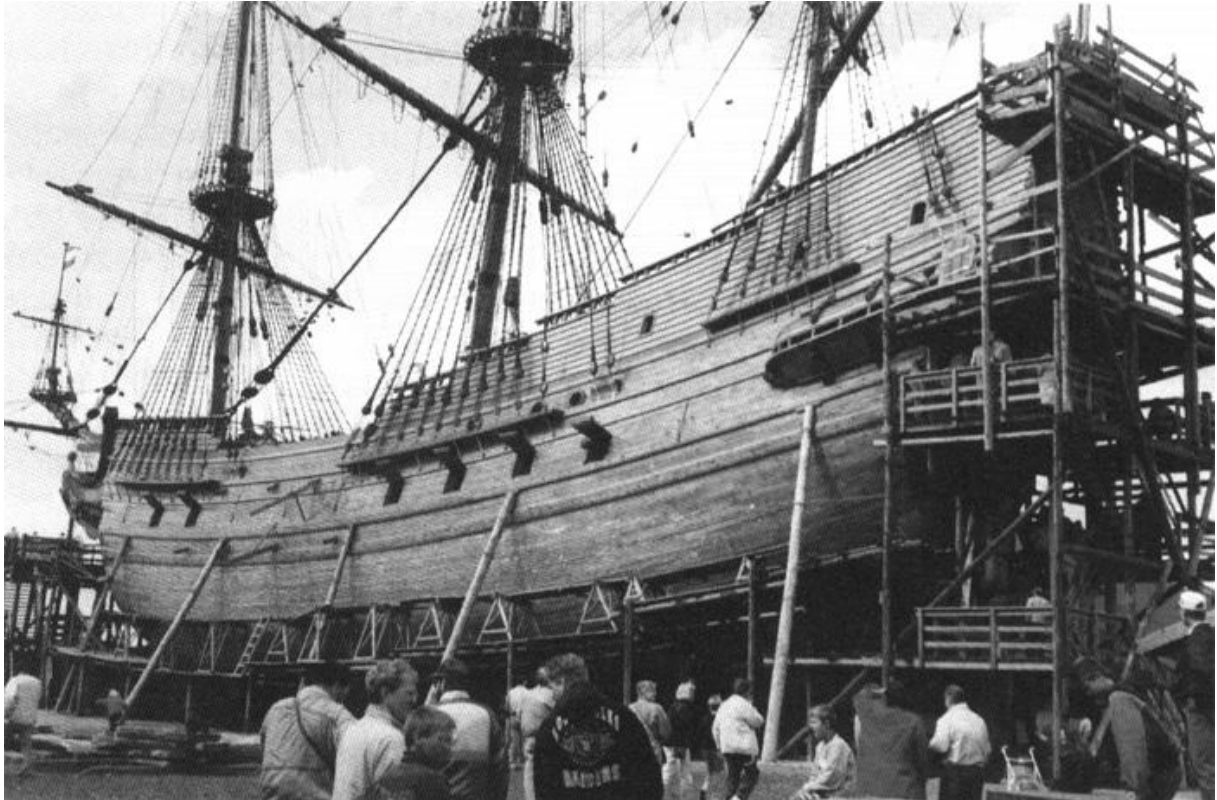
The VOC was slowly revived over the following decades, starting with an inclusion in the history books (as illustrated by the new *schoolplaat* mentioned above) and with a new public interest in the subject. During this period, several replicas were built of VOC ships, most notably a replica of the *Batavia* (sunk in 1629, replica built in Lelystad 1985–1995) and the *Amsterdam* (sunk in 1749, replica built in Lelystad 1985–1990). Both ships function as exhibitions and are open for visitors.

The *Amsterdam*, housed at Amsterdam's *Scheepvaartmuseum*, was represented through the use of living history. On weekends, volunteers would dress up in 17<sup>th</sup> century costumes and represent life onboard a VOC ship: cannon were fired, the rigging was climbed and traditional meals were cooked (which the visitors were invited to taste). The different cabins in the ship were furnished, the hold was filled with crates and the main decks held hammocks and cannon. The *Amsterdam* created a representation of the VOC from two perspectives: the journey and the homecoming. The former was represented as hardships, challenges and adventures. It was largely focused on the aspects of life on board, rather than arrival in the Indies or the activities there. The homecoming was represented as: wealth, success and the bringing of culture towards the Dutch Republic (such as the introduction of tea and coffee, through plants and porcelain, to Dutch society).

The *Batavia*, located at the *Bataviawerf* in Lelystad, was represented in two perspectives as well: the ship's construction and the story of its tragic fate. The construction was represented by opening the ship to visitors for the entire ten years of its construction. Visitors could observe the ship slowly being built up from the ground and they could learn about traditional techniques and tools (fig. 4). No part of the construction process was off limits, thus visitors were shown sail-making, wooden construction, painting, the carving of decorations and costume- and furniture-making. The story, which has all the elements of a best-selling thriller, such as mutiny, murder, shipwreck and survival, is told through volunteer guides. The replica does not contain any signs or labels to ensure an authentic atmosphere. It contains cannon and furnished cabins, a powder room, galley and brig. The shipbuilding perspective creates a representation of the VOC as: craftsmanship, efficient and hardworking. The focus on the story of the *Batavia* represents the VOC as: exciting, personal and a wealth of tales.

In all arenas, focus was shifted from the VOC's activities abroad, to a representation of the VOC's **influence and achievements at home**. This proved to be very popular at the time and the replicas were accompanied by many exhibitions on the subject of the VOC and the *Gouden Eeuw*. As late as in 1998, when the *Scheepvaartmuseum* in Amsterdam began to plan their grand renewal, the VOC was a focal point in their plans. The museum decided "that the VOC should be among the first [exhibition themes], as it connects well with the replica *Amsterdam*, and also because, at present, there is widespread interest in that subject" (Mörzer Bruyns 1998: 134).

Figure 4: Visitors at the *Batavia* during construction, photo: Albert Boes



### *Now*

A new perspective of the VOC could be seen in the media last year, when the statue of Jan Pietersz. Coen fell off its pedestal after an accident with a construction crane. The population of Hoorn immediately started a petition to request that the statue *not* be replaced. The locals felt that the statue, with Coen's phrase encouraging the VOC to get all the richest that could be had from the Indies, was insensitive (De Volkskrant, 19 September 2011). They no longer felt that a man such as Coen with his violent deeds represented the Dutch in the modern world. The issue had been a point of debate in Hoorn for a number of years and the local government had promised to add a 'critical note' to the statue. This note would explain some of the less illustrious acts of Coen, such as his violent depopulation of the Banda islands. Although the statue's falling seemed to be a good time to suggest that the statue be removed all together, in the end the local government decided to return the statue to its pedestal. They argued that Coen, despite his 'dark side' was still one of the most famous and influential citizens of Hoorn throughout history. The critical note has yet to be added. The situation surrounding this statue

provides two conflicting representations. The local government sees Coen's statue as representing a successful man: a local man who made a global impact. The inhabitants of Hoorn, however, see the statue as a representation of **colonial oppression**, genocide and cruelty.

Three Dutch exhibitions also provide alternate representations of the VOC. In *Nederlands-Indië*, Indonesia is put in a colonial framework and its history under influence of the Netherlands as a colonial power is investigated. The exhibition provides a critical view of the activities of the Dutch in Indonesia in examples such as: power relations on plantations, educational discrimination, armed conflicts, independence movements, missionary activities and racial anthropological investigations. The VOC is included as the origin of Dutch colonization. The economic incentives of the VOC are juxtaposed with slavery, wars and exploitation. The VOC is accused of protecting their trade interests with violence. In this exhibition, the VOC is represented as a **colonial power in the negative sense**: violent, oppressive and unforgiving.

The exhibition *Schipbreuk* is centered around the story of the *Batavia* and its loss. The exhibition follows the journey of the ship chronologically, from construction, through the journey to its loss and the struggle for survival of the people onboard. In various steps, the *Batavia* is set within the bigger picture of the VOC. The massive production of the wharfs in the Dutch Republic are sketched, examples of products imported from the Indies are provided to smell and touch, the city of Batavia is mapped and the contemporary Dutch legal system is explained. Throughout, the emphasis is, however, on the story of the *Batavia* and a number of individuals who were aboard her. The VOC as colonial power is not represented in the exhibition. Rather, it is represented as a(n almost) modern trading company, a multinational, which had posts and factories around the world and imported many products to the Dutch Republic. Although the laws and punishments of the time are represented as very different from ours, the idea of a legal system with rules, laws, punishments and without unauthorised torture is represented as similar and modern. Overall, *Schipbreuk's* representation of the VOC is as a **modern trading company**: efficient, productive, organized and democratic.

Finally, the exhibitions in Amsterdam's *Scheepvaartmuseum*, after being closed for complete refurbishment, opened in October 2011. Although the museum had previously planned an exhibition about the VOC (see above), no such exhibition was ultimately created. Instead, the museum now has an exhibition on the Golden Age (*Zie je in de Gouden Eeuw*) in which the VOC is included. Despite having chosen the logo of the VOC as pictorial symbol for the exhibition, the VOC is represented as only a - minor - part of the *Gouden Eeuw*. The exhibition starts by describing the Dutch Republic's waterways as an important cause for the Republic's wealth throughout the Golden Age. Technological discoveries, the high level of expertise in cartography and the importance of national and European shipping are the first topics discussed. After presenting a critical perspective on the VOC's sister company, the WIC (*West-Indische Compagnie*), its slave trade and the failure of its colonies, the final theme presented in the exhibition is the VOC itself. The representation provided of the VOC is best summed up in the words of this section's main label: "[In the 17<sup>th</sup> century] the VOC contributes towards

the prosperity of the Golden Age, however shipping within Europe is the basis for Dutch affluence” (Scheepvaartmuseum, *Zie je in de Gouden Eeuw*). The VOC is represented from a commercial perspective, as such it is seen as not extremely influential. This perspective is backed by recent studies into the economy of the Dutch Republic, which suggest that although the turnover of the VOC was substantial, it is not as impressive within the broader perspective of the Republic’s total economy (Gaastra 2009: 181). In sum, the exhibition represents the VOC as **moderately commercially influential**.

In conclusion, the dominant Dutch perspective on the VOC has changed significantly over the last 100 years. Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the VOC was seen as rich, successful and powerful. It was often represented in relation to the Indies, as a founder of the Indonesian colony and as bringer of civilization and progress – in a peaceful manner. The most influential men were heralded as heroes and the VOC was generally seen as a good example to follow in contemporary dealings with the colony. After the Second World War, the history of the VOC, seen as intrinsically linked to the former colonies, was almost completely removed from Dutch collective memory. A representation of negligibility had succeeded representations of Western superiority and idealized colonization.

During the 1980s, the VOC re-emerged, once again as successful and wealthy. However, instead of seeing the VOC as civilizing the colony, focus was placed on the economic and cultural effects of the VOC’s import products on the Dutch Republic. Furthermore, emphasis was shifted to the voyage: adventure, excitement, challenges and personal stories. The VOC became less represented in terms of the achievements of some of its Governor-Generals and more in terms of the experiences of the regular men in its employ. Focus was also reoriented to the ‘fatherland’ in terms of ship construction and ‘Dutch hardworking efficiency’. Representations were centred on the VOC’s influence and achievements at home.

Finally, today we can see several conflicting representations of the VOC in existence. For some it is still successful, productive and wealthy: an organized multinational company of almost modern standards on a global stage. This has been downplayed as well, to representing the VOC as only somewhat commercially influential. Others emphasize the VOC’s position as founder of the Indonesian colony and, unlike in the early 1900s, this is seen in a negative light with connotations of genocide, colonial oppression, violence and warfare.

