Emerging Memory
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This chapter investigates the social biography of the 1904 photographs as they were semanticized during the colonial period from the moment they had emerged from the social frame of the military. Although in the Indies their existence was already publicly known due to a June 1904 article in the newspaper Deli Courant (see below) and through the exhibition in Batavia in February 1905, in the Netherlands it was only in the summer of 1905 that a number of them (TT, PE, and KR2) became part of the public debate due to the publication of Kempees's book. After 1905, the photographs were published two more times during the colonial period: KR2 was printed in a 1907 booklet (Wekker 1907), while a 1938 book included three photographs, namely KR2, KR3, and KL1 (Zentgraaff 1938). What I will show in this chapter is that the perceptible order they displayed was at odds with the Dutch distribution of the perceptible within which they were semanticized, causing disturbances and irritations of what it meant to be Dutch and to have an empire. Crucial in this respect was that, in colonial matters, a distribution of the perceptible was dominant in the Netherlands in the early twentieth century which can be characterized as “ethical”, i.e. a set of implicit laws that produced the Dutch not only as subjugators but also as caretakers of the natives in the Indies.

This chapter will also show that images of colonial atrocity, and even the idea of such photographs, played a vital part in Dutch debates on colonial policy, as could already be grasped from Braakensiek's drawing in De Amsterdammer discussed in chapter 1. In a parliamentary debate in November 1904, the idea of photographs of atrocity of the 1904 expedition was invoked by Member of Parliament Victor de Stuers without him seeming to know that they actually existed. PD, a photograph of atrocity of the 1898 Pedir expedition, was shown and discussed in parliament by MP L. W. J. K. Thomson in November 1907. Socialist cartoonist Albert Hahn, moreover, made several drawings about the 1904 expedition which shared important formal characteristics with the photographs and can therefore be read as commentaries on them. As the framing and semanticization of the photographs were also strongly influenced by the other mediations of
the 1904 expedition circulating at the time – primarily newspaper articles, and military and governmental reports – a substantial part of this chapter will be devoted to these mediations.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, imperialism tried to design the past and future it needed and subsequently produce them, in this case through photography. In fact, of course, the Dutch could not control the future, nor was the imperial distribution of the perceptible the only factor in the production of the perceptible order. Addressing the insecurities and hesitations of colonial administrations, Stoler writes that, within them, “[g]rids of intelligibility were fashioned from uncertain knowledge, disquiet and anxieties registered the uncommon sense of events and things, epistemic uncertainties repeatedly unsettled the imperial conceit that all was in order” (2009b: 1). In this chapter I take from Stoler’s work this perspective on colonial knowledge to investigate how the photographs and other mediations of the 1904 expedition were framed in both the Indies and the Netherlands during the colonial period. In contrast to the previous chapter, emphasis will be put here not on how the photographs were framed but on how they threatened to become frames themselves, i.e. how they threatened to become icons of Dutch colonialism and even of the Dutch nation. This chapter examines the moments when certain undesired oublis de réserve loomed to haunt their observers, and how these viewers developed strategies to negotiate the meanings of the images in such a way that these silences-turned-sounds became manageable. It is in this chapter that I will describe the first signs of Dutch cultural aphasia vis-à-vis the photographs and analyze the search for appropriate concepts that their observers were undertaking. Here is also where, for the first time in their social biography, these images can be described as emerging (and submerging) portable monuments, for it is already in the colonial period that observers framed them – together with the 1904 expedition and colonial violence in general – as “absent”, despite these images and other documents of atrocity being widely available.

Epistemic anxiety has been an important subject in colonial studies. Homi Bhabha has pointed out the paradoxical nature of colonial (and other) stereotypes, arguing that they, anxiously repeated as they are, connote “rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder”. On the one hand they betray the uncertainty within the colonial regime about whether the validity of these stereotypes can ever be proven, yet on the other hand it is exactly “the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures” (Bhabha 2004: 94-95). Stoler’s work corroborates this insight:
“if there is anything we can learn from the colonial ontologies of racial kinds, it is that such [racial] ‘essences’ were protean, not fixed, subject to reformulation again and again” (2009b: 4). She sees colonial regimes as “uneven, imperfect, and even indifferent knowledge-acquiring machines” (2002: 206), and investigates the colonial archives “as condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources” (2009b: 20).

In photographic and visual studies, epistemic uncertainty is thematized in accounts in which photographs resist semanticization. Roland Barthes’s concept of the photograph’s third meaning addresses moments when the photograph exceeds the limits of knowledge, as does his concept of the punctum (1977, 1981). W. J. T. Mitchell suggests that we:

see the picture not just as an object of description or ekphrasis that comes alive in our perceptual/verbal/conceptual play around it, but as a thing that is always already addressing us (potentially) as a subject with a life that has to be seen as “its own” in order for our descriptions to engage the picture’s life as well as our lives as beholders. This means the question is not just what did the picture mean (to its first historical beholders) or what does it mean to us now, but what did (and does) the picture want from its beholders then and now. (2005: 49)

In the study of colonial photography, it is particularly the work of Elizabeth Edwards that has thematized pictorial excess through her concept of photographs as “raw histories”: unprocessed and painful, they are “ultimately uncontainable, there is an incompleteness and unknowability of photographs” (2001: 5-6).

In memory studies, the disturbance of frames of remembrance by cultural artifacts has gained most attention in relation to works of art (Van Alphen 1997; Bennett 2005), while against presentist and instrumentalist conceptions of memory it has been argued that there are limits to “the malleability of the past”, meaning that memory is not only dependent on social frames but also on traces from the past such as can be found in photographs.86 This can lead to unprocessed traces that do not fit the distribution of the perceptible and are like specters: present and absent at the same time. In her book Ghostly Matters, which is also very much about memory, Avery Gordon has developed a concept of haunting as:

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an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely... [T]he term haunting describes those singular yet repetitive instances... when the over-and-done-with comes alive... The ghost... is not the invisible or some ineffable excess [but] a real presence and demands its due, your attention. (2008: xvi)

Being haunted by ghosts is an experience inextricably connected to anxiety. Moreover, Gordon holds, a ghost can also have a “seething presence” on the level of the state, which sometimes becomes engrossed in “exorcizing the ghosts it believes are ruining the nation” (ibid: 126).

Whereas for some observers discussed in this chapter, the photographs produced epistemic anxiety and aphasic moments, as their perceptible order did not fit an ethical distribution of the perceptible, others who were confronted with their raw histories employed various types of denial to manage these images’ meanings. Sociologist Stanley Cohen has distinguished three types of denial in the case of states that do not want to acknowledge what they did and caused: literal, interpretive, and implicatory denial. In the case of literal denial, “the fact or knowledge of the fact is denied” (2001: 7). In interpretive denial:

the raw facts (something happened) are not being denied. Rather, they are given a different meaning from what seems apparent to others... In the public realm: this was population exchange, not ethnic cleansing; the arms deal was not illegal and was not really an arms deal. Officials do not claim that “nothing happened”, but what happened is not what you think it is, not what it looks like, not what you call it. (ibid: 7-8)

Finally, in the case of implicatory denial:

there is no attempt to deny either the facts or their conventional interpretation. What are denied or minimized are the psychological, political or moral implications that conventionally follow... This is not a refusal to acknowledge reality, but a denial of its significance or implications. (ibid: 8)

Denial can be found among a number of strong defenders of Dutch imperialism, though literal denial was less of an option, as the military had paraded its deeds everywhere it could. The other two types of denial, however, are both encountered in the debate in the Netherlands on the 1904 expedition.
All these denials can be interpreted as attempts to prevent the photographs from being semanticized in a certain manner: these were not simple lies but strategies that helped the Dutch deal with what were also troubling recognitions.

