What's To Be Done With Gender and Post-Colonial Studies?

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Rede

uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar Vrouwenstudies,
in het bijzonder de geschiedenis van (post)kolonialisme en multiculturaliteit,
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam op vrijdag 1 juni 2001

door

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Vossiuspers UvA

Geachte Rector Magnificus,
Voorzitter en leden van het College van Bestuur,
Dames en Heren,

Men heeft mij verteld dat de regels van hoffelijkheid van de Universiteit van Amsterdam voorschrijven dat ik deze oratie in het Nederlands zou moeten uitspreken. Maar tijdens een dertig-jaar lange omzwerving in de Verenigde Staten is Engels de professionale taal geworden waarin ik mijn gedachten op de meest duidelijke en ook de meest eerlijke manier onder woorden kan brengen. Bovendien heb ik tijdens mijn lange verblijf in de Verenigde Staten een Engelstalige familie en een academische en sociale gemeenschap van geestverwanten opgebouwd van wie een aantal vandaag in de zaal zit. Omdat ik vermoed dat de regels van hoffelijkheid van de Universiteit van Amsterdam niet vergen dat ik mijn Amerikaanse familie en vrienden een uur van algehele verveling voorschotel door een taal te spreken die zij niet kunnen verstaan is het een bewuste keuze dat ik nu in het Engels overga.

Dear Rector Magnificus,
Chairman and Members of the Board of Governors,
Colleagues and Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

What Is To Be Done? with Gender and Post-Colonial Studies? In quoting the title of a novel by the Russian populist and revolutionary Nicolai Chernyshevsky – written in 1863, while he was locked up in a prison in Saint Petersburg – I don't want to imply that the academic world in the year 2001 resembles nineteenth-century Russia during the autocratic rule of Czar Alexander II.[1] Nor do I wish to replicate V.I. Lenin's purpose when he revived the same title in 1901, in his effort to compose a blueprint of the revolutionary strategies to be pursued by the Russian Social Demo-

cratic Party, called What Is To Be Done? [The] Burning Questions of Our Movement.[2] But the current scholarly efforts to incorporate gender relations and the socio-cultural legacies of Europe's colonial past as valid analytical categories can be called a 'movement'. And most movements, whether social, political, or intellectual ones, adhere to a specific agenda by maintaining a vision of What Is To Be Done. In this specific case, it represents an effort to make it seem natural that gendered assumptions and norms, as well as the contemporary multi-ethnic ramifications of European imperialism, are addressed on a par with other variables. In the humanities and social sciences, categories such as class, ethnicity, political ideology, economic development, or religion are part of the standard repertoire of scholarly research. Thus the burning question for our movement is how the historical profession, in particular, and humanistic and social science scholarship, in general, can be transformed in an integrated fashion by incorporating a gender analysis or a consideration of post-colonial realities and identities as regular scholarly practice.

Yet another way of defining the Burning Question on the scholarly calendar of gender and post-colonial studies is to recognize that prescriptions of masculinity and femininity are far from universal and timeless. Instead, they are inherently unstable due to the particularities of time, place, and changing structures of power. Similarly, 'whiteness', as a reference to the skin color of the majority of Europeans and North Americans, also tends to have variable meanings – or shifting connotations that are grounded in locally specific patterns of authority and subservience. It is the ambition of our 'movement', therefore, to convince colleagues of the importance of these commonsense, yet infinitely complex, intellectual quandaries. What Is To Be Done, in other words, calls for an ongoing attempt to expand the conceptual horizons of the practitioners of our craft rather than to plot and plan, as Lenin might have phrased it, the collapse of the substructure of the academic enterprise.