## Dutch Politics

The representations that were identified in the previous chapter do not stand alone. They were influenced by different reigning discourses and changing power relations. Over the last century, the political situation in the Netherlands altered significantly. Dutch and Western discourses altered, perhaps most noticeably for these representations with the end of colonialism and the beginning of globalization. This chapter investigates the politics and discourses that influenced the different Dutch representations of the VOC during the four time periods.

### 1900s

Around 1900, the Netherlands were expanding and intensifying their power in the East Indian archipelago. This new wave of colonialism was linked to the early years of the VOC's expansion in the Indies to legitimize the modern Dutch activities (Gaastra 2009: 9-10). Parallels were drawn with the VOC to emphasize the benefits of this expansion of power for both the colonizers (products and wealth) and the colonized (civilization, progress, technology, education). As part of the notion at the time that colonial powers were the only powers that mattered, the Dutch heavily prided these early territorial conquests by the VOC. World exhibitions and colonial museums all functioned within a colonial discourse, aimed towards legitimizing and neutralizing the colonizer. The *goal* was to make the populations in the home country and in the colonies understand that this situation was for the best for everyone and that it embodied a natural balance of power.

Within all this, the VOC also functioned as a source of wealth and success for the nation in other aspects: exploration of unknown lands, import and export of spices and advances in ship building technology. The dichotomy of self and the 'other' was heightened by images such as the *schoolplaat* of Bantam. This, yet again, was part of the colonial body of knowledge that the 'natives' were inferior to the colonizer. In this sense, colonialism may be seen as a discursive formation, including discourses of racism, evolutionism, imperialism, wealth and Western superiority. The history of the VOC was seen from the perspective of this **colonial discursive formation**.

### After 1945

The discursive formation of colonialism was abruptly brought to an end by the conclusion of the Second World War. The Netherlands had already lost most of their smaller colonies, which had been trading posts of the West and East India Companies (WIC and VOC), prior to WWII. These small trading posts had been abandoned as soon as the companies went bankrupt. The two largest colonies, Indonesia and Suriname, were both decolonized after the Second World War. Subsequent to the Japanese occupation of Indonesia during the war, the Netherlands tried forcibly to regain power. However, the Netherlands ultimately granted

Indonesia independence a few years later, mainly due to international pressure because of Indonesian independence movements. Suriname, originally colonized by the WIC, remained a colony of the Netherlands until 1975, although it was granted limited self-government after the war. Suriname's final independence was the result of peaceful negotiations with the Netherlands.

In the period immediately after World War II, colonialism was associated with loss. The colonies were no longer a matter of pride and a source of wealth, but a painful loss and a public wound to the Dutch nation's international reputation. The history of the VOC, linked to the foundation of Dutch colonial activities in the East, became a history of shame, rather than pride. As such it was hushed and hidden away, it became an aspect of the past to neglect rather than to remember. The Bantam *schoolplaat* was removed from classrooms to weaken the link to the Dutch colonial past (Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008: 118–119). Simultaneously, the date 1619 (when Coen founded the city of Batavia) was removed from educational curriculums. Coen's achievements were no longer something the Dutch wanted to be associated with: it was no longer considered appropriate to brag about the deeds of an arsonist and mass murderer (Ibid.: 158).

Within the museums, imperial history was being replaced as well. The *Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen* broadened its scope from the former colonies to include various other non-Western cultures around the globe. Focus was on the exoticism of these cultures and their 'unorthodox' material world and rituals. Reinterpretation and reorientation towards the cultures of the former colonies was needed (Broeze 1995: xv). This was achieved largely by neglecting the colonial past of that culture and their histories of European contact. These cultures were often represented as they had been prior to Western contact: as 'pure' and uncorrupted by Western influences.

The post-colonial period was one marked by a discourse of forgetting, denial and post-colonialism. As part of the latter, reorientation was needed to reconstruct a power balance that had been heavily damaged through the process of decolonization. This reorientation needed to be accompanied by changing attitudes of the population at home. One way to do this was to deny the importance of the colonies (economically and otherwise) and, therefore, to deny the importance of their loss. The VOC, as the colonizer of the Indies, was inextricably linked to this loss: it no longer stood for the colonies it had conquered, but for the loss of those colonies. As such, it was best to remove all emphasis on the VOC from schools and museums (Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008: 118–119). Removing the importance of the VOC was a way to deny the former colonies their importance and to deny the severity of their loss. National suffering was eased by collectively forgetting and by creating a representation that the colonies had never been important to begin with. The VOC was a victim of the national amnesia and denial that formed the core of the discourse of **post-colonialism**.



## 1980s

Over the next few decades, the post-colonial countries had constructed a new balance of power and post-colonialism began to fade. The losses of the colonies were no longer fresh in the colonizers' minds and new political relations arose with the former colonies. Trade and exchange were increased between the West and their former colonies as goods were imported and exported more freely. The discourse of post-colonialism had been replaced by a discourse of **globalization**. Overseas trade was an important source of both economic and cultural wealth in the Western world. Thus, the VOC once again became symbolic. As the first true multinational company, parallels were drawn between the Dutch Republic's Golden Age under the influence of the VOC and the thriving economy of the Netherlands due to globalization processes. Emphasis was moved to the effects of the VOC at home: the cultural impact made by the import of tea, coffee or porcelain and the economic impact of spices and other trade goods. This was then used as an example of the positive effects globalization could have at home.

As part of the discourse of globalization, museum exhibitions and replica VOC ships shifted focus to the voyage. Within new museological practices of living history, thematic displays and stories (rather than chronological or geographical displays), the voyage was an excellent medium. From a voyage perspective, the VOC was represented as adventurous, hazardous but exciting: all the characteristics globalization was idealized as. Through projects such as the construction of the *Batavia*, emphasis was also realigned to ship's construction. The craftsmanship of old was put in a wider frame of the Dutch Republic's technological advantage over other nations. This discourse of **technology** was used both in combination with and as a counter for the discourse of globalization. Although globalization and overseas trade were seen as important for the nation, reaching a high level of specialized technology at home (rather than to outsource everything) was seen as equally necessary. A two sided approach was advocated: trade overseas and specialized knowledge and technology at home.

Along with discourses of globalization and technology, the importance of the individual was heightened. No longer was fame reserved for the rulers, the wealthy or the political heads of state: the importance of the individual within society was emphasized. In most fields of history, the stories of the lower classes were uncovered and the faceless masses were given identities and faces of their own. This perspective or discourse of **individualism** also came to bear down on the representations of the VOC: the regular men on the voyages, the soldiers in the Indies and the thousands of anonymous, lower class employees of the VOC entered museum exhibitions and were called into imagination during tours on the replica ships. No longer was fame reserved for the Governor-Generals and men like Coen: rather, the greatness of the VOC was seen as achieved through the sweat and sacrifice of the many (Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008: 159). This notion of power through numbers was used as an example to create a national community in which everyone would work together to receive collective profits and to advance the wealth of the entire nation. The discourse of individualism was joined to discourses of democracy and socialism.

## Now

The discourse of globalization is still strongly present in some current representations of the VOC in the Netherlands. In the exhibition *Schipbreuk*, for instance, the VOC is represented as a multinational company on a global stage: a company which is organized, effective and democratic. However, this representation has also been countered, such as in *Zie je in de Gouden Eeuw*. Here, a discourse of anti-globalization or of **localization** is advocated. The VOC is represented as influential to some extent, but it is argued that national and European shipping were the source of affluence. This can be seen in the political light of today, in which emphasis is being shifted from trade overseas to European cooperation (for instance, within the institution of the European Union) and to the stimulation of local and national production. There is a fear that too much globalization will harm national economies and that national culture will be lost within a unified global culture. As such, the VOC is represented negatively as embodying such a multinational company which does more harm (to the nation's culture and local production) than it provides benefits (to the nation's overall economy).

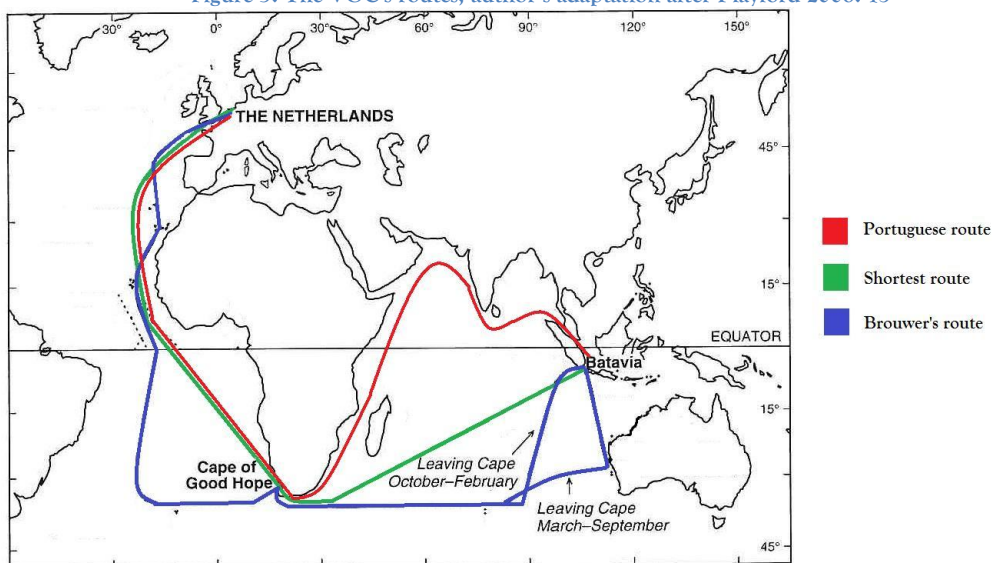
A discourse of **post-colonial theory** can also be seen within representations of the VOC. Although it has been decades since decolonization and post-colonialism, it was only recently that post-colonial theory became an established discourse in the Netherlands. Whereas under post-colonialism the history of the VOC was neglected and purposefully hidden, post-colonial theory has struggled to uncover it. Within this framework, the VOC is once again inescapably linked to the colonies in the Indies. However, rather than hide this history, the history of the VOC and its colonizing activities is emphasized and criticized. Post-colonial theory is used as a way to uncover the errors and transgressions of the nation's colonial past. Furthermore, it attempts, in retrospect, to make up for or correct these wrongdoings by highlighting and condemning them. The discourses of post-colonial theory, globalization and localization provide distinctly different representations of the VOC, each with different aims: to condemn colonialism, to legitimize multinational companies or to encourage local production.

## The VOC & Australia

In comparison with the entire extent of the activities of the VOC abroad, their dealings with the continent of Australia were very few. Furthermore, these dealings were often unsuccessful or had unwanted results. Nonetheless, these encounters were far from insignificant. Theories of 'the Great Southland' had been in existence for centuries, but its location was still unknown when the VOC was founded in 1602. These theories assumed that the continental mass of the northern hemisphere was countered by an equal continental mass in the southern hemisphere. Since the known continents of the southern hemisphere were smaller than those of the north, it was assumed a large continent (the Great Southland) was yet to be discovered. Australia was first discovered by Europeans in 1606 when a small vessel of the VOC was sent out to scout New Guinea. This vessel, the *Duijken*<sup>6</sup>, followed the southern coast of New Guinea and, failing to find the Torres Strait, happened to continue along the west coast of Australia's Cape York. Although they were unaware of the fact that they had discovered a new continent, the men aboard the *Duijken* were the first Europeans to set eyes on Australia (Green 2007: 21). They did not land and soon returned back to the Indies with new maps to report on what they had seen.