This chapter continues with an analysis of the uncertain responses to the 1904 expedition by Queen Wilhelmina and others in a discussion of the ethical distribution of the perceptible. Next, I discuss how supporters of the expedition – among whom Van Heutsz and Prime Minister Kuyper – had various strategies to contain its meanings and depict it as in some way inevitable. Subsequently, I show how a number of outright critics discussed the 1904 expedition and photographs precisely in terms that others tried to prevent, namely as icons of everything that was wrong with Dutch colonialism. This is followed by an analysis of the deft political cartoons of Albert Hahn in which the expedition is depicted as haunting Dutch politics. The last two sections deal with the two occasions in which one or more of the 1904 photographs were reprinted during the colonial period. In the first of these instances, a former soldier of the KNIL tried to turn the photographs into icons of his former commander’s cruelty, while the second occasion is the use of the 1904 photographs by conservative journalist H. C. Zentgraaff to sing the colonial army’s praise but simultaneously revealing his discomfort with what they depicted.

The Ethical Distribution of the Perceptible

On 20 September 1904, Queen Wilhelmina mentioned the 1904 expedition in her Queen’s Speech (the Dutch equivalent of the US State of the Union address), which opened the Dutch parliamentary year of 1904-1905. In one of two paragraphs devoted to the Indies in her speech of some five hundred words, she said in a rather awkward manner:

The further confirmation of what till now was achieved in Northern Sumatra moved forward again in a not unimportant manner. In view of this, a more forceful action in the Gajo and Alas lands could not fail to occur. That with this also unarmed [“ongewapenden”] fell is regretted by Me, though it was not preventable.87

87 Verslag der Handelingen 20 September 1904. The Queen’s Speech was taken up in the minutes of the Dutch parliament.
With its modifiers (“further”, “till now”, “more forceful”), negations and double negations (“not preventable”, “could not fail”, “not unimportant”), this paragraph makes the situation in Sumatra visible and invisible at the same time, smoothing things over while also suggesting a number of alternatives: Could the more forceful action have failed to occur? Was the death of unarmed people not preventable? There is still an echo of the imperial future perfect (“confirmation of what till now was obtained”) but without pride, for the passive constructions make the Dutch nation invisible. The speech reflects a certain uneasiness with what had happened and a difficulty in finding the right words. It is this struggle that will be thematized throughout this chapter, for the disquiet perceptible in this speech lurks in the background of many of the responses that will be discussed.

How did this search for words occur? Whereas in the army circles discussed earlier, the expedition was a self-evident fact of perception, outside of these circles this was no longer the case: other frames generated other meanings and made visible the passe-partout of the representations of the expedition. This means that these representations became visible as signs and as media: they were detached from certain meanings to which people in the army had not even consciously known they were attached. This can be seen from the amount of cultural production surrounding the Gajo expedition, and specifically from the many justifications: whereas the army felt it needed no explanation, the newspapers back in the Netherlands were filled with attempts to explain what had happened. In Pierre Nora’s terms: the 1904 expedition was no longer a part of a milieu de mémoire. According to Nora, people only start talking about memory when it is no longer there, i.e. when it is no longer a given. “Milieu de mémoire” means “lived memory” (i.e. a memory that people do not even know they have), and it is exactly this “lived memory” that became impossible (1996: 1). Crucial in this respect was the rise of “ethical policy” in the Netherlands and of an ethical distribution of the perceptible which did not permit the Dutch to act as ruthless killers of the natives.

Neither Van Daalen nor Van Heutsz used ethical arguments in their writings about the 1904 expedition. In the Netherlands, however, ethical reasons were an important part of the debate. In the Queen’s Speech of 1901, “ethical policy” had been officially announced by the administration of Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper by declaring that the Netherlands had a “moral calling” in the Indies. Locher-Scholten, who has investigated the many usages of the term “ethical policy”, defines it as a “policy aimed at acquiring de facto political control of the entire Indonesian archipelago and the development of both country and people under Dutch leadership and
after Western example” (1981: 213). As the Dutch version of the British “white man’s burden” and the French “mission civilisatrice”, ethical policy combined military subjugation with the penetration of the state into the population’s everyday lives through policies of what Foucault has called disciplining (the surveillance, training, and punishment of man-as-body) and biopolitics (the management of the population as a whole, or man-as-species), though in practice the colonial state was mostly far too fragmented to effectively implement its policies (Foucault 2003).88

While in 1904 the word “imperialism” already smacked of power and self-interest, “ethical policy” was the showpiece of Dutch colonialism: “the elevation of the peoples of the archipelago” became a convincing argument for the establishment of authority (Locher-Scholten 1981: 194-200). People who considered themselves “ethicists” or had a partly ethical argumentation could be found on both sides of the debate on the expedition. Kuyper was one, as well as the state advisor for native affairs Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, and also the Minister of the Colonies A. W. F. Idenburg. In the eyes of the latter, “imperialist politics, in the evil sense of the word, is completely alien to the colonial policy of the Government”.89 This was a well-known conviction in the Netherlands at the time, finding its source in the idea that the country, as a small or middle power, did not participate in the power play exercised by the big nations (Johannes 1997: 93-4). Guiding Idenburg’s policies was “not thirst for power, profit, and money... but a serious belief in our duty as a colonial Power”.90 “Imperialism” was simply un-Dutch, and with that the matter was settled.

While ethical policy fit the ethical distribution of the perceptible, the 1904 photographs and other reports about the expedition did not. This disturbance led to both critical and anxious responses from various observers. Socialist MP H. H. van Kol, for instance, called the expedition a stream of blood on the map and worse than the bloodiest months during the Spanish reign of terror under Alva, a Spanish duke who had many Dutch killed during the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish at the end of the sixteenth century.91 Victor de Stuers, a Catholic MP, compared the 1904 expedition to warfare by the Huns, the Tartars, Tamburlaine (see also Vereshchagin’s

88 Biopolitics seeks to control “processes such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of the population”, its prime effect being a healthy, productive population (243).
90 Verslag der Handelingen 25 Nov. 1904: 253.
Apologies of War in chapter 1) and Genghis Khan, and called the soldiers a gang of bloodhounds.

Van Kol characterized the paragraph in the Queen’s Speech on the expedition as hypocritical cant where he would rather have seen “words, in which indignation resounded”. He directly attacked Kuyper who, seven years earlier, had spoken about how “Atjeh should enjoy to a rich extent the blessings of the Gospel”. Van Kol called the Gajo and Alas lands “the deepest and darkest part of Sumatra”, where “a more or less uncivilized people” was trading slaves and stealing water buffalos (ibid: 52). Though he held that in both respects (thievery and condoning slavery), the Dutch themselves were worse, he argued not so much against the principle of taking action against these “abuses” as against the violent way in which the government had gone about it. In his opinion, the same goal should have been achieved “in a peaceful manner” (ibid), and he argued for better contacts with the locals, perhaps through missionaries or a tactically operating civil servant (ibid: 74-75). Even better would be not to try and solve all abuses in the Indische archipelago but to concentrate solely on Java, for “every further expansion of our authority is an unforgivable folly, a crime against the 26 million Javanese” (ibid: 53). This was in line with Van Kol’s ideas about selling most of the Dutch possessions in the East to other colonial powers. Van Kol claimed that history had placed a noble task, namely taking care of the Javanese, on the shoulders of the Dutch. He discussed the natives in empathetic terms but at the same time positioned them as irrational and helpless.