During the past two decades, in part due to the linguistic turn in the human sciences, the academic discipline of women's studies, as it emerged in the 1970's, has re-invented itself as gender studies. Frequently, the historical analysis of European imperialism in Asia and Africa has also been re-baptized as colonial discourse analysis or post-colonial studies. In both instances, language and the instrumental use of knowledge, as articulated in certain types of elocution and figures of speech, have become privileged objects of research. These newly reconfigured fields take seriously what the Francophone psychiatrist born in Martinique, Frantz Fanon, wrote in 1952, as the contested process of decolonization in French Algeria was be-

ginning to take shape. In the very first sentence of his book, Black Skins, White Masks, Fanon announced that he ascribed 'a basic importance to the phenomenon of language'. As he specified further, it is through a verbal rendering of racial biases, grounded in visible physical differences, that 'the other' is created.[3] Another way of describing this shift of focus in recent scholarship is to assert that all knowledge claims – not only in the humanities and the social sciences, but also in the natural sciences – are socially constructed and communicated through either the medium of words or in the language of numbers and mathematical formulas. Such a social constructionist perspective suggests that any intellectual argument, whether it is verified in a controlled experiment in a laboratory, posits a new social scientific theory, or proposes an unorthodox literary interpretation, constitutes nothing but a knowledge claim. And all knowledge claims function, as Donna Harraway has argued in her influential essay on situated knowledge(s), as 'rhetorical strategies and methods of persuasion to stay ahead in the knowledge-and-power game'.[4]

By devoting my attention to the history of the Dutch East Indies, it is possible to explore these questions in an empirical terrain that is more or less familiar to most people in the audience today. In the course of the twentieth century, the Dutch colonial regime in the Indonesian archipelago was confronted with the growing strength of a vibrant nationalist movement striving for independence. At the same time, however, Dutch colonial residents in both Southeast Asia and the Netherlands itself continued to characterize their colonized subjects as childish and emotionally immature – or as delicate and irrational – and therefore in need of Western, male guidance for an indefinite period in the future.

Ironically, distinct notions regarding rational and authoritative forms of masculine behavior were thus formulated and frozen in the tropical setting of the Dutch East Indies. These ideas, in turn, provided a striking contrast with the emerging prescriptions of masculinity and the appropriate conduct of full-fledged citizens in Dutch civil society itself, where consultation and deliberation – or accommodation and consensus – were increasingly valued. At the same time, Indonesian nationalists envisioned their country's post-colonial modernity as requiring a liberation from the Dutch habit of labeling Indonesian men as effeminate and infantile, a discursive practice that vindicated Dutch colonial rule and tried to undermine and frustrate the legitimacy of Indonesian nationalism.

When concentrating on idiom, metaphor, or more generally, on the ways in which reality is converted into words, What Is To Be Done in the field of gender

studies is to recognize that such language often invokes models of femininity and masculinity, which tend to reflect and reinforce a hierarchy of values. Gendered tropes illustrate discrepancies of power. They signify all sorts of unequal social relationships that are not intrinsically linked to the similarities or differences between men and women per se. Instead, the figures of speech conveying concrete images of womanhood and manhood represent graphic symbols – easily recognizable – that are invoked to underscore relations of command and subordination. Through the use of metaphor, Joan Scott and other post-structuralists have reminded us in recent years, gendered discourses are divorced from the realm of sex roles or biological differentiation, emerging instead as symbolic and narrative tools designed to highlight unequal power positions. As a result, gendered figures of speech become constitutive elements of many aspects of social and political organization at a structural level.

Such gendered metaphors, of course, are embedded in human history and representational practices since time immemorial, whether in the classical literature of Europe or in the classic epic texts of South and Southeast Asia such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. But even in a modern, twentieth-century context, similar rank-ordering judgments have been attached to demarcations of femininity and masculinity. During the height of the Second World War, for example, America's Vice President Henry Wallace wrote in his diary about Franklin Delano Roosevelt's so-called 'feminine mind' that it did not 'always produce the same answers'. He continued to define the supposedly feminine nature of Roosevelt's mind as 'proceeding by means of intuition and indirection'.[5] What Wallace did, in this instance, was to mark the attributes of consistency, predictability, and linearity as male, while he coded indirection and surprise as female. Roosevelt himself, however, used a comparable set of images. He described Charles de Gaulle, the symbol of the 'Free French' resistence, as a highly respected bridegroom with integrity and honor. On the other hand, he characterized Henri Giraud, who was the commander of the Vichy government's forces in North Africa, as an ugly bride with a dubious moral reputation.[6]

Whether it is called discourse, rhetoric, or semantics, the use of a certain kind of language matters. After all, language is learned, in part, by observing, assessing, and naming things in the material worlds and the realm of ideas; it is also learned through the process of classifying and rank-ordering people's behavior. In many in-

stances linguistic statements imply a judgment as to what is either more or less important in the identity and social conduct of a specific human being or a certain group of people. The composition of a particular figure of speech conveys useful information about the understanding of historical agency. Even if linguistic messages are indirect or oblique, such gendered tropes express a palpable vision of the world; they also clarify historical actors' interpretations of the political culture that surrounds them and presumably legitimates their actions.