Not long after, in 1610, a new, faster and healthier route to the Indies was discovered. Initially, the VOC's ships had either followed the Portuguese route (staying close to the east coast of Africa and then sailing along the coast of India until they reached the Indies) or sailed the shortest route across the Indian ocean between the Cape of Good Hope and Java. However, Hendrick Brouwer discovered a faster route, using the trade winds of the 'roaring forties' (fig. 5; Gaastra 2009: 117). This route led straight east from the Cape of Good Hope and required the vessels to veer north-east after a certain distance. Vessels that did not turn in time ran the risk of coming upon the west coast of Australia (Ibid.: 57). The VOC made using Brouwer's route mandatory for all outgoing vessels in 1616 (the shortest route was used for the return journey). The use of Brouwer's route would, literally, put Australia on the map.

Figure 5: The VOC's routes, author's adaptation after Playford 2006: 13

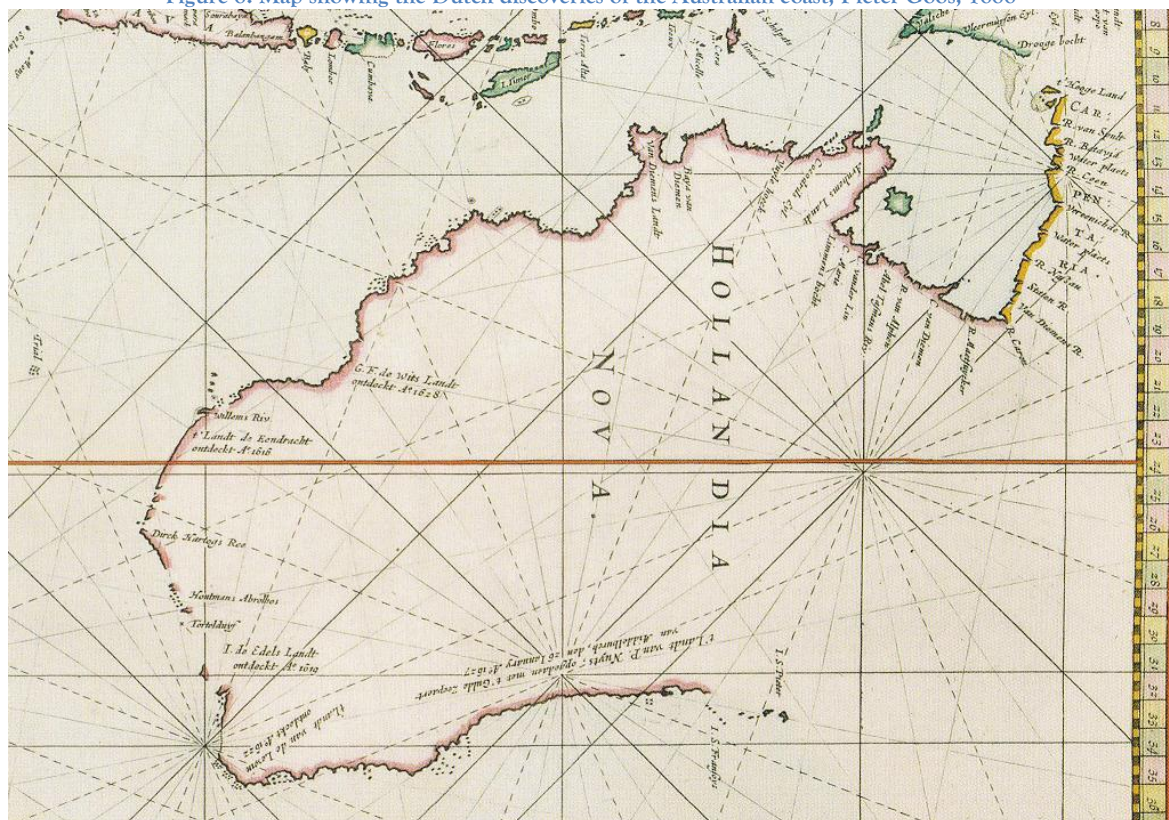


<sup>6</sup> Literally 'Little Dove', it is commonly spelled as *Duyfken* in English texts.

## Explorations & Shipwrecks

Using the new sailing instructions, the next vessel to sight the Australian coast was the *Eendracht*<sup>7</sup> in 1616. Not only did the men of the *Eendracht* accidentally come upon the west coast of Australia, they decided to make landfall. To mark their landing on what is now known as Dirk Hartog Island, they left a pewter plate with an inscription nailed to a wooden post. They mapped a section of the coast before heading further to Makassar. The *Eendracht* and the *Duijken* were the first of many vessels to explore the Australian coast. Many of these explorations, especially in the early decades, were accidental. Others were real expeditions, such as those carried about by Abel Tasman in 1642 and 1644 or Willem de Vlamingh's voyage in 1696 (Gaastra 2009: 57). Whenever VOC vessels happened upon the Australian coast, they would chart as much as they could before sailing onwards to the Indies (Donaldson 2006: 14 & Playford 1998: 27). Soon, a large section of the Australian coastline was charted. The only parts of Australia where the VOC did not venture were the east coast and the eastern part of the southern coast (fig. 6). In exploring the coast, the Dutch would give names to the landmarks and features they found, some of which are still used in Australia today (Playford 1998: 27).

Figure 6: Map showing the Dutch discoveries of the Australian coast, Pieter Goos, 1666



Both the accidental and deliberate explorations of the Australian coast had two main aims. First of all, to chart the continent as a safety measure. Knowing the shape of the coastline and the dangerous islands and coral reefs lying before the coast was crucial for the safety of the outgoing VOC vessels using the Brouwer's route. By mapping the continent, ships would have a better

<sup>7</sup> Literally 'Unity', this vessel was skippered by Dirk Hartog.

chance to avoid hazardous points, although longitudinal measurement was still almost impossible at sea (Playford 2006: 14). The second aim was to determine the prospects of trading with the Aboriginal population. The VOC was always looking for new areas to incorporate into their intra-Asiatic trade network. However, when it came to Australia they were disappointed. The country itself was unattractive; in the words of the *Batavia's* upper merchant<sup>8</sup> Pelsaert:

... for beyond the heights the country was flat again, without trees, foliage or grass, except for high anthills thrown up of earth, which in the distance were not unlike the huts of people. Was also such a host of flies, which came to sit in the mouth and the eyes, that they could not be beaten off (Drake-Brockman 2006: 120).

The prospects for trade did not seem much better. Upon making landfall, the Aboriginals tended to hide from the foreign intruders. If they were encountered, the Aboriginals often ran away. When contact<sup>9</sup> was established, “they seemed utterly unacquainted with gold, silver, other metals, and spices, all of which were shown to them repeatedly” (Loos 1998: 13). Thus the Dutch returned, time and again, to the *Heren XVII* with news that there was nothing of commercial interest in Australia and that there was no point in establishing a trading post or factory (Shaw & Wilkins 2006: 22). Both Australia and New Guinea remained outside the VOC's trading network and, from a Dutch perspective, they were not deemed important (Gaastra 2009: 57). Australia was left uninhabited by Europeans until James Cook cautiously endorsed the possibility for agriculture on the east coast in 1771. It is still a matter of debate whether the British finally decided to colonize Australia to stop the French or Spanish from taking it for strategic purposes or as a way to reduce the problem of overcrowded convict hulks (Shaw & Wilkins 2006: 22; Edwards 1970: 172).

Less fortunate encounters with the Australian coast befell those who were shipwrecked there. A number of VOC ships were lucky enough to only get temporarily stranded, such as the *Wapen van Hoorn* (1622) and *Vianen* (1628). Others were wrecked without hope for recovery. Although a number of vessels were lost between the Cape of Good Hope and Batavia, only four are positively known to have been wrecked in Australia: *Batavia* (1629), *Vergulde Draeck*<sup>10</sup> (1656), *Zuijtdorp* (1712) and *Zeewijk* (1727) (Henderson 2007). Rescue parties were sent from Batavia on a few occasions, sometimes because survivors had managed to sail there in a sloop or if a ship had been missing for too long and it became clear that it must have been wrecked. The stories of these four VOC shipwrecks are, each in their own right, fascinating. Survivors lived to tell the tale in three of the four cases and there is a significant amount of historical evidence to accompany the archaeological material which has emerged since the wrecks were discovered.

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<sup>8</sup> The VOC, being foremost interested in trade, gave command of a vessel to the upper merchant. The skipper, in charge of navigation, was second in command.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted here that this contact was not always without aggression: keeping in mind the possibilities of trading with the Aboriginals, Aboriginal men were occasionally violently kidnapped and taken to Batavia against their will. It was hoped that these men would be able to function as translators in the VOC's future trading with Australia. These kidnappings did not go unopposed and on several occasions Aboriginals were fatally wounded (Loos 1998: 9-11).

<sup>10</sup> Literally 'Gilt Dragon' and commonly referred to as such in English texts.

## Finding the Wrecks

Although the activities of the VOC around the coast of Australia had ended in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, their effects were strongly felt in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. While the Dutch discoveries around Australia had never been entirely forgotten, they were far from common knowledge. In 1840, when the British surveyor John Lort Stokes was sent along the Australian coast in the *HMS Beagle*, he found wreckage in the Houtman Abrolhos and named several features, such as islands, points and channels, after the two VOC ships which had been wrecked there: *Batavia* and *Zeewijk*<sup>11</sup> (Stanbury 1998: 103–104). In 1859, interest was increased with the publication of the book *Early Voyages to Terra Australia* (Western Australian Museum Education Section undated: 10). Guano mining uncovered Dutch relics in the Abrolhos which were collected with curiosity by Florance Broadhurst (Stanbury 1998: 106). The trend continued in the 1930s when relics were found on the land sites of the *Zuijtdorp* and when a boy found a skeleton with coins which were assumed to have belonged to the *Vergulde Draeck* (Playford 2006: 82).

During the Second World War interest, understandably, waned. However, after the war, divers began to search for the wrecks that belonged to these relics (Western Australian Museum Education Section undated: 10). Searching was aided significantly by the recent invention of SCUBA equipment which allowed divers to breathe under water without air supply from a ship. This meant that divers could both dive deeper (increasing the search area) and stay under water longer (increasing the possibilities to find something). Then, 14 April 1963, the first Dutch wreck was found by a young Graeme Henderson:

*This [the Vergulde Draeck] was the first discovery of a seventeenth century shipwreck in Australian waters, and it was a sensation in the local media. My accidental discovery of a wreck that occurred on 28 April 1656 transformed the Western Australian community's view of the past. News of divers finding African Elephant's tusks, iron cannon, house bricks, beardman jugs and ship structure of the early seventeenth century now eclipsed Johnny-come-lately James Cook's sighting of the east coast of Australia on 19 April 1770. In a sense, Western Australia's European history was now 114 years longer than that of the East coast (2007: 37).*

Suddenly there was proof – archaeological evidence – that the European history of Australia was significantly older than James Cook's exploration of the east coast. Furthermore, shipwreck survivors pointed to the fact that even settlement had occurred long before the First Fleet was sent to Botany Bay in 1788 (Gerritsen, Cramer & Slee 2007: 3). The discovery of the wreck challenged the history taught in Australian schools which was focused on the achievements of British explorers (Shaw & Wilkins 2006: 11). History, as the Western Australians knew it, changed completely.

*Community awareness of history and heritage matters was also developing strongly and close to reaching a "critical mass" which governments and museums could no longer afford to overlook. Of particular significance in this context was that several of the most active divers, including Hugh Edwards and James*

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<sup>11</sup> Most notably: Wreck Point, Gun Island, Zeewijk Channel, Pelsaert Island and Pelsaert Group.