De Stuers positioned the Dutch as “parental guardians” who should patiently let their civilization “penetrate those primitive tribes” in order for the latter to become “softer and better” and Christianized (ibid: 225): “primitive peoples should be somewhat seen as children who should be treated with gentleness and patience”. He argued that “the Dutch flag, the

92 Ibid.
93 Verslag der Handelingen 23 Nov. 1904: 210. Van Kol’s views were in line with the official point of view of the Social Democratic Workers Party (SDAP), which was that “the colonies exist and will exist for centuries; they are inextricably bound up with world history... In most cases it will not be possible to abandon the old colonies since they, not suited for self-governance and weakened by centuries of guardianship, would be at the mercy of anarchy and misery. Where the weak or unconscious child cannot do without our support, abandoning it completely would be the same as giving it up for maximum exploitation as a victim or handing it over to our rulers.” Het Volk, 30 June 1904.
old, honest, and honorable Dutch flag has been spattered with the blood of hundreds of women and children” (ibid: 223).

It is not a coincidence that both Van Kol and De Stuers picked icons of the Dutch nation: in Van Kol’s case, a time of misery (Alva’s regime of terror); and in De Stuers’s case, a soiled symbol of pride (the blood-spattered flag). Their anxieties concerned the Dutch nation and whether it was fulfilling its “historical task” vis-à-vis the colonies.95 A politician like De Stuers, together with many other ethicists, saw violence only in terms of direct physical violence, not in terms of what Gayatri Spivak has called “the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text” (1988: 283). In the pursuit of their biopolitical agendas, however, military violence was often needed and seen by them as a necessary evil that had to be contained as much as possible. For Van Kol, on the other hand, sticking to Java and Madoera was exactly a means to evade military violence.

This expedition had “raised eyebrows” and brought to the fore the question whether the Dutch were in fact better than Alva and could be as proud of their flag as they were. Above, I quoted Stoler who clarified that in colonial administrations, “disquiet and anxieties registered the uncommon sense of events and things”. Such disquiet was also present in the speeches of Van Kol and De Stuers, who like Wilhelmina were confronted with information that exceeded their frames of semanticization and therefore caused anxiety and anger. Their outrage, aimed at the production of a perceptible order that fit their ethical frame, was met with a rather different response from those who defended the mission, namely denial and justification.

Managing Established Frames

Supporters of the expedition tried to contain the meanings of its mediations as much as possible. Just like Wilhelmina, Van Kol, and De Stuers, they sensed that certain established frames were threatened by these mediations, yet their response was one of semantic management and damage control. The four defenders discussed here – various journalists of Dutch newspapers that supported the expedition, the Governor of Atjeh Van Heutsz, Prime Minister Kuyper, and the reporter M. T. V. of the Deli Courant – all developed strategies to frame the expedition and its outcomes as in some way inevitable.

95 Jos Perry’s biography of De Stuers is called Our Decency as a Nation. See Perry 2004.
Inevitable Imperialism

Between February and August 1904, more than two hundred articles relating to the military actions in the Gajo and Alas lands were printed in nine Dutch newspapers. From beginning to end, the Christian and liberal newspapers were enthusiastic, while their writings repeatedly pointed out the inevitability of the expedition. In the case of these supportive newspapers, this idea of inevitability boiled down to the conclusion that the expedition and everything it caused were just. Yet what is most striking about these articles is their defensive tone, indicating that the story they wanted to tell was contested from the start. These articles form a good illustration of both the slipperiness and persistence of colonial categories, particularly with respect to the question of whether the Dutch, formally at war with “Atjehnese”, could attack “Gajo and Alas”.

On 5 April, the liberal Algemeen Handelsblad wrote that the Gajo land was a vassal state of Atjeh. As the Netherlands were at war with Atjeh, the expedition could therefore be seen as just. However, on 18 July the same newspaper admitted that this insight was of recent date and wrote that although “[t]he Gajo and Alas lands used to be seen as independent, recent years have clearly shown that they belonged to Atjeh”. It then offered a “simile”:

After a long struggle, we suppose, X-land was brought down, yet it is now revealed that, by virtue of a connection which was kept secret for a long time, it had been supported in all kinds of ways, with money and men, by Q-land... Shall [the conqueror] then leave Q-land alone! No, to be able to count on a lasting peace in the future, he will also fight the enemy over there and bring him down.

The basic message here is that it did not really matter whether the Gajo and Alas lands were independent or not. However, when it was reported in all newspapers that a member of the British parliament had asked critical questions about the 1904 expedition, Van Heutsz said in the same newspaper ten days later and without being contradicted that “[t]he places named by the British are not in the Atjeh, but in the Alas lands”. De Maasbode of 18 May

96 These newspapers were the liberal De Arnhemsche Courant, Algemeen Handelsblad, and De Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant; the Protestant De Standaard and De Rotterdamer; the Catholic De Maasbode and De Tijd; the socialist Het Volk; and the anarchist De Vrije Socialist. See Mal-Bouwman 1980.
also had a solution of its own, stating that “the Atjehnese are in charge in the Gajo lands” and that the “old jahats [evil-doers]... changed the Gajos into Atjehnese”. According to this article, the Gajos were in fact good-natured, “childishly simple”, and they never fought a lot. So even if the Gajos were not Atjehnese, they certainly acted as such. Articles that positioned the Gajos as always already Atjehnese, on the other hand, emphasized their long history of warfare.

As Stoler has argued, colonial categories were “not fixed, [but] subject to reformulation again and again” (2009b: 4). The Dutch newspapers used such flexible categories, as they were anxious about how to justify the expedition. This is because they, unlike most in the army, functioned in a social scene in which other frames of interpretation were also emerging which semanticized the expedition in a different manner. The expedition, in other words, was being reframed and the therefore became vulnerable to critical scrutiny, as it turned out that the reports of the 1904 expedition were troubling the Dutch sense of reality.

**Inevitable Violence**

When General van Heutsz was in the Netherlands in the summer of 1904 to be promoted to governor-general of the Indies, he was interviewed by *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*. The anonymous interviewer started by noting that the killing of large numbers of women and children had “raised eyebrows” in the Netherlands and abroad. Van Heutsz responded that the list of losses was also “personally painful” to him. Asked whether no other course had been possible, Van Heutsz answered:

> Under the given circumstances impossible... Be assured that commander Van Daalen is not the type of leader to order his troops to shoot at women and children. Doing such a thing would, moreover, not only be in defiance of the explicit order to act in a peace-loving manner, but also of the character and nature of our soldiers. There may be rough customers among the fusiliers, but precisely that would go against the grain with the roughest of the roughest... By the way, women and children are not shot at in the way we shoot at men. Women and children are not spotted, aimed at, and if possible, hit. Not even when they used firearms and fired at our soldiers. 97

97  *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* 22 July 1904.
In short, the Dutch did kill women and children, but they did not shoot to kill them. Shooting to kill women and children was simply not in the army’s wiring. Asked how it was then possible that so many women and children were nevertheless killed, Van Heutsz said:

the Gajos use their women as a living bastion... They know we do not shoot at women and children and that is why they do not only believe themselves to be safe behind the backs of their women, but they shoot at our troops from behind that safe parapet... But you have to realize that sometimes during this expedition a few thousand Gajos opposed 200 soldiers at the same time... This is why we are obliged to let off some volleys into the crowds which are piling up and because of that, because of that alone it is that also women and children are hit... it is impossible to retreat because he [the enemy] chooses to hide behind his women and children.