When we acknowledge that Indonesian nationalists absorbed a similar vocabulary, however, it should become clear that the binary categorizations of femininity and masculinity are both fungible and slippery. Indonesian left-wing critics of Sukarno as president of the Republic also used female emblems when they denounced him as 'fainthearted and faithless'. Sukarno, militant opponents of the Indonesian Republic in Yogyakarta argued, was not a true leader because 'he could be influenced by the tearful pleas of his wife', while he sang a 'mother's lullaby in the hope of putting to sleep the radical popular movement'.[7] Being a citizen of a free and autonomous Indonesia demanded an emancipation not only from the Netherlands' political and economic mastery, but also from the Dutch proclivity to emasculate and infantilize their colonial subjects. Embracing the ideal of independence entailed the invention of a brand new post-colonial identity. Hence, the macho idiom, which translated into the 'hyper-masculine' conduct of Indonesian nationalists in the postwar period, can be viewed as a calculated response to European labeling practices. At the same time, however, Indonesian nationalists also reserved the right to appropriate a comparable gendered vocabulary to verbalize their own internal power struggles.

The term 'hyper-masculinity', as applied, in this case, to the defenders of the Indonesian Republic, was coined by the Indian psychiatrist Ashis Nandy. In 1983 he assessed the burgeoning boldness of the nationalist movement in India in the first half of the twentieth century – and by implication, in other societies shaped by European imperialism as well – as a form of synthetically inflated masculinity. It is true that Nandy acknowledged that Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent path of resistence to British colonial rule could be treated as a deviation from his diagnostic protocol. One might call Gandhi's movement androgynous, even though his post-colonial vision was grounded in an imagined community that assigned men and women, as essentialized entities, their 'natural' place in an organic hierarchy. But other anti-colonial crusaders in India and elsewhere, Ashis Nandy argued, celebrated their viril-

ity. This deliberate process represented a necessary step in 'the discovery of self' on the part of colonized men, whom European rulers had emasculated for hundreds of years. The inhabitants of colonized territories in South and Southeast Asia had been captives of European cultures that were grounded in what he called an exaggerated sense of Western 'masculine maturity, historicism, objectivism, and hyper-normality'. Hence, the liberation of Indian men from European imperialism demanded a process of mimicking, even enhancing, those aspects of the 'self' they could share with their masters from the West. By doing so it was possible at long last to destabilize Europeans' firm faith in their existential superiority, or what he has called their 'manly, husbandly, and lordly prerogatives'.[8]

In synergy with Nandy's diagnosis of anti-colonial politicians in India, Indonesian nationalists also 'acted upon' a newly discovered intellectual authority and physical confidence.[9] They displayed a virility and toughness that shocked as well as bewildered Dutch observers. Although conflicts about tactics and ideology lingered on, most leaders of the independence movement exhibited a physical and mental rigor or a political cunning many Dutch residents viewed as unprecedented. It seemed as if their colonial subjects had suddenly evolved into a novel species of 'Super-Indonesians', as a Dutch psychoanalyst in Java observed.[10] But Western-oriented intellectuals or upper-crust politicians were not the only men to construct a radically different identity by embracing a 'new courage'.[11] Instead, they were sustained by a much larger contingent of less educated but equally tempestuous Indonesians.

Both in Java and Sumatra this new breed of crusaders on behalf of Indonesia's independence has been described as pemuda, which in a literal sense means youth. Despite their name, however, the pemuda drew their rank and file from all age groups, hailing from either urban areas or rural villages.[12] Rather than their relative young age, the unifying characteristic of the men who joined the nationalist movement resided in a shared spirit of exhilaration and a common outlook, which made them regard the returning Dutch colonial rulers after Japan's surrender in August, 1945, as a Japanese eyewitness noted, with 'revulsion, disdain, and hate-filled eyes'.[13]

In their daily existence, contributing to Indonesia's liberation from the Dutch became an all-consuming quest. While trying to communicate to the world around them their commitments, many anti-colonial activists absorbed a distinct new style, both a social and a sartorial one.[14] As a calculated departure from local customs and

traditions in Java and some other regions that valued soft-spoken decorum and courtesy, a novel habit of speaking gruffly, or ordering people around with a strident voice and in a peremptory manner, constituted signs of pemuda identity.[15] Casually wearing a military uniform, regardless of its color or shape, also qualified as a badge of revolutionary honor.