*Henderson, were journalists who brought maritime archaeology into the living rooms of all Western Australians – and beyond (Broeze 1995: xviii).*

The *Vergulde Draeck* was followed a few months later by the discovery of the wreck site of the *Batavia*. As much as the media and general public were enthralled by the discoveries and the relics, it also inspired unwanted attention. The silver bullion known to have sunk with the wrecks became a target for thieves. Especially the *Vergulde Draeck*, whose entire cargo had been lost along with the ship, was looted extensively. Not only was the silver taken from the wreck, other relics – indeed the entire wreck site – were destroyed or damaged through the use of explosives. The anger felt as a result of these actions was expressed in an editorial in the *West Australian* in 1970: “It is deplorable that the 341-year-old wreck of the *Batavia* should have been the victim of plunderers, whose efforts to reward themselves financially deprive the nation of an historic legacy” (Tyler 1970: 52). The public discussion surrounding the discoveries and lootings were the point when “most Australians first became aware of a Dutch presence on these shores” (McCarthy 2006: 31).

The State Government responded to this public outrage by passing protective legislation in 1964 (Nash 2007: 3). This legislation was to protect the old shipwrecks and the State Government selected the Western Australian Museum as its representative in these matters to enforce the protection of these shipwrecks. However, at the time, the Western Australian Museum was primarily focused on natural history with a small, beginning interest in Aboriginal studies (Kennedy 1998: 31). It was, as such, completely unprepared to act as the State Government’s representative. As the other two VOC wreck sites were discovered, the *Zwijtdorp* in 1964 and the *Zeewijk* in 1968, looting continued and the public persistently requested that something be done. It was not until the early 1970s that the Western Australian Museum had gained the resources required to conduct (maritime) archaeological investigations of the sites. Divers and archaeologists had been hired along with conservators and facilities were prepared for the conservation, storage and display of recovered material. A Department of Maritime Archaeology materialized out of the people involved in the first few seasons of excavations, which in turn led to the emergence of maritime archaeology as a scientific profession in Australia (Broeze 1995: xvii).

The Western Australian Museum (WAM), although it is now working under newer shipwreck legislation, is the only representative of the State Government in these matters. Furthermore, Western Australia is the only Australian state where VOC shipwrecks have been found. As such, the Western Australian Museum is in a unique position to exhibit finds from the Dutch wrecks. Originally, all of the Dutch wreck material was displayed in the WAM Shipwreck Galleries in Fremantle. However, with the construction of the WAM’s new regional museum in Geraldton, a selection of Dutch wreck material was moved to be housed in their new *Shipwrecks Gallery*. Finally, the VOC wrecks have gained public awareness through the construction of a replica of the *Duijffken*, which was finished in 1999 (Green 2007: 21). This sailing replica has also visited Australian ports outside of Western Australia and has brought the history of the VOC beyond the state borders.

## An Australian Perspective

Accounts of the Dutch activities in Australia had been circulating in Australia since the 1850s. These stories were few, generally limited to explorations of the coast and the VOC as a company. It was not until the publication of Henrietta Drake-Brockman's novel on the *Batavia* (1957) that enthusiasm emerged for the individual VOC wrecks in Australian waters. After the first wrecks were found in 1963, a hype erupted during which books, articles, newspaper reports and radio series were made. As the Western Australian Museum received the responsibility to care for these wrecks and adapted their services to wreck exploration and conservation, the museum slowly transformed their exhibitions and displays to include material from the VOC wrecks. Since completion of the conservation of the *Batavia*'s hull and artefacts around 1990, the VOC and its wrecks have been continuously exhibited by the museum. Today, both the exhibitions of the wrecks and literature about them are as popular as ever.

### *Literature*

There is little difference in the representations of the VOC in Australian literature over time. Although new information is added, books written 50 years ago use similar representations as those written today. Certain representations can be found in both popular and academic literature, although some representations are exclusive. This section will discuss these representations by type rather than discuss the literary works individually.

The main representation that can be found in all literary sources is that of **primacy**. The VOC's activities in Australia are represented as a series of firsts. 'Achievements', such as sighting a piece of the coast, gain importance due to their primacy: this was the *first* sighting of the coast. Often, although not always, a note is added that these were the first Europeans to achieve this goal. In the quest to attribute primacy to the VOC and the Dutch, even obscure events gain importance: the first to take note of the characteristics of Australian marsupials (Drake-Brockman 2006: 42), the first Europeans to be entertained by a corroboree (Loos 1998: 15) or the first "private letter ever to have been written by any person who spent some time ashore, close by the great southern continent" (Drake-Brockman 2006: 72).

Primacy is even attributed to events which, otherwise, would have been represented in a negative light, such as "the first sentences passed by Europeans in Australia" (Edwards 1970: 134). Similarly, the gallows used to hang the mutineers and murderers of the *Batavia* are described neutrally as "the first solid European structures ever built in what would become known as Australia" (Fitzsimons 2011: 411-412). This positive attribution of primacy goes quite far. The two criminals who were marooned on the Australian mainland as punishment for the crimes they committed after the wrecking of the *Batavia*, Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de Bijie, are remembered not for their crimes – which included mutiny, murder and conspiracy – but as "Australia's first European settlers" (Donaldson 2006: 15). This representation of Loos and Pelgrom de Bijie can be found in no less than eight of the literary sources researched, in both



academic and popular literature. Primacy is ascribed to the VOC and the Dutch in a large variety of events, from exploration, cartography and discovery to settlement, ship building and interaction with Aborigines (for a list of these representations of primacy, see Appendix I).

The **importance** of the VOC's activities as a part of the history of Australia is also an oft expressed representation. This importance is, on occasion, also emphasized through notions of primacy. Sentiments such as the following are not uncommon: "... this [the Hutt River, where Loss and Pelgrom de Bijie were marooned] may be the location of perhaps *one of the most significant events in our history* relating to the first settlement by Europeans" (Gerritsen, Cramer & Slee 2007: 20; my emphasis). Especially the importance of the four VOC wrecks, as tangible remains of these historical events, is stressed. They are referred to as "an historic legacy" (Tyler 1970: 52) and are deemed to be "of very great importance both to Australia and to their countries of origin" (Williams 1971: 250). Curiously, except for the wreck of the *Batavia*, the VOC wrecks found in Australia are far from common knowledge in the Netherlands. The case of the *Batavia* forms an exception. However, it is well known because of its bloody tale, not so much because of the role it played in European-Australian history.

Another common representation found in both academic and popular literature is that of **superiority**. In academic literature, the achievements of the VOC and the VOC as a company are often expressed in terms of superiority over other European trading companies. In popular literature, this representation is often drawn further to apply to the entire Dutch Republic or to 'the Dutch' in general. Where the VOC is concerned, it is called "the richest corporation in the world" (Gray 2008: 1) and "a trade empire without parallel" (Edwards 1985: 43). Playford goes one step further and links the VOC to the wealth of the Dutch Republic: "the company exerted unprecedented power in the Far East, and its huge profits contributed substantially to the prosperity of the Dutch Republic during its 'Golden Age'" (Playford 2006: 6). This is a statement which has been contested in the Netherlands by historians (see *The VOC*).

Superiority is attributed to the Dutch Republic in the areas of ship design and building (Edwards 1970: 48), low insurance rates and the management of shipping (Drake-Brockman 2006: 6). Whereas figures show that the Dutch Republic may have owned close to half of Europe's seagoing vessels (Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008: 160), it is exaggerated in Australian popular literature to "roughly half of the *world's* seagoing ships" (Playford 2006: 7; my emphasis). Although the human cost of Dutch efficiency is hinted at occasionally, emphasis is mostly on the fantastic rewards (Edwards 1985: 82). The superiority of the Dutch Republic, under the influence of the VOC, is commonly represented in such glowing texts:

*This tiny nation became the wealthiest in the world, dominating international commerce for almost 150 years. This was an astounding achievement, as the Dutch Republic was the smallest of the major European nations in terms of area, population and natural resources [...] in commerce and wealth it soon surpassed them all. Not only did the Dutch achieve world ascendancy in commerce; they were also among the cultural leaders of Europe, being especially renowned in the field of art (Playford 2006: 8).*

Along with the superiority of the VOC and the Dutch Republic, representations of **idealization** regularly appear, mostly in popular literature. For instance, the seamen of the VOC are applauded for their “remarkable courage, perseverance and resourcefulness” and their exceptional skill (Playford 2006: 19 & 31). This is quite different from the terms in which the VOC described their own employees: as beggars, thieves, street urchins, drunks and gamblers who had “deserved the gallows three times over” (de Graaff 1930: 46; my translation). Loos and Pelgrom de Bij, besides being represented in terms of primacy, are also idealized (fig. 7). Their crimes are neutralized by calling them “two Dutch seafarers, one a cabin boy, the other a soldier” (Gerritsen 2006: 40) and by juxtaposing them with the British settlers of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the “shiploads of hapless convicts, dragged unwillingly half around the world” (Ibid.: 40). Are the two Dutch criminals really more innocent than the exiled English convicts?

Figure 7: Romantic image of the two marooned Dutch criminals, Ross Shardlow, c. 2000s



Along with the men of the VOC, the Dutch Republic is idealized as well. A picture is painted of the Republic as one without poverty or problems, as a state that is wealthy to the benefit of all:

*Wealth had poured into the Netherlands, new inventions, new amenities, new ideas, had enriched the lives of all [...] In Amsterdam the merchants were no less magnificent [than in Antwerp], but they walked with zest through a bustling city; whilst the people en masse were well clothed, well fed, filled with the same spirit of enterprise as the busy merchants (Drake-Brockman 2006: 31).*

Such generalizations are often accompanied in popular literature by **stereotyping**. Individuals, of whom little is known historically, are given characteristics which are then stereotyped. For instance, Wiebbe Haijes, one of the men who stayed loyal to the VOC during the *Batavia* mutiny, is described as “the epitome of the Dutch East India Company soldier: seasoned, tough, courageous, with cast-iron loyalties” (Edwards 1985: 39). In another book, Hugh Edwards idealizes the cleanliness of the Dutch Republic while providing a stereotype for the Dutch housewife: “it was a land of ostentatious cleanliness where every Dutch housewife scrubbed and rubbed her floors daily and even washed the doorstep and pavement of the street outside” (1970: 10). Although, at the time, an identity of being ‘Dutch’ was uncommon and local identities were the norm, Australian popular literature regularly stereotypes ‘the Dutch’. Frequently, they are praised for their discipline, common sense, God-fearing honesty, charity and their nearly cruel tendency to overlook human cost for mercantile rewards (Edwards 1985: 11; Edwards 1970: 10 & Fitzsimons 2011: 4-5).

Representations of primacy are the most common representations of the VOC in Australian literature. Both academic and popular literature emphasize the activities of the VOC in terms of a series of firsts. Along with representations of primacy, both types of literature emphasize importance and superiority. In academic literature, superiority is restricted to the VOC as a company, while in popular literature the representation also includes the Dutch Republic and ‘the Dutch’. Finally, representations of idealization and stereotyping frequently occur in popular literature, often in combination with each other.

### *Exhibitions*

The four exhibitions researched for this thesis are all part of the Western Australian Museum (WAM). Three of them are housed in the same museum building in Fremantle, the Shipwreck Galleries, and have been made by the same group of individuals. The fourth, which is located in the regional city of Geraldton, was created with significant aid from the Fremantle staff. Furthermore, all of the objects displayed in Geraldton had been either displayed or stored at the Fremantle site previously. A significant overlap can be expected between these exhibitions with regards to objects, stories and representations. As such, the exhibitions will not be analyzed individually, but the representations that can be found on the whole will be assessed.