The women and children in Van Heutsz’s story have a double position: on the one hand, they are passive parts of a living bastion, yet on the other hand they are active and have firearms themselves (Van Heutsz even says in the same interview that they “are mostly no less armed than their men”). The Dutch soldiers also have a double position: they are active agents when it comes to shooting men but passive instruments when it comes to shooting women and children. In Van Heutsz’s reasoning, the people who actually killed the Gajo women and children were the Gajo men. The Dutch were sucked in, as it were. Also, given the ratio (thousands of Gajos versus two hundred Dutch), it was clear who was attacking and who was defending, according to Van Heutsz. He held, moreover, that there were at least 300,000 Gajos and Alas, and that “seeing the numbers that fell in relation to the total population, we cannot speak of ‘extermination’ as I read somewhere”. Asked next by the interviewer if it had not been possible to enter the villages with cold steel instead of firearms, Van Heutsz said:

Completely right, and this also happens... once we are inside the kampong the carbine is put over the shoulder and there are exclusively man-to-man fights with the klewang. You will be able to understand that this means fewer dead enemies, but as a rule all the more dead on our side compared to shooting. However, we undergo this bigger loss if we do not want to make more victims among the women and children.

In this interview, Van Heutsz claimed a number of things that differed strongly from the military writings of Van Daalen and Kempees (see
chapter 1). First of all, in both military accounts it is not the case that the army stopped shooting once the village was entered – on the contrary. Moreover, at no point did it appear as if Van Daalen took any risks to “save” women and children by jeopardizing his men. And finally, the number of 300,000 Gajos and Alas is about ten times too high.

Van Heutsz was put in a defensive position here, another sign that the expedition was being critically scrutinized. The reporter asked him to respond to “raised eyebrows” and he himself brought up the accusation of “extermination”. These conversations about what the killings in Atjeh meant were the effects of reframings of the expedition which led to the passe-partout of imperialism becoming visible. Simply put: what was self-evident in military circles had become contested in other social frames. Imperialism, in this interview, was spaced through all kinds of doublings. This begins with Van Heutsz’s first words “[u]nder the given circumstances”. Things that had been matter-of-fact within army circles now had to be explicitly contextualized. Doubling was also present in this interview in the fact that there was no longer one but two possible worlds: one in which Van Daalen let women and children be shot, and one in which he did not. Of the first, Van Heutsz held, readers should be assured that it was a fictional world. The character of the rough fusilier should not be placed in the wrong narrative. Finally, there was also doubling at the word level, as can be seen in the two meanings of “shooting”. The meanings given to the expedition had to be actively and carefully managed so as not to run wild. Van Heutsz achieved this mostly through interpretive denial: the raw facts were not denied, but apparent meanings were adapted.

Inevitable Responsibility

The Dutch Prime Minister also proved himself very capable at this management of meaning. On 28 September 1904, Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper defended the Queen’s speech. 98 He was head of a cabinet formed by his own orthodox Calvinist Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), the conservative Christians (CHU), and Roman-Catholics. After these confessional parties, which had a majority in parliament (fifty-eight seats out of one hundred), the second biggest group were the liberals, including the “radical democrats” (thirty-five seats), followed by the up-and-coming social-democratic party (seven seats). 99 In 1904, women did not have the right to vote, while the right

98 Verslag der Handelingen 28 Sep. 1904.
99 These and other data on the Kuyper cabinet (1901-1905) are derived from Oud 1987, pp. 175-186.
to vote for men was connected to property, meaning that only 50% of the adult male population were eligible to vote in the last elections in 1901.

Like Van Heutsz, Kuyper was under attack concerning the 1904 expedition, in his case from a small number of members of the Dutch parliament who argued that Kuyper’s (and Van Heutsz’s) story of women as living fortresses had not been reported anywhere else, and that instead reports suggested that the women fought alongside the men. Kuyper countered this objection by saying that he was talking about “two types of women”: those used as shields and those who fought along (Verslag der Handelingen 28 Sept. 1904, 79). As in Van Heutsz’s account, women and children in the Prime Minister’s speech doubled as both active and passive agents. Kuyper argued, moreover, that a failure to be thorough now would only mean more slaughter later on, as resistance would only grow stronger: the Gajo and Alas men would be given the impression that they could hide between their families. It was precisely the shooting of women and children now that could prevent shooting women and children later.

Nevertheless, it seemed that Kuyper was not comfortable with this defense alone. This becomes apparent if we look at his elaborate strategies to discredit his opponents by arguing that they were not informed and therefore had no ground to stand on, or that they were not in the right position to have an opinion that mattered. Kuyper argued that the Gajo and Alas lands were indeed part of Atjeh and that therefore their subjugation was justified. He did this by pointing out that “the Gajos” paid a certain tax (hassil) to the sultan of Atjeh:

[s]omeone who is acquainted with Eastern affairs knows that this fact determines that indeed between these Gajo lands and the sultan a relationship of subject and sovereign exists. Furthermore I cannot emphasize enough that when you try to apply criteria which are in force in Europe to the situation there, like the respected representative continuously did, you necessarily come to totally confused legal conceptions. (Verslag der Handelingen 28 September 1904, 65)

In fact, Kuyper held, ask any Gajo and he will say the sultan of Atjeh is his sovereign. He asked the parliament to respect Gajo culture, which because of its difference from Europe merited special treatment (which in

100 “One should not imagine those children as exceptionally sweet” versus “It even happened repeatedly that a Gajo grabbed his wife with two hands and turned her as a shield in front of him to make the shot hit her.”
practice meant violent subjugation). Moreover, after an elaborate account of how much patience the Dutch had shown since 1898 and after stating that newspaper reports on bloody scenes had no effect on him as these were part of all wars, Kuyper claimed that those who bore responsibility for the expedition (meaning the members of the cabinet) “have felt that painful awareness [of the bloody scenes] all the more deeply” (ibid: 67). In other words, those not directly involved had no right to doubt the cabinet members’ intentions, as the latter suffered the most.\(^{101}\) Kuyper held, finally, that unlike the Members of Parliament, he had his information by word of mouth from Van Heutsz who had been present in Atjeh during the expedition and was now in the Netherlands. This boiled down to stating that his sources were more valuable than those of MPs, while they moreover had no access to them.

Like Van Heutsz, Kuyper had to deal with the passe-partout of the expedition which because of reframing was not invisible anymore. In the Netherlands, the same elements were differently semanticized and gained different, critical meanings with which those who defended the expedition had to cope. What Kuyper and Van Heutsz did was take up the positive values behind these critical meanings and connect the facts of the expedition not to the criticisms but to these values. Shooting women and children became the prevention of needless bloodshedding and a noble act of sacrifice on the part of the Dutch military. Massacring Gajo villages became an expression of respecting Gajo culture. The visibility of the passe-partout had turned the facts of the expedition into signs, and Kuyper used this new freedom to redistribute characters, storylines, and meanings. His denial was also of the interpretive kind. At the same time, as if still unconvinced by his own frames, he attempted to silence his opponents by discrediting their contributions to the debate. This move, however, can also be explained with reference to the passe-partout, for if indeed signs were up for grabs, the best way to secure meaning was to try and fix the frame.

**Inevitable Suffering**

As indicated above, the first public mention that photographs were taken of the villages after their conquest was in June 1904 in a newspaper article. This article was written under the acronym M. T. V. and appeared on 23 June in

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101 This is the figure of the colonial masochist who suffered for empire which was also encountered in chapter 1 in the sketch and painting by Wijnveld and Pieneman.
the Deli Courant. From the moment that the expedition was announced in December 1903, the Deli Courant reported on it. It was the most important newspaper at the time for Northern Sumatra and published in the profitable area of Deli, more specifically in the town of Medan on Sumatra’s east coast, 150 kilometers away from Gajo-Loëös and 100 kilometers from the Alas land. The newspaper wrote about the glory the expedition would bring, including promotions for Commander van Daalen and Governor van Heutsz. On 12 January 1904, the Deli Courant’s local correspondent in Kota Radja, the capital of Atjeh, published an overview of the year 1903 in which the main theme was what he called the “pacification” of Sumatra, next to some economic and public health considerations. He wrote: “By making commander Van Daalen responsible for the contacts with the Gajo and Alas lands, a start has been made with the extension of our authority in the interior.” The expedition is presented here as simply another stage in the inevitable work in progress, and therefore in line with the imperial narrative. As discussed in chapter 1, editor-in-chief Mulier used the future perfect in his nine-part series “The Gradual Subjugation and Development of Sumatra” to summon a present future. This series also included the map with all the “not yet” subjugated areas of the island.