Of course the purposeful virility displayed by champions of the Indonesian nationalist movement after the Second World War was not unique. One could argue that since the birth of the nation-state as a political entity in modern history, masculine toughness has been mustered, both as a political strategy and social response, to bolster a mother country's or fatherland's unity, especially at moments when national integrity needs to be asserted or reclaimed. As the American political scientist Cynthia Enloe has proposed: manifestations of nationalism have typically arisen from 'masculine' memory or 'masculinized' sensibilities of shame, honor, and hubris.[16] In many national histories, meanwhile, enemies have been demonized as either effeminate men or as fainthearted women, while domestic heroes are often celebrated as manly.[17] In this context it is interesting to remember that Albert Einstein, for his part, also added a critical intervention. Because nationalism is often represented as an adult sentiment flowing from a range of political conventions and military traditions seen as predominantly male, he described it as an infantile disease – or, as he noted, nationalism should be treated as 'the measles of mankind.'[18] Nationalism, Einstein implied, is a phenomenon associated with adult men who never managed to overcome the infirmities of childhood.

As an outgrowth and manifestation of European nationalism, the rhetoric of colonial mastery in Asia incorporated an endless array of hierarchical allusions to adults and children, to parents and their offspring, or to schoolteachers and pupils. These binary oppositions – or 'well-schooled dichotomies,' as Jacques Derrida has called them – were deeply embedded in European colonial practices. The idiom of parental obligation and the vocabulary of family ties, in fact, functioned as a constitutive metaphor used to justify Europeans' colonial governance, in both Asia and Africa. Whether articulated in Dutch, English, French, or other European languages, arguments designed to vindicate colonial regimes often summoned a maternal model of caring for the welfare of indigenous people, on the one hand, or mustered a paternalistic model of the rigorous disciplining of native children, on the other hand.

Invariably this parental rhetoric of colonial rule was formulated in gendered language. After all, most family units tend to incorporate both mothers and fathers, while their offspring always consists of either girls or boys. Hence, these metaphors of the nuclear family were designed to represent colonized societies as a happy household. Their purpose was to sustain the myth of the Dutch East Indies as a natural, organic whole, composed of benevolent but stern white-skinned parents, who guided their brown-skinned children to basic literacy and psychological maturity. But as the American historian, Lynn Hunt, has argued in her book, The Family Romance of the French Revolution, this was not a phenomenon unique to colonized territories in Asia. Rather, as she has written, 'narratives of the family are central to the constitution of all forms of authority.'

It is therefore no surprise, perhaps, that since the late nineteenth-century inception of anthropology as an academic discipline, patterns of kinship have constituted its central focus. In his landmark volume of essays published in 1961, entitled Rethinking Anthropology, for instance, the eminent British anthropologist, Edmund Leach, collected six articles, five of which concentrated on kinship terminology, rules of descent and inheritance, cross-cousin marriage, and affinal exchange. He did not select the title Rethinking Kinship and Marriage for his collection, however, because he adhered to the prevailing view that kinship comprised the analytical core of anthropology, which had from its very beginning both echoed and reinforced the logic of European colonial rule in many distant corners of the globe.[19]

Since the early modern period, Western notions concerning the 'primitive' or the 'infantile other' have been concocted and recreated at regular intervals. The intellectual impetus to do so occurred not only as a vindication of European domination over territories in other parts of the world. Instead, the search for evolutionary typologies of human difference was part and parcel of hierarchical schemes designed to classify and taxonomize human development in various, often competing, evolutionary schemes or Comtean stages.[20] In fact, the controversial British critic and artist Wyndham Lewis applied the same logic to European societies as well. In 1926, he argued in The Art of Being Ruled that the manipulative strategy to infantilize and feminize in order to dominate was an essential feature of European civil society and patterns of governance during the first half of the twentieth century. And in Lewis's case, his view that modern European cultures were increasingly dominated by womenhood 'as the most helpless and ill-equipped category of man-

kind' yielded an infatuation with its antidote, hyper-masculinity, which entailed a slippery slope toward his embrace of fascism in the 1930's.[21]