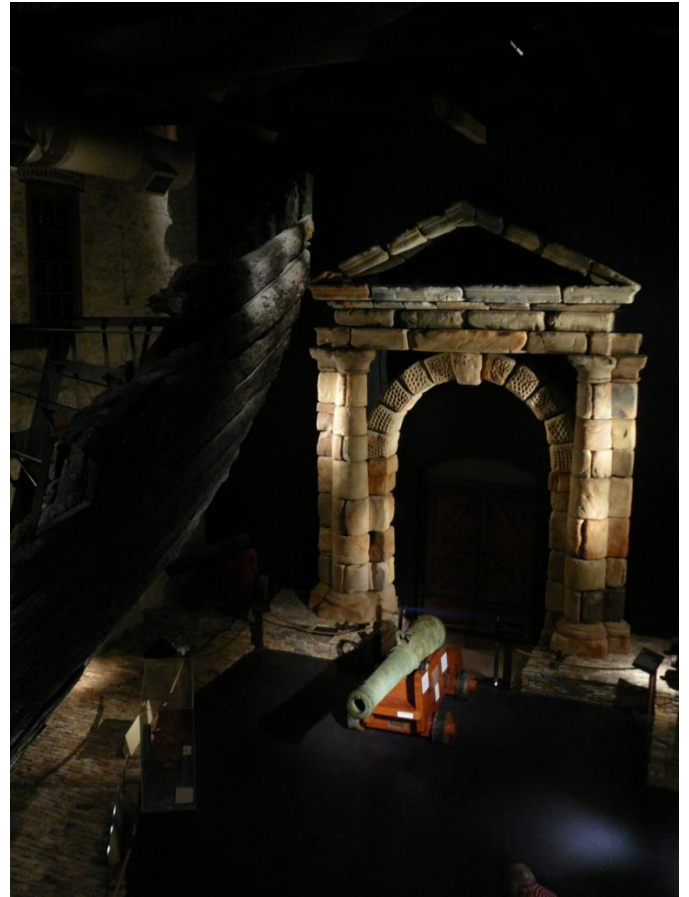
The first representation that draws the visitors’ attention is the **importance** of the activities of the VOC for the history of Australia. At the WAM Shipwreck Galleries the floor space dedicated to the history of the VOC says enough: apart from an entrance gallery with exhibitions in progress and a gallery on the steamship *SS Xantho*, the rest of the museum is focused entirely on the VOC in three large permanent exhibitions. The new building of the WAM Geraldton was designed specifically to accommodate the original sandstone portico<sup>12</sup> recovered from the wreck of the *Batavia* (which until then had been located in Fremantle) and

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<sup>12</sup> This portico was intended for one of the gates of the castle in Batavia which was under construction at the time.

Figure 8: *Batavia Gallery*, author's photo

as such its gallery of the VOC wrecks is the crown jewel of the museum. The porticos, the original in Geraldton and a replica in Fremantle, form the focal piece of the exhibitions with a number of cannon. In Fremantle, the portico is displayed along with a section of the original hull which has been entirely preserved (fig. 8). These massive, original objects are surrounded by many other authentic artefacts which have been recovered from the four wrecks. The exhibitions use few replicas apart from models of the vessels. This is a method of **authenticating**, through which this specific history becomes more tangible and more real.



The importance of the VOC for Australian history is further emphasized by continually accentuating the connection between the two. The VOC as a company is only discussed in passing, while focus lies on the four shipwrecks in Australian waters, the explorations and discoveries of the VOC around Australia and, finally, the discoveries of these four wrecks in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The broader history of the VOC, its activities in the Indies or its influence at home is a subject barely touched upon in the Australian exhibitions. By highlighting those activities of the VOC which are immediately relevant to Australia, the link between the VOC and Australian history is made clear.

As in Australian literature, **primacy** is a representation of the VOC which is used regularly in the Western Australian exhibitions. This is another method to highlight importance. However, primacy is used differently than in most of the literary sources. Primacy is attributed mostly to the earlier, larger and more neutral events (such as the first sighting of the coast and the first landing on Australian soil by Europeans) rather than to events which could be seen as negative (such as those surrounding the mutiny and murders in the aftermath of the *Batavia's* wrecking). Furthermore, primacy is ascribed in more cautious and more specific terms. For instance, Dirk Hartog is called the first *Dutchman* (rather than the first European or the first person) to land on *Western* Australian soil (see Appendix II). The possibility of VOC castaways becoming the first white settlers in Australia is questioned rather than stated as a certainty. Finally, the matter of possible genetic mixing between VOC castaways and aboriginals is brought up in the *Dutch Wrecks Gallery*, but it is stated in the most tentative terms. Primacy, although used as a representation to highlight the importance of the VOC for the history of Australia, is put in more factual and cautious terms.

Importance is also stressed by representations of **wealth**. On a primary level, the wealth of the VOC as a company is shown in the exhibitions. The rich cargo of the vessels is displayed: piles of silver bullion, silver toys and trade items, ivory, porcelain and pipes. The wealth of the VOC is described in labels: “profits were enormous, sometimes as high as 400 per cent” (Western Australian Museum Geraldton, *Shipwrecks Gallery*). The wealth of some of the men aboard is displayed through fragments of delicate lace, ornate sword belt buckles, elegant wine glasses and decorated fragments of fine furniture. On a secondary level, the wealth of material from the VOC wrecks is represented as a source of knowledge of 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century European material culture and as an insight into the lives of the common folk who came in contact with the Australian continent. This secondary level is represented through the stories of the four wrecks and the people involved and by displaying the common, everyday objects that were used aboard and during the castaways’ involuntary stay on Australian soil. The dual levels of representations of wealth – of the VOC as a company and of the material from the wrecks as insight into the lives of the men who set foot on Australian soil – are both used to enhance the representation of importance of the VOC.

A representation of **assimilation** was common in the exhibitions, although it rarely occurs in the literary sources. Dutch words and terms are used throughout the exhibitions; sometimes these terms are followed by an English translation in parentheses but often they are merely explained rather than translated<sup>13</sup>. Without exception, the VOC is introduced with its full name in Dutch, rather than as the ‘Dutch East India Company’. In the *Dutch Wrecks Gallery*, the names of the four VOC vessels are written in Dutch (e.g. *Vergulde Draeck* instead of *Gilt Dragon*) and they are also phonetically written on the labels to help visitors learn their ‘correct’ pronunciation (fig. 9). At both museums, the guides and educators find it important to ‘properly’ pronounce the names of the people, vessels and places involved when they give guided tours. For instance, Batavia (both the vessel and the city) is pronounced in a Dutch rather than in an English manner (Bahtahfiah, instead of Buhtayvia). During my visit to the WAM Geraldton, I overheard staff members practicing their pronunciation of the names of the vessels, skippers and other people involved in the stories of the four wrecks and even attempting the challenging ‘*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*’. They were very grateful for my assistance, as they expressed how important it was to them to “say everything right”. By teaching the visitors, both through phonetic spellings and guided tours, how to pronounce these Dutch terms, the WAM is using a strategy of assimilation. They are taking ownership of this history and are making it their own (assimilating) rather than contrasting it with Australian history (exoticizing). However, instead of anglicizing the history of the VOC, which is often how assimilation is put to work, the museums are ‘Dutchifying’ their visitors.

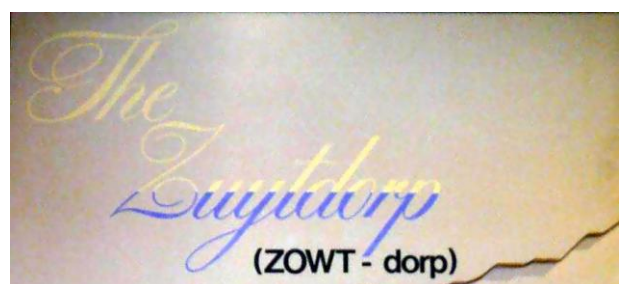


Figure 9: Phonetics on the *Zuytdorp* label, author's photo

<sup>13</sup>An example is the regular use of the term *retourschip* (see p. 22), although its plural form is sometimes erroneously anglicized as *retourschips* rather than the Dutch *retourschepen* (Western Australian Museum Geraldton).

Finally, two representations of the VOC and the Dutch that are noticeable throughout the exhibitions are those of **power** and **superior technology**. The VOC as a company and its employees are represented as powerful through the frequent display of weaponry and by discussing how the VOC set up forts and sent soldiers to enforce its monopoly. Its power as a company and monopolistic trading concern in terms of economic power is conveyed as well. Representations of the Dutch Republic's superior technology and knowledge are generally focused on three areas of expertise. The first is ship construction, as evidenced by the remaining hull section with triple planking of the *Batavia*, multiple ship models and the remarkable story of the construction of *Sloepie* by the *Zeewijk*'s survivors. Secondly, Dutch seamanship is prided, not only in terms of how few vessels the VOC lost over the span of two centuries, but also the seamanship of the survivors of the *Batavia*, *Vergulde Draeck* and *Zeewijk* who managed to reach Batavia in small open boats. Finally, the navigational and cartographic achievements of the Dutch Republic and its skippers are displayed. Maps based on Dutch discoveries, which were the first to incorporate the continent of Australia, are displayed throughout the exhibitions.

In summary, the representation of importance of the VOC for the history of Australia is the main representation in the exhibitions of the Western Australian Museum. This importance is emphasized by highlighting only that which is relevant to Australian history, by the allocation of floor space and by the positioning of the exhibitions within the museums. Representations of primacy and wealth are used to further this representation of importance. All of these representations work towards telling visitors why the VOC is important 'to us Australians'. This history is then authenticated by the use of mainly original objects, including some very large pieces such as the hull section, cannon and the porticos. A representation of assimilation is then applied to firmly integrate the history of the VOC into Australian history. Finally, representations of power and superior technology are created to encourage a sense of pride for this - now entirely Australian - history.

It becomes obvious that the representations used in the museum exhibitions differ little from the representations in the literary sources. Both focus on importance, primacy and superiority, although the exhibitions provide few stereotypes or idealizations. The fact that an object in a museum carries the same representations as those found in a text is not necessarily surprising:

*As such, it [the object in the museum] is just as thickly lacquered with layers of interpretation as any book or film. More to the point, it is often lacquered with the same layers of interpretation. For it is often precisely the presuppositions derived from other media that determine both which artefacts are selected for display in museums and how their arrangement is conceived and organized (Bennett 2009: 146).*

## Australian Politics

We have seen that the history of the VOC is lacquered with more or less the same representations in museum exhibitions and in literary sources. The foundations of these representations are reigning discourses and discursive formations. In order to understand these discourses, one must take a glance at the political history of Australia to understand why certain representations were favoured over others.

Australia's human past is a very long one, starting with its earliest settlement at an estimated 42000 years ago or earlier. These first settlers may have been the ancestors of today's Aboriginals. After the European discovery of Australia in 1606, various European states searched for trade opportunities in Australia. These endeavours failed and neither the French, Dutch nor English displayed much interest in colonizing the continent. It lay half forgotten, marked on maps as a shipping hazard, for nearly two centuries until James Cook expressed a careful endorsement for a possible settlement in Botany Bay. As such, Australia finally became a British colony and settlers of all kinds, including convicts, were sent to populate the continent (Gerritsen, Cramer & Slee 2007: 3).