M. T. V. was a reporter who traveled with the so-called “Pedeng Column” which was on its way from Sumatra’s east coast to the Gajo and Alas lands to reinforce Van Daalen’s troops. On 16 June, M. T. V.’s account of the fight near Péparéq Góip from 18 March was published. Many elements in it were the same as in the military reports, for instance how the entire village fought alongside each other and the numbers of parentless children walking through it afterwards. Where M. T. V.’s reports departed from the writings of Van Daalen and Kempees, however, was in the detailed descriptions of the horrors of the expedition. This was especially the case in two articles from 23 June and 4 July on the fights over Tjané Oekôn-Toenggól on 21 April and Koetö Lengat Baroe on 24 June. Regarding the aftermath of the latter massacre, M. T. V. wrote under the subtitle “The Misery of War”:

In the trous-de-loup behind the earthen wall... corpses and wounded lay in a jumble and on top of each other, in all kinds of positions. Old and young men, very old women and young mothers, boys and girls, older children and infants; the younger naked, the elderly half dressed, all

102 Termorshuizen 2001. All data offered here on the Deli Courant are from Termorshuizen’s book.
covered in blood that dried up brown, all with more or less big wounds, almost all shot dead.

In a big pit 10 to 12 dead bodies, straight up, an apparently blind boy of 10 years, but with wide glassy eyes, unharmed, listening to our steps and movements [sic]. In another pit we passed one of the wounded pulled a sarong over his head. Somewhere else against the wall an unharmed child, naked, whining.

Again somewhere else on the stairs of a house a number of children, the elder staring around, the younger crying. In the middle of the square here and there a male corpse, arms and legs spread out widely. The saddest image, however, was provided by the trous-de-loup and the north-eastern salient, where the defense had been the most powerful. 20 to 30 corpses and wounded all mixed up and on top of each other, colorful through clothing, naked skin, open wounds, blood stains and blood stripes on the sandy subsoil. Here and there a half burnt corpse with a stomach torn open as a result of hitting the supply of gunpowder of the defender.

M. T. V. describes the KNIL soldiers as “calm, icy, and composed, with horror on their faces, speaking softly”. Regarding the aftermath of the massacre at Tjané Oekön-Toenggöl on 21 April, M. T. V. wrote:

The next day dr. Neeb took photographs with his apparatus in and around the benteng. Then the destruction could be observed calmly. Before the gates the largest piles of bodies were lying. At the entrance, a man whose half chest they had ruptured and whose intestines one could see lying, all dried out. A terrible smell of blood and bodies was all around. Another man, who in his fear of death had wanted to jump over the pointed fence, had spiked himself. His corpse hung on the bamboo shafts, his head backwards, his legs warped; in the position of his desperate flight he found death... A wounded enemy with shattered breastbone and shot-through chest was dying while rattling and groaning. A child of about two years with a thick belly laughingly walked around his grandmother who could not go on anymore. A heavily wounded woman still waved with a sabre and called out to us to kill her...

A horrible scene! Dogs had already gnawed off some of the corpses, chickens pecked in the clotted blood of the wounds... and corpses were lying everywhere: behind the bulwark, at the gates, beneath the houses, in the pits, at the rice sheds, everywhere you found dead bodies. Also in the paddy fields outside the kampong, corpses were scattered... all the
By first mentioning Neeb’s photographic activities, this description starts functioning as an ekphrasis of the 1904 photographs. M. T. V.’s judgment on these scenes remains unclear, but seeing the newspaper he was writing for, it is most likely that these articles were not meant as an indictment of Dutch imperialism. In 1904, the Deli Courant (Mulier) had also written about coolie abuses in the area, but certainly not to denounce the plantation owners.

The title “The Misery of War” explicitly reframes the photographs in another pictorial genre. In chapter 1, Delacroix’s Scènes des massacres de Scio (1824) was discussed as the first painting showing victims of war in an unembellished manner. Prior to this, however, there had been such depictions in prints. Francisco Goya’s Los Desastres de la Guerra (1810-15) depicts horrors from the Peninsular War between France, Spain, Great Britain, and Portugal. From the end of the sixteenth century onwards in the Netherlands, there had been a large number of prints on the reign of terror of the Spanish Duke of Alva, when whole cities were massacred (Horst 2003). In 1633, Jacques Callot published the eighteen prints of his Les Grandes Misères de la guerre on suffering and dead during the Thirty Years’ War in which most European countries were involved. After Delacroix, Henri Rousseau’s La Guerre (1894), for instance, depicted the monstrosity and alienation of war. In photography, Photographic Sketch Book (1866) by Alexander Gardner depicted the bodies of killed soldiers lying on the battlefield of the American Civil War.

Though pictures of the miseries of war are often interpreted as a protest against war, their makers and framers mostly gave them different meanings. For Goya, for instance, his prints depicted “what happens when mankind abandons reason, and hatred and revenge take control of human behavior” (Tea-Dasschate Chu 2003: 15). According to art historian Anthony W. Lee, Gardner’s Photographic Sketch Book “is composed of anecdote, interruption, serendipity, and pure contingency”, has no overarching narrative, and gives only a sketchy answer to its central question “What is war?” (Lee and Young 2007: 36). M. T. V.’s articles do not give an explicit verdict on what the photographs depict; what they do is place these images within a genre that makes them icons of human suffering in a general sense. “The Misery of War” was a genre that had existed for many centuries and which was, moreover, seen as Art. Both these facts meant that framing the photographs within that genre produced these images less as pictures of specific victims of Dutch
colonial aggression, and more as pictures of a universal (and therefore inevitable) human experience.

M. T. V. was not the only one who saw things this way. Kuyper had argued that bloody scenes were part of all wars. The leader of the conservative Christian party A. F. de Savornin Lohman said on 5 November 1908, when the expedition had returned on the political agenda: "[W]hich means were used to accomplish this? / Horrible means, mister Chairman. This I admit. Because it is accomplished through war and war is horrible." (quoted in Idema 1924: 218). Kuyper had connected the values of his opponents to exactly those elements of the expedition that they attacked. In Cohen's terms, his denial was interpretive: the raw facts were not denied, but given a different meaning (1991, 7-8). De Savornin Lohman, however, not only said that the means were indeed ugly but admitted that the results were ugly as well. He told the critics they were completely right: war is terrible, yet what did they expect? De Savornin Lohman, in Cohen's terms, employed implicatory denial: he did not deny the facts or their interpretation, yet he also did not draw any conclusions, for instance that the Dutch should stop engaging in such expeditions. Articles like those of M. T. V. had a comparable meaning.