Implicit in the patterns of authority grounded in a patriarchal family model of colonial societies was the reality of the Dutch colonial ruler as the paterfamilias, perched at the apex of the social hierarchy. As Louis Couperus's novel The Hidden Force (or De Stille Kracht) portrayed so strikingly, the Dutch civil servant Otto van Oudijck embodied the prototype of the rational sovereign, whose 'soldier-like briskness' and 'robust virility' coincided with great responsibilities that 'delighted his authoritative nature.'[22] While Dutch colonial administrators, who were uniformly male, exemplified austerity and self-discipline, colonized men were cast as their opposites – as creatures who exuded, also in the words of Couperus, a 'soft and delicate sensuality' and a 'feline strength and dexterity.'[23] As was the case with British representations of Bengali men who presumably lacked 'manly virility,' so-called feminine characteristics were projected onto Javanese men.[24] Their so-called effeminate and infantile behavior contrasted starkly with grown-up Dutchmen, who possessed the masculine energy and adult wisdom to rule the Indonesian archipelago. Or as Rudyard Kipling articulated it in his novel Kim: 'they had learned to carry on the heroic, day-to-day business of maintaining the [British] Empire' on the South Asian subcontinent.[25]

Even though not every Dutch colonial resident shared this particular belief, the alleged effeminacy and naiveté of Javanese men was a resonant theme in Dutch East Indies folklore. However, an antonymic set of clichés had become part of Dutch colonial mentalities as well, because numerous Europeans marked some ethnic groups in the archipelago with a stereotypical masculinity. The supposedly fanatic Muslim fighters in Aceh in North Sumatra, for example, or the truculent Moluccan men who made up the rank-and-file of the Royal Netherlands-Indies Army, were enduring examples of this contrasting motif. But also in the case of these martial and 'manly' ethnic cultures, Europeans assumed that their superior rationality and emotional composure were crucial to the preservation of public order and economic productivity in the archipelago.

This Dutch habit of characterizing the Indonesian 'other' as feminine continued in the postwar period, when a vibrant Indonesian nationalist movement challenged the structural foundations and ideological legitimacy of Dutch colonial rule in Southeast Asia. Even though the Netherlands had conceded by signing the Linggajati

agreement during the spring of 1947 that the unilaterally proclaimed, independent Republik Indonesia possessed de facto authority over Java, Madura, and Sumatra, the Dutch nation still maintained sovereignty over the archipelago as a whole. In doing so, the Dutch government had relegated the Indonesian Republic to a position of acting like a rebellious child within a still coherent national family.[26] The appointment of the well-educated Indonesian Abdulkadir Widjojoatmodjo as the formal chairman of a Dutch commission, authorized in 1947 to negotiate with the Indonesian Republic under the auspices of the Security Council of the United Nations, represented a clever Dutch move. His appointment as chair was designed to reinforce the notion that the dispute between the Netherlands and the Indonesian Republic was nothing but a family affair. Abdulkadir, for his part, had initially compared the desire of his Republican compatriots' for immediate independence to an ill-conceived, impetuous marriage. As he wrote during the fall of 1945, 'Why wait until the couple's house is completely furnished? Marry first. The household will take care of itself if the bride and groom cooperate.'[27] Not surprisingly a spokesman for the Indonesian Republic in a broadcast on The Voice of Free Indonesia Radio denigrated Abdulkadir as a man who was not a 'real and pure Indonesian.' Instead, he was an unknown personality of 'dubious ability.'[28]