British rule remained until Australia was given a measure of independence at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Australia's final severance from the British constitution happened as recently as 1986. Australian nationalism is generally said to have emerged along with the First World War, the first war in which the Australians fought - and died - of their own accord rather than under British rule (see '(Post-)colonialism'; Bennett 2009: 137). Nationalism was, furthermore, fuelled by two centuries in which the British had treated anglicized Australians differently than 'English English', especially when it came to holding governmental positions (Anderson 2006: 93).

### 1960s

The major underlying reason for the main representations of the VOC in Australia - such as primacy, importance, superiority and assimilation - is Australian nationalism. However, Australian nationalism during this period should be seen as a discursive formation rather than a single discourse, since it also contains discourses of federation, racism, European superiority and post colonialism.

The nationalization process generally requires a strong back-projection of the nation's history into the past. Aspects of the past are subjected into the story of the nation and are used to create a sense of unity and shared history. The aim is to create a national history that seems immemorial (Bennett 2009: 142). In Australia, the nation struggled throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to create such back-projections to lengthen their national history back beyond the moment of independence. The post-settlement period was largely unsuitable to inspire Australian nationalism as it was so strongly associated with the history of the British state (Ibid.:

137). The past prior to settlement was deemed unsuitable because, as far as most people knew at the time, that was a history of entirely Aboriginal origins.

Why were a British or Aboriginal national history deemed unsuitable? The newly gained political independence from Great Britain quite naturally required an independence from British history as well. It would be difficult, as a new nation, to construct a national identity upon the history of its previous colonial suppressor. Here both **post colonial** and **nationalist** ideas guided the formation of a national history. As Tony Bennett wrote: “much of this is not surprising. Nor, in itself, is it in any way deplorable. That said, this process of elongating the national past does have some questionable aspects” (2009: 149–150).

One of these questionable aspects in the Australian case is undoubtedly the **racist** perspective or discourse which existed amongst the European Australians towards the Aboriginal population. Just as the British had looked down upon the Australian born English, this latter group looked down upon the Aboriginals. This notion of inferiority was not merely an idea: it was expressed through laws as well. Aboriginals had fewer rights than white Australians. Although Aboriginal remains and artefacts were no longer exclusively exhibited in natural history displays and represented as a link between nature and culture as they had been around 1900, there was still a notion of racial difference and **European superiority** (Bennett 2009: 150).

During the 1960s, the issue of Aboriginal rights increasingly arose in the political arena. As a result of missile and bomb testing in the Australian deserts, many Aboriginals had been forcibly relocated to reserves. Here, their population quickly degenerated because the men were stripped of their purpose and the women were unable to hold their communities together (conversation with Richard Gould, 2011, pers. comm., 27 September). Under pressure of the U.N., Australia was strongly urged to abolish their discriminatory laws. A national referendum was called to answer the question whether the Aboriginal population was part of the nation of Australia. With the majority voting yes, Aboriginal rights laws were passed in 1967. These new rights quickly backfired. Bars were no longer allowed to refuse entry to drunk people and alcoholism soon became a problem under Aboriginals, who are genetically less tolerant of grain. Another law which proved harmful, was declaring that Aboriginals had to be paid as much as white men for their labour. Until then, many had worked for free on stations, being paid only in room and board and given permission to live on their ancestral land and visit their spirits. Now that they had to be paid as much as a white man, their occasional spiritual absences were not tolerated and many were fired. Having been fired, they were also driven from their lands and often ended up in reserves (Ibid.). In this setting, it is understandable that European Australians did not hold the Aboriginal population in high regard, although they failed to see the actual problem.

It is in the middle of this political climate that the VOC wrecks were discovered. Suddenly a history was discovered that met all the criteria for a national history: it was neither British nor Aboriginal, and yet it was European – and thus deemed superior. The history of the VOC, the Dutch wrecks and the Dutch discoveries became a national history and functioned as a



European history prior to British settlement. With one discovery, Australia could sever its ties from their British colonial past without having to accept an Aboriginal history in its stead. Simultaneously, their national history was elongated by 164 years, back until 1606 from Cook's discovery in 1770. In addition, Western Australia as a state was also suddenly significantly older than the politically more powerful states of the east coast (Henderson 2007: 37). Within the perspective of the **federation**, Western Australia now had a history it could use to legitimize a higher standing.

Throughout the 1960s, as the wrecks were discovered, and the 1970s, when they were investigated and displayed by the Western Australian Museum, these political discourses shaped the reasons to recover the wrecks and influenced the decisions on how to display them. The need to create an Australian nationalist - European prehistoric - history and to create a Western Australian identity at the same time, led to representations of primacy, importance and wealth. These representations were used to explain why the VOC is important to Australian history and to the Australians. The representations were legitimized by authentication through the use of large, original objects. The history was made tangible, real and impossible to doubt. To avoid that the history of the VOC remained a foreign history, strategies of assimilation were used to integrate it firmly into Australian history. Finally, national pride is constructed by representing the VOC in terms of power and superior technology. Seeing as the VOC, through these other representations, has become a natural part of Australian history, its achievements are something Australians can, and should, be proud of (fig. 10).

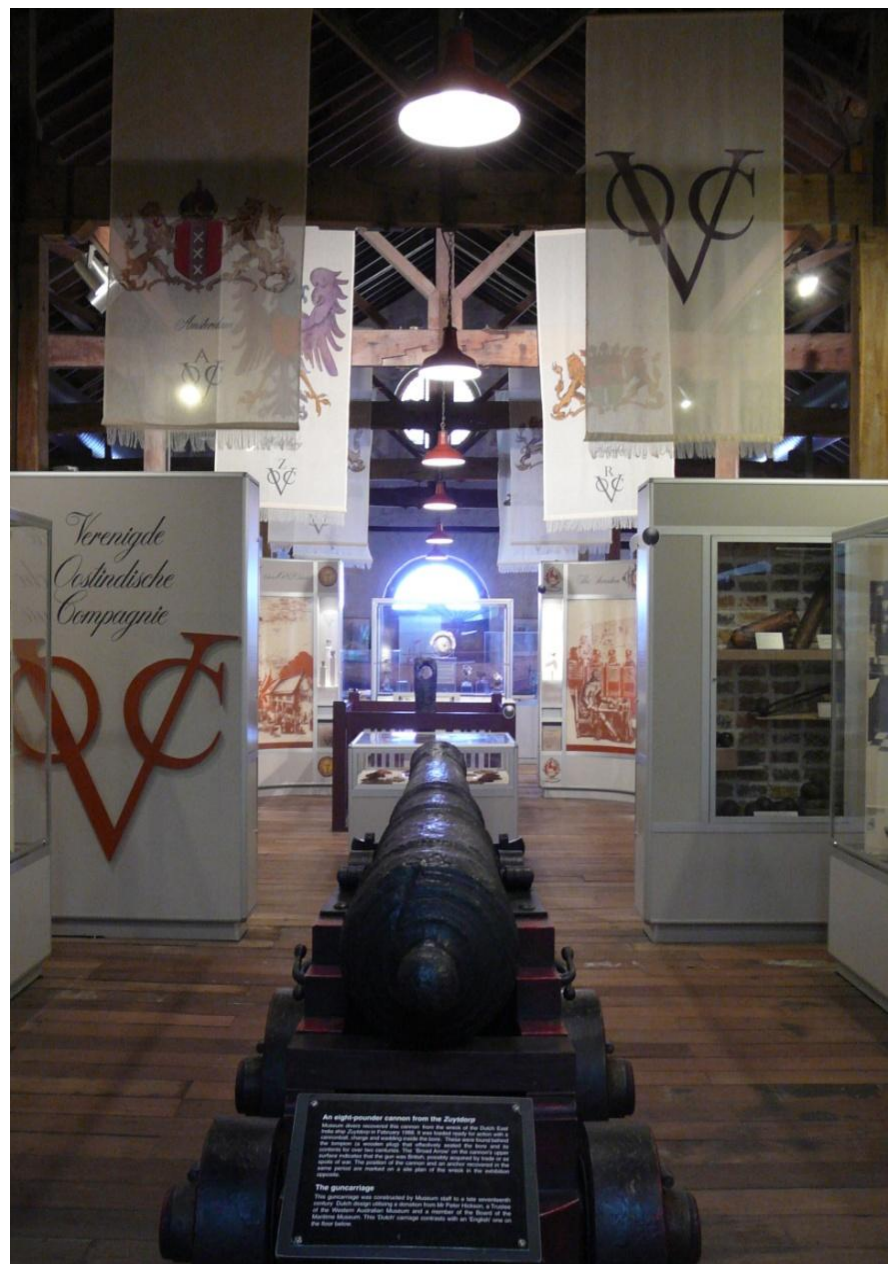


Figure 10: VOC banners in the *Dutch Wrecks Gallery* encourage feelings of pride, author's photo

## *Now*

Beginning in 1972 when a labour government under Gough Whitlam came to power, a new nationalism emerged (Bennett 2009: 124). This nationalism was coupled with a new social agenda and awareness, especially towards the Aboriginal population. The land rights movement advanced the rights of the aboriginal population and the official view that the Aboriginals are the owners of the Australian land slowly took hold (conversation with Richard Gould, 2011, pers. comm., 27 September). Museums and the academic world were taking a new interest in Aboriginal history and culture (Bennett 2009: 121). As post-colonial theory arose in the Western world, Australia began to critically look at its colonial past. Colonial guilt is now a common characteristic of the Australian federal and state governments as they attempt to right the wrongs of their predecessors and make up for past mistakes. The problems with the reserves, alcoholism and unemployment among Aboriginals are being addressed, although not (yet) entirely successfully.

Although the new nationalism has attempted to include the Aboriginal past into the national history, this representation is not commonly expressed. A foundation myth of maritime history, such as the history of the VOC, is the one most commonly expressed in the Australian states. This is not strange: by the time the Aboriginals received their rights, shipwreck legislation had already been passed in Western Australia, the Commonwealth and several other states. Especially the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act of 1976 was important, as it “officially annexed pre-settlement maritime history to the national past” (Bennett 2009: 149). By the time the political situation was ripe to include the Aboriginal past into the national history, emphasis had already been placed strongly on maritime history. And so the excavation, investigation and display of the Dutch wrecks and the history of the VOC has continued, initially possibly because a preference for European history prevailed. As Graeme Henderson, former director of the Western Australian Museum, wrote: “our identity as Australians has been influenced by a museum focusing on ships and shipwrecks” (2007: 2).

Although the reigning discourses in Australia no longer include racism or notions of European superiority and while the discourses of nationalism and post colonialism have come to mean different things, these discourses – along with the new discourse of multiculturalism – have not yet changed the representations of the VOC in Australian literature or museums. Most visitors, readers, writers or staff of the museum have not taken much notice that the present representations are deeply politically rooted and are no longer in line with the current political attitudes. The representations within their texts, labels and exhibitions have become normal and natural; the rift between these representations and the current reigning discourses remains unperceived.

## Future Representations

Usually, when reigning discourses change, the representations in museums and media change as well. This is because, while the objects retain the same descriptive power (denotation), their relevance and meaning (connotation) is now seen differently (Lidchi 2010: 165). Whereas the representations of the VOC in the Netherlands have changed over the last century, this has not happened in Australia. The reigning discourses, however, have altered and so the 'old' representations no longer fit. It may be time to alter the connotations of the VOC in Australia. The same subject matter can, through small or big changes, be recreated to represent the new political discourses and, thus, the same objects can be redressed to carry new connotations.