Icons of the Nation

This management of meaning was necessary because the 1904 photographs threatened to become icons not of a specific Alas village or of general human suffering, but of the Dutch nation. The social-democrat P. J. Troelstra, for instance, sensed that the 1904 expedition was pushing the boundaries of the distribution of the perceptible (words were hard to find and questions about the nation were asked), and noticing the deftness of Van Heutsz and Kuyper, he told a story which ridiculed all attempts to limit the expedition's meanings. In it, the main character is a “Christian burglar” who at the end of his break-in had murdered the inhabitants of the house and had to defend himself before the judges:

Your Honors, I did not burgle with the goal to kill. In fact, I am a particularly good-natured, Christian burglar: but, you see, after I had almost finished my break-in which took me a lot of trouble – after I had taken up the silver and gold tied in my handkerchief and stored the stocks and bank-papers in the inside pocket of my coat, I had to go through the bedroom where the inhabitants were sleeping. While I went through
that bedroom, the man woke up; if he had woken up alone, I could have settled the matter with only him, because he wanted to take the stolen goods away from me again; but the woman also woke up and she appeared to feel quite a bit for the man, because she positioned herself in front of him. I told her: Madam, clear off, for truly my Christian burglar’s courage urges me not to harm you, but like a fury she grabbed a pair of tongs and wanted to fly at me. In self-defense I was also obliged to do something. Now as a burglar one is always more or less prepared for such incidents and so I had taken the precaution of taking along a considerable knife and this I used. I would have preferred to only have given the man a prod, for I told the woman repeatedly that she should go away; but when she did not do this, I was forced to give them both a prod which did something. I could have been gentler, but from philanthropy I hit them hard straight away, putting them out of their misery. Thereupon a number of children came from the box bed and they seemed to have the same mind as their parents for they each grabbed one of my legs to keep me there and then I was forced to... In short, I am surprisingly sorry, it really was not my intention, but, Your Honors, I was burgling, you see?103

Troelstra did not have to look far to find words for the expedition, nor was the question of what it said about colonial politics in the Netherlands hard to answer for him. In his eyes, the expedition and the hypocritical way in which it was defended had exemplified this politics and Christian-capitalist politics in general. Rather than framing the expedition in such a way that its meanings became containable, he used it as a frame of interpretation itself to characterize Dutch capitalism and imperialism, and the Netherlands as a nation.

What becomes clear here is that from the very start, the photographs could gain meanings that irritated received self-conceptions. While this was welcomed by someone like Troelstra, others like De Stuers and Van Kol were decidedly less enthusiastic. What they and Troelstra have in common is that all three were critical of what had happened, yet what separated them was that for Troelstra the expedition showed the rottenness of the whole system, while for someone like De Stuers it was an ugly aberration.

A closer look at De Stuers’s response, moreover, will also show that from their earliest public existence onwards the 1904 photographs had been framed as “hidden documents” which would sway public opinion and cure Dutch colonial amnesia. De Stuers, who had argued that the expedition had

103 Verslag der Handelingen 24 Nov. 1904: 249.
spattered the Dutch flag with blood, made a long speech which was for an important part a reflection on the media. In this speech he brought up the idea of the existence of photographs like the 1904 ones, seemingly unaware of them actually having been made. Arguing against the mediations of the expedition that were issued by the government, he positioned photography as the medium that would produce self-evident facts.

As De Stuers was from an army family, his words made a great impression and received a considerable amount of attention in the press. All those in favor of the expedition strongly opposed him; the other Catholics in parliament distanced themselves from him. On 25 November 1904, he said:

During that expedition, a mine engineer and a botanist were present, but no photographer. If I had been able to get photographs of the hecatombs that had occurred there, I would not have spoken a word; I would simply have shown the photographs to the Members and I would have been eloquent through my silence! These photographs would have worked stronger on the nerves than my description.

De Stuers’s suggestion was that, through photography, the Gajos and Alas would present themselves directly, both in a political and a sensory manner. Just before this passage, he said that “on occasions like these it is such a pity that the case can always only be viewed from one side. We cannot let Gajos or Alas perform here to tell us about the impression which this occurrence made on the native” (ibid: 270). It was the photographs that were supposed to achieve this in their place.

From the start, De Stuers talked as much about the expedition’s mediations as about the expedition itself: “Mister Chairman! I would like to say a word on the last pages with which the annals of our famous Dutch-Indische history have been enriched.” The first problem De Stuers addressed was the lack of words on these pages. After enumerating the given numbers of dead and wounded, he said: “These are the official numbers. What else was hit or died in the bushes, history does not tell. What we did with the wounded is also not reported... What we did to save the infants, whose mothers had been shot, is also not mentioned” (ibid). He thus positioned the governmental reports as mediations with all the attributes so often ascribed to texts: they reported, told, and mentioned, but they did not make

105 Verslag der Handelingen 25 Nov. 1904: 270.
106 Verslag der Handelingen 23 Nov. 1904: 223.
present; more often than not, they did not show but obscured. Outside the frame of the text, he suspected more casualties, hidden in the forests of Atjeh, mentioned as wounded but not deceased and left helpless and without proper care.

Following his critique of the official mediations, De Stuers constructed his own mediations of the expedition. This occurred in three shifts: 1. While he positioned the official reports as texts, De Stuers framed his own mediations as images. 2. Related to this, there was a shift from reading to seeing: De Stuers had emphasized that the report had been read by him (“Let me first recall the facts, which we have been able to read...”), but in his own mediations the emphasis is on visual perception. 3. There was a shift in verb tenses. In his critique, De Stuers had used the present tense to describe the report (“How is an operation like this qualified?” or “These are the official numbers.”); and the present perfect simple and the simple past to talk about what happened in Atjeh (“What more has been hit or died in the bushes...” and “What we did to the infants...”). In other words: what happened in Atjeh belonged to the past, while reading the report belonged to the present. But after the turn to the visual, what happened in Atjeh belonged to the present. These three shifts (from text to image, from reading to seeing, and from past to present) came together when De Stuers said that what struck him was that, for a certain sense of horror to emerge, “we have to see bleeding women and children in front of us”.

De Stuers was possibly influenced by the rise of photography as a genre of social indictment (also called “documentary photography”), such as Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) about slums in New York, or August de Winne’s *A Travers les Flandres* (1904), in which photographs by M. Lefébure depicted poverty in Flanders, Belgium. In the 1910s, the Dutch photographer Tonnis Post photographed poverty in the rural areas of the province of Groningen in the north of the Netherlands (Figure 2.1) (Coppens 1982).

De Stuers summoned the frame of ethical policy which he thought should be the guideline for Dutch colonial policy. The 1904 expedition simply did not fit this frame: in it, the army’s actions were semanticized such that they became unacceptable. Implicitly he argued that the army and the cabinet knew this, as there was a gap between their mediations and what had happened on the ground in Atjeh. He basically accused the government of cultural aphasia: it did not have the right vocabulary at its disposal to recount what had happened in the Gajo and Alas lands. His speech was a plea to stick to “ethical” forms of imperialism and to prevent the further production of documents of atrocity that could start functioning as icons of the nation.
Haunting Memories