Also Henri van Vredenburch, who served as a senior Dutch negotiator alongside Abdulkadir Widjojoatmodjo, wrote in his memoirs that the idea of the meetings sponsored by the UN Security Council's Good Offices Committee (GOC) were an effort to adjudicate a family feud. He conjured up an elaborate story to portray the complicated relationship between reform-minded Dutch colonial civil servants and Indonesian nationalists. His foray into allegory invoked an odd sequence of men embracing each other, to be followed by an incestuous relationship between an uncle and his niece. Describing first the prewar friendship between neo-ethical Dutch administrators and their well-educated Indonesian apprentices, he wrote 'that members of the progressive group De Stuw doted on the Young Turks of the nationalist movement who, for their part, relished the embrace…as long as they were callow and beardless.' Switching gender in his representation of Indonesian nationalism, Van Vredenburch continued, 'It was … a liaison de raison between the colonial uncle and his nationalist niece…Once she was released from the uncle's embrace and had acquired a taste for freedom, the niece was convinced she could get as many lovers as she might desire. But for the uncle it was and remained a tragic affair. With endless patience, determination, and attractive gifts in the form of concessions, the

uncle attempted to regain the affection of the beautiful niece, but it was in vain…The uncle was furious at the lack of gratitude on the part of the niece, who had been ignorant and onnozel (silly) until quite recently, and whose first steps on the path of emancipation the uncle himself had guided.'[29]

Van Vredenburch was hardly original in concocting such bizarre metaphors. In 1946, Winston Churchill had described India's nationalist movement as a 'bride who refuses to appear in church.' Van Vredenburch may also have taken his cue from his personal friend, the Netherlands Army's Commander-in-Chief in the Dutch East Indies, General Simon Hendrik Spoor, who had produced an equally eccentric parable contained in a political analysis written in September 1948 — a report that the Netherlands Embassy in Washington placed on the desk of an influential foreign policymaker in the US State Department.[30] The first three paragraphs of the text conjured up a well-connected Dutch bridegroom and his fabulously rich Indonesian fiancée, who were being urged by relatives abroad to resolve their personal discord, chronicling 'a family romance' gone awry.[31]

The introductory section made General Spoor's report extraordinary. His narrative depicted the Dutch-Indonesian confrontation as a nasty fight between a rational, if possessive, Dutchman and a neurotic Indonesian bride-to-be.[32] In Spoor's story, the Indonesian Republic emerged as a volatile woman, who had acknowledged that the relationship with her Dutch fiancé was a travesty.[33] Since the birth of the Indonesian nationalist movement, it had gradually dawned on her that any kind of union with her Dutch groom would always be based on exploitation rather than kindness or generosity. The newly liberated woman was adamant about receiving her official freedom, and she pursued her independence fiercely. As the Commander-in-Chief intimated, however, the ill-fated couple was under enormous pressure from the international community, headed by the UN Security Council and its Good Offices Committee in Java, to reconcile their differences.[34]

His report began as follows, 'The bride not only refuses to appear in church; no, she has induced her friends and the Best Man to institute legal proceedings against the bridegroom. She allows her admirers to engage in unseemly acts in her bridegroom's house; she repudiates and deceives him, engages in flirtations with adventurers, and has even allowed herself to be ensnared by a great-uncle, a real bear of a man, who is after her innocence and wealth… Her incompetence in the field of business and economic management is also shocking. In short, the bride's mental equipment is out of order. Normally the marriage would not take place. Instead, she

would be entrusted to the care of a few competent doctors, who would suggest treatment in a center for neurotic patients under the guidance of husky nurses. But the Family Council — a council with the widest ramifications throughout the whole world — has decided that the wedding has to take place, in order to keep the bride away from the sensuous great-uncle if at all possible…[35]

The Dutch Commander-in-Chief's flight of fancy translated the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, monitored by the UN Security Council – or what he called the Family Council – into a story about family conflict, a contested marriage, and a psychotic woman. The Security Council's involvement was motivated by its desire to protect the feminized Indonesian Republic from the clutches of 'the sensuous great-uncle, a real bear of a man' — which was, of course, a stock image of the Soviet Union. But at the same time, the rebellious stance of the Indonesian Republic was portrayed as the neurotic conduct of a woman who had lost her senses. She should therefore be entrusted to the custody of 'husky nurses.'