One of the issues that should be considered is including Aboriginal history into the discovery of the nation. It is a curious notion that the European discovery is seen as more important for Australian history. In an article in the Sydney Morning Herald from 1869, objects from the *Batavia*<sup>14</sup> are referred to as being "connected with the earliest history of Australia" (The Sydney Morning Herald, 5 November 1869). The impression is given that Australian history starts with its European discovery. In an interesting analogy, Mathilde Bellaigue wrote:

*This is noted in the paper by Poka Laenui (of Hawaii) about the Bishop Museum exhibition 'The Hawaiians', in which the history of Hawaii began with the 'discovery' of the islands by Captain Cook. Laenui answers to this with some humour: 'Cook did not discover us. We knew, long before he was conceived, who and where we were' (1999: 41).*

Although the Western Australian Museum is careful in attributing primacy to the VOC and the Dutch for their discoveries, it would not be out of place to note that Australia has a long and rich human history that began well before 1606. As such, a method of complementarization could be used to incorporate the histories of both selves and others.

Another way in which the history of the VOC could be used, is by viewing it from within a discourse of multiculturalism. By including stories of the Dutch, French, British and other explorers, today's multicultural Australian society can link their recent immigration to a deeper history (Bennett 2009: 149). Multiculturalism has become an important part of Australia's current ideals of nation building. Australian nationalism has changed from including racism and European superiority to being focused on multiculturalism, cultural diversity and inclusiveness. As such, both immigrant histories and Aboriginal history should be included into the national (maritime) history told by museums and literature<sup>15</sup>.

Achieving these changes could also be done through the use of post-colonial critique. One of the aspects of decolonizing Western museums is to reveal the Eurocentric ideologies, such as primacy or supremacy, which underlie the museums' practice (Kreps 2011: 72). Revealing Western biases, acknowledging the colonial nature of the collections or including multiple

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<sup>14</sup> It is now known that these objects actually originated from the *Zeewijk*.

<sup>15</sup> Although the Western Australian Museum tells stories of immigration and multiculturalism, this is done in the WAM Maritime Museum, where a more recent history is told and the VOC is not on display.

perspectives are all ways in which the museum can be decolonized. In the case of the Western Australian Museum, all of these changes could – and perhaps should – be implemented. Eurocentric and Western ideologies, such as the notion of primacy, should be revealed for what they are: European constructions and discourses. The nature of the museum’s maritime collection and the political history surrounding the acquisition of the VOC wreck material could be discussed within the exhibition and critically challenged by the museum itself. Multiple perspectives on the Australian past, as well as a plurality of voices, may be incorporated into the exhibitions to give voice to the diverse Australian population (Lidchi 2010: 201). As such, Aboriginal and immigrant histories could be included by the use of complementarization to connect to the discourse of multiculturalism. If these histories cannot entirely be included, one should at least acknowledge their existence.

A third strategy that could be adopted alongside complementarization and the decolonization of the museum, is the use of reflexive representation. This would involve a self-questioning representation: “exhibitions which problematize the politics of representation itself” (Nederveen Pieterse 2005: 173). To do so would require revealing the exhibition as a cluster of representations and to uncover the underlying political reasons or discourses for these representations. Such a reflexive representation would require the museum to critically analyze itself and its exhibitions and then to open this discussion to the visitors. While this puts the museum in a vulnerable position by telling the visitors it is not providing them with a neutral or factual ‘truth’, it fosters critical thought. Allowing visitors an insight into the work of the museum, which is based on interpretation rather than solid facts, would benefit the public’s awareness. Letting the visitors understand and question the representations of the VOC in the Western Australian Museum, for instance, would not only provide them with historic knowledge of the VOC but would also increase their knowledge of politics and the effects of the media on people’s thoughts. As such, the exhibition would be more relevant to the visitor’s everyday life, by providing a critical thought that is applicable to life beyond the museum’s walls, namely: ‘what influences the way I see the world?’ Additionally, revealing the politics of representation in the Western Australian Museum would change an exhibition about others, to an exhibition about the relationship or connection between selves (modern Australians) and others (17<sup>th</sup> century Dutchmen).

Changing the representations of the VOC in the Western Australian Museum can be done by complementarization, by adopting a strategy of decolonization and/or by using reflexive representation. All of these strategies can be implemented in smaller or bigger ways, depending on the museum’s capacity. One can simply acknowledge that these exhibitions host specific representations and show a specific history. In doing so, the museum concedes that it is neglecting to tell other histories. The museum may also choose to change the exhibitions more dramatically by including multiple voices and histories throughout or by implementing reflexive representation in the entire exhibition. For the latter, the museum would have to critically analyze itself and its representations before revealing these representations and the power behind them to the visitors. Any of these methods would result in the museum’s representation of the VOC to be more in line with the current discourses in Australia.

## Conclusion

The VOC had a noticeable impact on the Dutch Republic during the Golden Age. As such, it was and is a source of pride for the Dutch and remains an oft quoted success story in Dutch history. However, it has not continuously been a matter of pride and over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it has been represented in different ways in museums, schools and media in the Netherlands. These representations were guided by reigning discourses and discursive formations. As the reigning discourses altered, so did the representations of the VOC in media and exhibitions. Over time, these representations have been influenced by colonialism, post-colonialism, post-colonial theory, globalization and individualism.

In Australia, and especially in Western Australia, the VOC has also become a matter of pride. Perhaps, it is an even greater matter of pride to Australians than to the Dutch. As the newly decolonized nation of Australia sought for ways to encourage nationalism and construct a national past, the discoveries of the VOC wrecks happened more or less simultaneously with an increase in problems with the Aboriginal population. Australian representations of the VOC were born out of a discourse of nationalism, European superiority and racism. As such, primacy was strongly attributed to the VOC and its history was incorporated into Australia's national history. Histories that were linked to the former colonial power of Great Britain were stripped of their importance and Aboriginal histories remained largely neglected. However, since the creation of these representations in the 1960s and 1970s, the reigning discourses in Australia have altered. Unlike in the case of the Dutch representations of the VOC, museums and media in Australia continue to use the same 'old' representations. This is potentially harmful as the museum exerts power through knowledge based on discourses which are no longer generally accepted in society. As such, a few recommendations have been made to change these representations to be more in line with the current discourses and to exert a different power, for instance by decolonizing the museum or by using reflexive representation.

Reflexive representation is a valuable strategy, because it uncovers the hidden powers within history and reveals the politics behind representations. Once we are able to understand that neither media nor museums are able to provide us with entirely objective truths and see that we are constantly surrounded by representations, we can question the power behind these representations. Critically assessing the discourses that mould and direct our thoughts is a vital tool to tackle the future. How the past is portrayed and which histories are being remembered has an effect on our lives, in the present. As such, histories have a profound impact on the future. As Tony Bennett put it: "more than history is at stake in how the past is represented. The shape of the thinkable future depends on how the past is portrayed and on how its relations to the present are depicted" (2009: 162).

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<http://www.westfriesarchief.nl/news/174/onthulling-standbeeld-coen-1893-en-coenfeesten-1937-in-het-westfries-archief.html>

## Exhibitions

### *Batavia Gallery*

Western Australian Museum Shipwreck Galleries, Fremantle, Australia. Visited: 29 August & 15 December 2011.

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/museums/shipwrecks/#shipwrecks%2Flong-term-exhibitions>

### *Dutch Wrecks Gallery*

Western Australian Museum Shipwreck Galleries, Fremantle, Australia. Visited: 29 August & 15 December 2011.

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/museums/shipwrecks/#shipwrecks%2Flong-term-exhibitions>

### *From Hartog to De Vlamingh – 100 Years of Dutch Explorations of Australia'*

Western Australian Museum Shipwreck Galleries, Fremantle, Australia. Visited: 29 August & 15 December 2011.

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/museums/shipwrecks/#shipwrecks%2Flong-term-exhibitions>

### *Nederlands-Indië: Een Koloniaal Verleden/The Netherlands East-Indies: A Colonial History*

Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (Tropenmuseum), Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Visited: 1 November 2010 & 16 March 2012.

<http://www.tropenmuseum.nl/-/MUS/6815/Tropenmuseum/Tentoonstellingen/Vaste-tentoonstellingen/Nederlands-Indi>

### *Schipbreuk – De Noodlottige Reis van de Batavia [Shipwrecked – The Fateful Voyage of the Batavia]*

Nieuw Land, Lelystad, The Netherlands. Visited: 6 & 10 March 2012.

<http://www.schipbreukbatavia.nl/>

### *Shipwrecks Gallery*

Western Australian Museum Geraldton, Geraldton, Australia. Visited: 21 August 2011.

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/museums/geraldton/#geraldton%2Flong-term-exhibitions>

### *VOC-schip Amsterdam/East Indiaman Amsterdam*

Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Visited: 11 & 25 January 2012.

<http://www.hetscheepvaartmuseum.nl/exhibitions/exhibits|33>

### *VOC-schip Batavia/VOC ship Batavia*

Bataviawerf, Lelystad, The Netherlands. Visited: 6 & 10 March, 12 May 2012.

<http://www.bataviawerf.nl/the-batavia.html>

### *Zie Je in de Gouden Eeuw/See You in the Golden Age*

Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Visited: 11 & 25 January, 16 March 2012.

<http://www.hetscheepvaartmuseum.nl/exhibitions/exhibits|22>

## Images

- Title** All the citations listed in Appendix I, author's compilation, 2012
- Fig. 1** *Gezicht op het Oost-Indisch Magazijn te Amsterdam*, J. Mulder, 1726  
<http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl/?/en/items/FSM01:E-279>
- Fig. 2** *Op de reede van Bantam 1598*, Johan Herman Isings, 1913  
(Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008: 118–119).  
<http://historywallcharts.eu/view/op-de-reede-van-bantam-1598.->
- Fig. 3** *Binnenkomende vloot vóór Amsterdam ± 1665*, Johan Herman Isings, c. 1960  
(Blokker, Blokker & Blokker 2008: 146–147).  
<http://historywallcharts.eu/view/binnenkomende-vloot-vr-amsterdam-omstreeks-1665.->
- Fig. 4** Visitors at the *Batavia* during construction, photo: Albert Boes, c. 1990s  
[http://www.zaans-industrieel-erfgoed.nl/pages\\_3/met%20stoom%2024%20art%20%2009.html](http://www.zaans-industrieel-erfgoed.nl/pages_3/met%20stoom%2024%20art%20%2009.html)
- Fig. 5** The outgoing routes of the VOC, author's adaptation after Playford 2006: 13
- Fig. 6** (Fragment of) *Paskaerte Zynde t'Oosterdeel Van Oost Indien, met alle de Eylanden daer omtrent gelegen van C. Comorin tot aen Japan*, Pieter Goos, 1666  
(Putman 2005: 94–95)
- Fig. 7** Romantic image of Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de Bijé, Australia's 'first European settlers', Ross Shardlow, c. 2000s  
(Gerritsen, Cramer & Slee 2007: cover)
- Fig. 8** The *Batavia*'s hull section and the replica portico, author's photo, 2011  
(Western Australian Museum, Shipwreck Galleries, *Batavia Gallery*)
- Fig. 9** Title of the main label for the 'Zuytdorp' display, author's photo, 2011  
(Western Australian Museum, Shipwreck Galleries, *Dutch Wrecks Gallery*)
- Fig. 10** Banners express pride in the history of the VOC, author's photo, 2011  
(Western Australian Museum, Shipwreck Galleries, *Dutch Wrecks Gallery*)