From the summer of 1904 onwards, political cartoonists also responded to the expedition. In the previous chapter, I discussed a Johan Braakensiek cartoon, but here I will focus on a number of drawings in the oeuvre of Albert Hahn, who contributed to the socialist newspaper Het Volk (The People). Contrary to their positioning in De Stuers’s speech, for instance, the Gajos and Alas in Hahn’s work were not only voiceless objects killed and spoken for by Dutch soldiers, journalists and MPs, but also explicitly shown as sources of anxiety for these same groups. Between the lines of the military reports, newspaper articles, and parliamentary debates, this already became apparent when the women, for instance, proved hard to position. The Dutch were struck by the armed resistance of the women and tried to deal with this by calling them hysterics and fanatics. Hahn’s drawings provide further insights into the role of the Gajos and Alas in Dutch representations of the 1904 expedition. What Hahn thematized in his political cartoons is that in the years after 1904, the memory of the expedition was not confined to established frames, despite the attempts described above to settle it.
Between 1902 and 1917, Hahn published over thirty drawings on the Indies, half of which were on the massacres committed during the Atjeh War. These drawings are part of an oeuvre of about 3,600 drawings that Hahn published between 1902 and 1918 in the Sunday supplement of the socialist newspaper *Het Volk*. Hahn was the main illustrator of this weekly, creating almost 800 front pages and many smaller drawings for the inside pages (Van der Heijden 1993: 79). His drawings addressed many of the core targets of the Dutch Social-Democratic Workers Party (SDAP), which had
been founded in 1894: social inequality, capitalism, militarism, religion, the monarchy, and democracy, especially universal suffrage. All of Hahn’s drawings of the Indies are critical of the Dutch colonial regime and of the way it was perceived in the Netherlands. Together they form a visual essay on Dutch colonialism and are part of a larger oeuvre in which Hahn sketched the essential lines that in his view ran through Dutch society and the larger world. Hahn’s drawings offered subject and object positions with the help of which people could identify themselves and others. The people in his cartoons were icons and symbols for larger structures and relationships that, once visualized, could be recognized by his audience. In fact, one important purpose was for the audience to recognize itself, namely as the working class that was oppressed by the capitalist system (see also Hahn 1929).

On 17 July 1904, Hahn published a drawing entitled Peace in Atjeh! in the Sunday supplement of Het Volk (Figure 2.2). The direct occasion for this drawing was Van Heutsz’s visit to the Netherlands in July. The ship on which Van Heutsz traveled was welcomed by singing school children, and he was honored in hagiographic special editions of newspapers such as Het Vaderland which had an illustrated, four-page Van Heutsz special.107 The text below Peace in Atjeh! reads:

One thousand sixty-eight deaths all-in-all
Van Daalen put down, that great hero.
And enthusiastically the Dutch bourgeois shouts, hurray!
He lines up his children to cheer in the roadstead.
Where so many corpses are rotting in the ravine,
Happy peace surely cannot be far anymore!

At the four corners of the drawing, neatly dressed children with eyes closed decently and mouths opened with composure sing for Van Heutsz. In the picture, against a background of tropical plants and trees, Dutch soldiers and a group of women and children standing on an elevation are enveloped in a fight. Though a pile of dead people lie at the bottom of the drawing, the women are far from helpless. This is emphasized by their position: they are standing higher, are larger than the soldiers, and do not form the grey mass that their male opponents form. In the background, a stone is making its way towards the soldiers while one of the women is ready to throw a second, particularly big one. This is an image of courageous women defending

107 Het Vaderland 10 and 11 July 1904.
themselves and their children against military-imperialist aggression: unlike in De Stuers's account, they are not reduced to blood spatters. Yet what does this military aggression look like? Though the most prominent Dutch soldier has raised his sword and roars like a lion, around him stand three cowering colleagues with worried expressions on their faces and hunched shoulders. They are hiding behind their bayonets. Dutch ambiguity is also present in the embellishing frame of this drawing, where the sweet children are counterbalanced by bleeding leaves. The ornamentation proves less
innocent than it may seem. In this image, Hahn has thematized both the anxieties in the Netherlands about the expedition and the fact that it proved hard to frame without the frame itself being affected by the bloodshed.

Of the thirty drawings on the Indies made by Hahn, seventeen (more than 50%) show natives in victim positions. They are chained, fleeing from Dutch soldiers, mourning their dead loved ones, or are murdered themselves. At the same time, many of these drawings critically investigate the way in which the Dutch had framed events in the Indies. A drawing
from 30 July 1905 features a Dutch soldier who has just knifed an infant (Figure 2.3). The soldier’s heartlessness is shown through his wide eyes fixed upon the infant’s bleeding body and a smile on his face like that of the grim reaper. His mechanicalness is signified by the fact that he keeps on marching: nothing will stop him from making progress, and those in his path will be wiped out along the way. In the background, two women are fleeing. Compositonally, they have a double position in the image, for the line they are standing on is one of two lines that split off from the line the soldier is standing on. The women are both in the background and underneath the soldier’s foot, ready to be trampled upon. The criticism of the government’s framing is in the title: “How the Netherlands is out civilizing again.” The combination of text and image shows that in language, as de Saussure pointed out, signifier and signified have an arbitrary relationship, and that everything can be framed as “civilizing”. Between text and image there is a significant space, making visible the passe-partout: the image is ambiguous.

A drawing from 28 June 1908 shows Van Daalen as dog Dalia killing the inhabitants of Atjeh, while Van Heutsz who released him says with a flabbergasted look on his face: “Yes, I did let Dalia out, and I don’t deny that the animal had a nasty temper. But how could I know that he would keep on biting?” (Figure 2.4). Hahn’s drawing here addresses the complexity of the situation: on the one hand, Van Heutsz’s bewilderment can of course be read as a façade (this is probably how Hahn himself interpreted it), but on the other hand, it indicates just how powerful the distribution of the perceptible can be. In the latter case, Van Heutsz and other Dutch observers knew that Van Daalen would employ extreme violence in the Gajo and Alas lands but could not see the 1904 photographs as possible depictions of the results, simply because the world of the Dutch empire did not look that way.

A similar theme is pursued in a drawing from 17 November 1907 of the Dutch Minister of the Colonies, Dirk Fock, standing on a pile of bodies (Figure 2.5). In that year, the debate on the many deaths in Atjeh had resurfaced. While the minister’s black suit makes him stand out sharply against the white background, the bodies form a grey mass, not always clearly distinguishable from each other or the forest in the background. Certain areas in the pile could be anything, from bodies to objects such as tree trunks. Fock says: “I do not care about all those newspaper reports and private letters. My assistants report to me that we act humanely and I keep it at that.” His hand is raised in defiance against those outside the frame who have accused him of something. The two quotes from Dutch MPs above the image read
"They commit bestialities in Atjeh." Van Kol.
"In Atjeh we are massacring a people." De Stuers.

The title of the image is *East-Indisch Blind*, a variation of the Dutch expression “East-Indisch Deaf”, which means that someone hears but pretends not to. A highly condescending expression usually aimed at natives is rebounded here. Just like the drawing of Van Heutsz and his dog, this drawing
thematizes cultural aphasia, and in this case even cultural myopia: the difficulty seeing things that are before one’s very eyes.

Finally, the contested nature of the Gajo and Alas expedition and specifically the anxieties surrounding it are thematized in a number of drawings in which Hahn represents natives as corporeal and incorporeal undead: as walking skeletons and ghosts (Figure 2.6). An example of the latter type depicts Kuyper, Idenburg, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Robert Melvil baron van Lynden sitting in parliament during the 1904
debates on the Gajo and Alas expedition. The three Ministers are self-satisfied: Kuyper sits slumped in his chair with his hands folded, and Idenburg gestures that things are epic. Outside their field of vision, a huge, hollow-eyed native clutches his chest, making a forward movement and threatening to flood the Dutch parliament. Whereas the Ministers believe they framed the expedition in such a way that it is neutralized, Hahn predicts this was not the end of it. An oubli de réserve, the mediations of the Gajo and Alas massacres had created, to borrow Derrida’s words, a “habitation without proper inhabiting, call it a haunting, of... memory” (1994: 20).

Photographs can function as icons, in which case they have a likeness to what they are supposed to depict. The depicted can be concrete, like a massacred village in the Alas land, but it can also have a more abstract quality, like “Dutch colonialism”. One can point at a 1904 photograph and say “this is Dutch colonialism” or even “this is the Netherlands in the modern era”. It was this latter iconization that people like Kuyper denied, people like Troelstra embraced, and people like De Stuers were fearful of. What Hahn had depicted was that those killed in the 1904 expedition haunted the nation and had to be exorcized. One important way in which this was attempted was to blame them all on one man: G. C. E. van Daalen.