The Dutch poet Lucebert, for his part, commemorated with comparable imagery the fateful day of December 19th, 1948, when the Royal Netherlands Army in Java and Sumatra launched its second military assault on the Indonesian Republic. He did so in a poem entitled 'Love Letter to Our Tortured Bride' (or Minnebrief aan onze gemartelde bruid) – a woman who was poetically represented by the ancient Buddhist temple of Borobodur in central Java.[36] In one of the final stanzas Lucebert addressed, in poignant and disturbing language, the Indonesian archipelago as a woman and a bride, who was ravaged by her Dutch husband-to-be:

Ik ben de bruidegom, zoete boeroeboedoer
hoeveel wreekt de bruidegom de bruid
als op java plassen bloed zij stuiptrekt
uitbuiters hun buit haar ogen oesters inslaan en uitzuigen?

Or in my English translation:

I am the bridegroom, sweet Borobodur
How much revenge the groom inflicts upon the bride
when she shudders in Java's pools of blood
while plunderers seize their spoils
by smashing open and draining her eyes like oysters?

I trust I am not the only one to wonder why this tragic, and to many people in the Netherlands, traumatic, Dutch-Indonesian conflict in the early Cold War period was so often rendered and remembered in the language of an internal family fight gone out of control. One explanation leads us to the historical context of the years immediately after World War II. In this era, the semantics of the Cold War increasingly began to inflect American and other Western nations' judgments of Moscow and its predatory designs on the nationalist movements of Southeast Asia, whether in Indonesia, Vietnam, Burma, or in the Malay Peninsula. Hence, the particularity of the Indonesian struggle for independence at the local level became entangled in a rhetoric that was mobilized to articulate the growing bipolarity of the world.

What this implied was that in the discursive arena of international relations in the immediate postwar years, the world came to be partitioned into a so-called democratic Western bloc and a hostile totalitarian Eastern bloc. By 1947, the UN Security Council already used a vocabulary of inclusion and exclusion, because soon after its inception, the hopeful UN vision of a harmonious world-wide community of nations had disintegrated. Instead, the world was represented as divided into two antagonistic families, which competed with each other for primacy and the recruitment of new partners. In addition, Cold War rhetoric also juxtaposed two modes of womanhood, because the politics of war 'is implicitly a politics of gender as well.'[37] In Western fiction and American movies, the monogamous and a-political housewife, dedicated to motherhood and apple pie, came to epitomize the harmonious, democratic family headed by the United States. As its opposite, a caricature of the driven, dogmatic, and promiscuous communist woman was concocted to symbolize the destructive nature of the Soviet Union's kinship ties.

From the perspective of the State Department in Washington during the year 1948, the most salient question posed by the intractable conflict between the Netherlands and the Indonesian Republic was whether Indonesia's natural home in the future would be within the orbit of the American family, or whether it would establish its ideological affinity with Moscow. Hence, when Indonesia's independence was finally an internationally recognized fact in early 1950, President Harry Truman welcomed the new nation into the 'family of peace-loving, democratic countries in the West.'[38]

But the vocabulary of gender also had more mundane consequences. When the Commander-in-Chief of the Dutch military forces in Java and Sumatra appropriated manly rational thinking as a core value of the Dutch nation, it prompted him

and others to demonize the Indonesian Republic as a hysterical woman who had lost her senses. Such a representation registered his contempt for his military opponents, because he continued to view Indonesian soldiers as effeminate and irrational colonial subjects, who were incapable of putting up an honest fight. This vision, in turn, caused strategic planners within the Dutch Army not only to underestimate the Republic's military muscle, but also to pursue classic battlefield tactics. These conventional military strategies, however, were an ineffective response to guerrilla warfare, which was nimble and unpredictable and more appropriate to the unwieldy terrain of Java and Sumatra. Dutch officials and military leaders in the Indonesian archipelago also failed to concede the sophistication of the Republic's politicians and their emissaries in New York, Bombay, Canberra and elsewhere. The depiction of the Indonesian Republic as onnozel, or as a vapid and unhinged female, made Dutch officials blind to the Republic's intelligent appeals to the UN Security Council and the efficient mobilization of international public opinion on its behalf.