## Appendix I – VOC primacy in Australian literature

Date	Occasion	Citation	Reference
late 1500s	First to use committees	"The Dutch were the first people to devise the modern practice of administration by committees or, as they were then called, councils."	Drake-Brockman 2006: 9
1606	<i>Duijfen</i> , first sighting	"'Experimental archaeology' on Dutch vessels has also been undertaken in Western Australia with the construction of the <i>jacht Duyfken</i> (1997-99), a reproduction of the first European vessel to sight the Australia continent in 1606."	Green 2007: 21
1606	<i>Duijfen</i> , first sighting	"... although it was ten years after the first Dutchmen had set eyes on Australia. That distinction belonged to Willem Jansz and crew of the <i>Duyfken</i> , who charted the west side of Cape York Peninsula in 1606."	Playford 2006: 15
1606	First map of all inhabited continents	"The <i>Duyfken</i> 's charting of part of the Australian coast meant that, for the first time, parts of all the world's inhabited continents could be on a single map."	Burningham 1998: 124
1606	First naming	"The Dutch traveller Willem Jansz [ <i>Duijfen</i> 's skipper] is the first person whose non-Indigenous name for an Australian geographical feature [Cape Keerweer] still applies today."	McCarthy 2006: 26
1606	First descriptions	"But, what they did bring home were the first descriptions of Australia, its nature and inhabitants through the ship's journals and maps."	Parthesius 1998: 68
1606–1756	First records of contact with Aboriginals	"The Dutch were the first Europeans to leave useful records of their contacts with the Aborigines of North Queensland."	Loos 1998: 8
1616	Dirk Hartog, first landing	"Dirk Hartog died in 1621 aged 41, the first European to set foot on the western coast of Australia."	WAM Education Section undated: 4
1616	Dirk Hartog, first landing	"... the Southland was discovered by the ship <i>Eendracht</i> in 1616 when Dirk Hartog made the first-recorded European's landing on the Australian coast, which was later named Dirk Hartog Island"	Green 2006: 57

1616	Dirk Hartog, first landing	"This was the first known landing of Europeans in Western Australia"	Playford 2006: 15
1616-1645	Mapping of west coast	"After their first accidental landfall in the vicinity of Shark Bay in 1616, the Dutch made charts to protect vessels from the danger of shipwreck. Thus the west coast was partially delineated and known to the world's maritime nations [through Dutch cartography] one and a half centuries before the first European settlement was established on the east coast."	Henderson 2007: 2
1623	First white Australian	"... in 1623, while the ship <i>Leyden</i> was sailing alongside the coast of Western Australia, north of Shark Bay, 'Willemtgen Jansz, wedded wife of Willem Jansz, of Amsterdam, midshipman, was delivered of a son who got the name Seebaer van Nieuwelant' (Seaborn of New Land). This child can perhaps be regarded as the first white Australian."	Playford 2006: 16
1627	Mapping of south coast	"But, in 1627, we get for the first time a chance sighting and charting of a large section of the southern coast of the Australian continent." [ <i>Gulden Zeepaard</i> ]	Donaldson 2006: 14
1627	Sighting of west coast en route from the Indies	"Late in 1627, we get the first chance sighting of the West Australian coast by a ship en route from the Indies to the Netherlands." [ <i>Vianen</i> ]	Donaldson 2006: 14
1629	First European presence	"Show parents the <i>Batavia</i> hull and they realise that Europeans were here in Western Australia many years before James Cook and the <i>Endeavour</i> ."	Henderson 2007: 1
1629	First residents	"There are no competing claims, however, that anyone other than Dutch mariners and their ships' passengers were the first Europeans or outsiders to find themselves actually <i>residing</i> in Australia." [ <i>Batavia</i> ]	Gerritsen 2006: 38
1629	West Wallabi Island, first building	"A legacy of the events following the wrecking of the <i>Batavia</i> , a stone enclosure built on West Wallabi Island, still stands and is the oldest known European structure in Australia."	Shaw & Wilkins 2006: 14
1629	West Wallabi Island, first building	"... it is the oldest European building in Australia."	Edwards 1998: 93
1629	West Wallabi Island, first building	"... no legal protection exists for the fort, which is the oldest man-made structure in the State and of major historical importance."	Tyler 1970: 56

1629	West Wallabi Island, first building	"This fort still stands today, the first edifice to be erected by Europeans on Australian soil."	Donaldson 2006: 15
1629	First description of Australian marsupials	"He [Pelsaert] thus became the first person to both report and take note of the characteristics of Australian marsupials."	Drake-Brockman 2006: 42
1629	Mutineers, first sentences	"The first sentences passed by Europeans in Australia - punishments of the <i>Batavia</i> mutineers ordered by Pelsaert in 1629 - included hanging with hand-logging, marooning, keelhauling, dropping from the yard-arm, and flogging."	Edwards 1970: 134
1629	Gallows, first structure	"Three strong men now step forward, pull Jeronimus to his feet and lead him to the gallows, where the loop of a strong rope is put around his neck, before the other end is thrown over one of the three scaffolds - the first solid European structures ever built in what would become known as Australia."	Fitzsimons 2011: 411-412
1629	First ruling on the treatment of Aborigines	"... Francisco Pelsaert laid down the first official ruling regarding the proper treatment of the aboriginal tribes of Australia by white men about to inhabit the country	Drake-Brockman 2006: 42
1629	Loos & Pelgrom, first marooned	"... Loos and Pelgrom were the first Europeans to be marooned in Australia"	Playford 2006: 237
1629	Loos & Pelgrom, first 'settlers'	"It is an established and historical fact that the Dutch castaways from the <i>Batavia</i> were the first recorded Europeans who landed and remained on Australian soil [...] we can consider them as the first European settlers in Australia."	Gerritsen, Cramer & Slee 2007: 1
1629	Loos & Pelgrom, first 'settlers'	"They [Loos and Pelgrom] almost certainly became the first European inhabitants of Australia."	Shaw & Wilkins 2006: 37
1629	Loos & Pelgrom, first 'settlers'	"They were never heard of again, but Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de Bye can presumably be regarded as Australia's first European settlers."	Donaldson 2006: 15
1629	Loos & Pelgrom, first 'settlers'	"Thus, these two Dutch seafarers, one a cabin boy, the other a soldier, became the first documented outsiders destined to remain in Australia for the rest of their lives, 159 years before shiploads of hapless convicts, dragged unwillingly half around the world, formed the colony of New South Wales."	Gerritsen 2006: 40



1629	Loos & Pelgrom, first 'settlers'	"... he [Pelsaert] later marooned on the continent of the unknown Southland the first Europeans ever to live in Australia."	Drake-Brockman 2006: 10
1629	Loos & Pelgrom, first 'settlers'	"... their names are remembered in history, not by reason of their crimes, but because they were the first two white men recorded to have lived on the continent of Australia."	Drake-Brockman 2006: 45
1629	Loos & Pelgrom, first 'settlers'	"If they were not killed by Aborigines or otherwise died soon after being marooned, these two men would have become Australia's first European inhabitants."	Playford 2006: 242
1629	First private letter	"It [Bastiaensz.' letter] is thus a very important letter - quite apart from the fact that it appears to have been the first private letter ever to have been written by any person who spent some time ashore, close by the great southern continent!"	Drake-Brockman 2006: 72
1629-1728	First European contacts	"These [Dutch] wrecks furnish records of the earliest European contacts with the west coast of Australia"	Williams 1971: 250
1696	Mapping of west coast & naming	"The expedition provided the first accurate map of the west coast of the Australian continent and resulted in the discovery and/or naming of a number of geographic features, the most notable being the Swan River, Rottneest Island, Red Bluff and Dirk Hartog Island."	Playford 1998: 27
1696	Mapping of west coast & naming	"The expedition provided the first accurate map of the west coast of Australia, and resulted in the discovery and/or naming of a number of prominent geographic features, the most notable being Swan River, Rottneest Island, Red Bluff and Dirk Hartog Island."	Playford 2006: 26
1712	<i>Zuijtdorp</i> , first 'settlers'	"If so, they [ <i>Zuijtdorp</i> 's castaways] could perhaps have been Australia's first permanent European inhabitants [...] However, this honour could earlier have belonged to the two <i>Batavia</i> mutineers (1629) or the survivors of the <i>Vergulde Draeck</i> (1656), provided that these people lived long enough to be considered as 'settlers'."	Playford 2006: 210

1712	<i>Zuijtdorp</i> , first 'settlers'	"Perhaps these Dutchmen [of the <i>Zuijtdorp</i> ] became 'unwilling settlers' in New Holland, more than seventy-five years before the first British colonists arrived in New South Wales."	Playford 2006: 235
1728	<i>Sloepie</i> , first vessel	"The <i>Sloepie</i> was the first ocean-going vessel built in Australian history, and the first to incorporate native timbers."	Edwards 1970: 142
1728	<i>Sloepie</i> , first vessel	"This little vessel deserves fame as the first ocean-going ship to be built in Australia, and it testifies to the remarkable courage, perseverance and resourcefulness of the VOC seamen of that time."	Playford 2006: 31
1756	First corroboree for Europeans	"After the Dutch returned to the beach, nineteen Aborigines approached them with their bodies daubed with red and were given alcohol, sugared arrack, by the Dutch, after which the Aborigines performed 'a frolic with a kind of song', the first record of Europeans having been entertained with a corroboree."	Loos 1998: 15
1958	First Dutch wreck	"The <i>Zuytdorp</i> was the first early Dutch shipwreck to be found [1927] and positively identified [1958] in Western Australia"	Playford 2006: 139
1964	Shipwreck legislation	"In response to diver activities on the <i>Batavia</i> and <i>Vergulde Draeck</i> sites in particular, the Western Australian Government passed protective legislation in 1964, which is among the earliest shipwreck heritage legislation in the world."	Nash 2007: 3

## Appendix II – VOC primacy in labels in the Western Australian Museum

Date	Occasion	Citation	Exhibition
1606	<i>Duijfen</i> , first sighting	"In 1606, the small Dutch vessel <i>Duyfken</i> made the first known voyage to Australia."	Shipwreck Galleries – <i>From Hartog to De Vlamingh</i>
1606	<i>Duijfen</i> , first sighting	"However, de Vlamingh was not the first Dutchman to reach the coast of Australia. Willem Janszoon claimed this honour when he explored the area around Cape York in the yacht <i>Duyfken</i> in 1606."	Shipwreck Galleries – <i>From Hartog to De Vlamingh</i>
1606	<i>Duijfen</i> , first landing [err.]	"The first recorded landfall of Europeans on Australian soil took place during the <i>Duyfken</i> expedition."	Shipwreck Galleries – <i>From Hartog to De Vlamingh</i>
1616	Dirk Hartog, first landing	"The first Dutchman to land on the Western Australian coast was Dirk Hartog who arrived here in the ship <i>Eendracht</i> in 1616."	Shipwreck Galleries – <i>From Hartog to De Vlamingh</i>
1616	Dirk Hartog, first landing	"On the flattened plate, a text was engraved to commemorate his [Dirk Hartog's] visit to the west Australian coast; it is the first recorded European landfall on this coast."	Shipwreck Galleries – <i>Batavia Gallery</i>
1629	<i>Batavia</i> victim	"One of the first Europeans in Australia."	Shipwreck Galleries – <i>Batavia Gallery</i>
1629	<i>Batavia</i> , first wreck	"... the first Australian VOC wreck."	Shipwreck Galleries – <i>Batavia Gallery</i>
1629-1712	First 'settlers'	"Is it possible that these people [from the <i>Batavia</i> , <i>Vergulde Draeck</i> or <i>Zuijtdorp</i> ] became Australia's first white settlers long before Captain Cook planted the British flag in Australian soil?"	Geraldton – <i>Shipwrecks Gallery</i>
1712	<i>Zuijtdorp</i> , first genetic link between Europeans and Aborigines	"This is no more than a possibility at present, which requires medical study, but it is an intriguing idea that descendents of <i>Zuytdorp</i> survivors could still be living in the Shark Bay area today."	Shipwreck Galleries – <i>Dutch Wrecks Gallery</i>