Other interpretations of the meaning and impact of this gendered Dutch rhetoric are plausible. The irony, however, was that Indonesian nationalists appropriated a comparable vocabulary, thus making these binary categorizations both malleable and fickle. Indonesian visions of modernity were predicated on a total break with the colonial past. From the perspective of Indonesian nationalists, post-colonial modernity entailed the emancipation not only from the Netherlands' political and economic power, but also from the deeply ingrained colonial habit of emasculating and infantilizing colonized men. Embracing modernity required the construction of a macho, newly configured post-colonial identity, which revived the image of femaleness as a source of instability and lack of resolve. It also mandated a suspension, whether or not it was temporary, of traditional social habits such as deference and courtliness. By transforming themselves into tough-as-nails soldiers and hard-nosed politicians, the architects of an independent Indonesia defined modernity as an enterprise that required the imagination of a cohesive national community. But it also mandated the realization of a 'new gendered self' that was no longer hampered by inscriptions of effeminacy, childishness, or irrationality.[39] After independence, Sukarno defiantly told the first American Ambassador to Jakarta in early 1950: 'We are now fully grown sons, who look to our mother earth – Ibu Pertiwi – with affection and gratitude, even though we don't want her to interfere in our lives.'

In sum, What Is To Be Done with an analysis such as the one contained in the story I have just told? At a scholarly level it proposes a systematic questioning of the way in which gendered notions and discourses are implicated, both structurally and symbolically, in change over time and in definitions of national identity. This kind of narrative also suggests that gender, as a constitutive principle as well as a linguistic device, is intimately linked to distributions of power. It is gratifying to note that the research of a new generation of Dutch historians, both women and men, has already begun to explore these issues in an extremely fruitful manner. In a similar fashion, recent post-colonial scholars have complicated the idea of the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis for historians. They have argued, instead, that in the contemporary brave new world of globalization and trans-national migration, historical causation and human agency can no longer be confined within national boundaries. Because nation-states still claim to uphold monolithic cultures, which presumably protect a unique set of national discourses that constitute gender and ethnic differences, nation-states as units of analysis no longer suffice. And finally, at a more practical level, my story, today, should also confirm that the intellectual mission of the Belle van Zuylen Instituut for Comparative and Multicultural Gender Research is a valid one, perhaps even an urgent one, in a university that has placed a premium on its international profile and its openness to interdisciplinary inquiry and new ideas.

One of the very real pleasures of this moment is to be able to express my gratitude to intellectual mentors and relatives, colleagues, and friends. David Pinkney and Gordon Griffiths, two exemplary historians on the west coast of the United States, took on a young Dutch graduate student in 1972, who trembled every time she had to utter or write an English sentence. Their scholarly advice and gentle prodding have provided a lifelong source of intellectual guidance. But because both of them are no longer with us, I would like to acknowledge the inspiration of an historian who is in the audience today. Recently, the history magazine for popular consumption, Het Historisch Nieuwsblad, tried to recruit new subscribers by means of an appealing headline: 'Remember that one special history teacher in High School?' I recall one of those very special history teachers, who made an indelible impression during my final two years of High School. In his first teaching position in 1965, Bonno van Dijk revealed to me that history was an infinitely exciting field of inquiry – a sentiment that has stayed with me ever since. My father also fueled my academic pursuits. Having earned his doctoraal in history from Leiden University at the age of

sixty, there was a short moment when both of us were history students at the same time, albeit on different continents. My mother, who missed this special occasion by exactly one month, would have been proud.

I am grateful to Selma Leydesdorff and senior administrators of the University of Amsterdam, especially the College van Bestuur, for making it possible to return to my country of origin. My colleagues at the Belle van Zuylen Instituut – Selma, Patricia Lulof, Pamela Pattynama, Sandra Ponzanesi, and Astrit Blommestijn – and also, or perhaps above all, the promovendae, have made the past two years exciting, hectic, and full of good cheer. My dedication to the advancement of female scholars in the academy is a long-standing one. But my return to the Netherlands after three decades in the United States has renewed my commitment, in part because on this score so much work remains to be done in this country.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Gary Price for being my comrade-in-arms in every conceivable sense of the word. I am honored that Adam and Rebecca Price took time out from their dedicated legal careers in Utah and New York to be in the audience, today. Also the presence of my sisters, brother-in-law, and nieces and nephews and their partners is a heartwarming reality, as is the attendance of a group of remarkable friends and colleagues from the Netherlands, the United States, England, France, and Indonesia.

Ik heb gezegd.

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