An Icon of One Man’s Cruelty

After having been published in 1905 in Kempees’s book, KR2 again appeared in 1907, namely in a booklet by a former officer of the marechaussee writing under the pseudonym Wekker (Wake Up Call) who wanted to denounce Van Daalen. Judging from the frame printed around KR2 in this booklet, it was directly copied from Kempees’s book. Near the end of 1907, Van Daalen’s expedition was put on the political agenda once again, though in a larger context than in 1904. In the intervening years, critics had not kept silent about it and had, for instance, responded to the reports published by Van Daalen and Neeb and Kempees’s book, which all came out in 1905.108 De Stuers in particular kept track of the ever-increasing number of natives

108 See speeches by the liberal C.Th. van Deventer (1857-1915; Verslag der Handelingen 16 Nov. 1905: 95); Van Kol (Verslag der Handelingen 17 Nov. 1905: 105-6); De Stuers (Verslag der Handelingen 21 Nov. 1905: 127-33); De Stuers (Verslag der Handelingen 22 Nov. 1905: 156-8); De Stuers (Verslag der Handelingen 14 Nov. 1906: 293-4).
killed during the many expeditions, which by November 1907 had reached 17,953 since 1899. Van Heutsz had in the meantime become Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, and in 1905 he had appointed Van Daalen as governor of Atjeh, Van Heutsz’s old job (Van ’t Veer 1969: 280). In 1905, Kuyper’s Christian cabinet was replaced by the liberal cabinet of Th. M. de Meester, a minority government supported by the six social-democrats in parliament and with Dirk Fock as Minister of the Colonies. This had three important consequences: the cabinet had to avoid conflicts with the social-democrats; Van Heutsz’s position became weaker since Fock was less close to him than Idenburg had been; and the Ministry of the Colonies was powerless under the ineffective Fock (Van ’t Veer 1969: 276-82).

In 1907, with the liberals C. Th. van Deventer and L. W. J. K. Thomson having joined Van Kol and De Stuers in their opposition to the government’s Atjeh policies, critics in parliament acquired new ammunition. In October of that year, a small Dutch newspaper, De Avondpost (The Evening Post), began publishing a series of seventeen newspaper articles in which a writer using the pseudonym Wekker laid out a long list of accusations against the policies of Van Daalen. This series was entitled “How Civilized Holland in the Twentieth Century Creates Peace and Order in Atjeh”. Wekker’s identity was unknown, though he was presented by the editors of De Avondpost as a former officer of the marechaussee from Atjeh. According to Paul van ’t Veer, Wekker was W. A. van Oorschot, a 27-year old former lieutenant who probably bore a grudge against Van Daalen because the latter had court-martialed him for killing Atjehnese prisoners (he was acquitted), after which his military career ended. In the same year, De Avondpost Press published a booklet in which all the articles and the parliamentary debates of 1907 were printed, together with KR2. On the cover of the booklet is a drawing of a KNIL soldier whose left foot is bent and resting on a dead infant (Figure 2.7). His sword is drawn and covered in red ink, indicating blood. From under the child’s body, a stream of blood emerges that spells the word “Atjeh”. The drawing strongly resembles the photograph of atrocity I have labelled PD from 1898 (Figure 0.4).

In the booklet, KR2 is used in an indictment against what Wekker calls “the Van Daalen system”, which according to him led to gross misconduct such as the 1904 massacres. Prisoners were killed, women and children were shot during village searches, and there was a habit of murdering Atjehnese for fun. The photograph is positioned as proof of this. By putting the blame

109 Verslag der Handelingen 5 Nov. 1907: 199.
on Van Daalen’s system, the text of the booklet has the effect of exculpating the soldiers and officers on the ground in Atjeh, including Wekker himself.

The main text of the booklet and its introduction by the editors of De Avondpost emphasize that its writer had been physically present in Atjeh to observe things there with his own eyes. After giving an account of how the Atjeh War had not been successful for the Dutch after thirty-four years, the editors write: “Then one asks oneself: how is it in Atjeh indeed; then one asks: are we given the information that is necessary to oversee...”
the situation on our own?” According to this introduction, the “official reports” have “a totally different spirit” from the articles of the author of the present booklet who is “a former marshal-officer in Atjeh”, whose writings “give the impression of being completely true” and who will “shed more light” on Atjeh (Wekker 1907: vi-vii). A few pages further on, Wekker’s own text reads: “Wake up, Dutch people, and step in!! / For too long a time you have satisfied yourselves with insufficient data and official truth. Lend your ear to someone who through a stay of many years in Atjeh and through experience from practice is capable of reporting the real truth” (ibid: 10). Wekker thus presents himself as someone with a perspective from nowhere who made media that offered unmediated truths. The photograph reproduced in the booklet supported this idea and represents the best of three media: it is a photograph, an index of reality; it is in a book, giving it cultural authority; and it is surrounded by texts from a newspaper, the medium thought to be as close to the present as one could possibly get. After De Stuers, Wekker’s intervention is the second in a long sequence of emerging memories around violence in the Indies that supposes that photographs of colonial atrocity will in and of themselves change public opinion – in this case, not about the Dutch nation or Dutch colonialism but about his former boss.

Part of Wekker’s strategy to put all the blame on Van Daalen and his system was to show that, unlike all Dutch media and most people involved in the Atjeh War, there were in fact only two people who had unmediated access to the events in Atjeh: Wekker himself, of course, but also Van Daalen. First of all, he positioned the soldiers as merely the performers of the Van Daalen system: they did not see for themselves, but the system saw and acted through them. Next there were, as De Stuers had pointed out, the official reports which by then had blinded everybody, including the Dutch population, parliament, and the Minister of the Colonies. Perhaps Governor-General van Heutsz, the highest official in the Dutch East Indies, knew what was going on? No, Wekker wrote, for “he does not have the disposal of better data than you [Dutch people!] and your representatives” – i.e., again, only the official reports and untruthful articles by journalists (ibid: 11). In Wekker’s account, the only one to blame – both for the war and the false image people had of it – was Van Daalen, for whom Wekker coins the concept of “vandaalism”. He and only he was the one who “[throws] you dust in the eyes” (ibid: 13).

Although Wekker’s booklet claimed to be presenting the unmediated truth about Atjeh and was confident in its understanding of what had gone wrong, there were some indications of unease. He writes: “[I]t may appear
as if I want to cast a stain upon the army, upon the soldiers and officers, my loyal comrades” (ibid: 9). Wekker wondered if certain things that had never existed in the first place would become visible, or even whether things that had simply been there remained invisible. He seemed to be well aware of the fact that in his booklet the media of text and photography both showed and obscured what happened in Atjeh, and that by showing the soldiers as working within the Van Daalen system, his imagetext also stained them and took them away from view. He tried to correct his mediations in a moment of self-reflection in which he made clear that they were not reliable and gave a false impression, but that nevertheless behind them, or in them, or through them, the readers and viewers could glimpse the truth that was promised to them. He wrote: “you, comrades, among whom many with well-deserved, marvelous decorations, you I am not attacking; while reading this essay you should distinguish people and affairs well; it is the honored system; the policy conducted and the ruling spirit in Atjeh that I will harp on” (ibid: 10). In this sentence, the overly strong emphasis on one thing summons its opposite.

These anxieties – that nobody on the Dutch side, including the booklet, could see or show what was happening in Atjeh, while the atrocities of Atjeh might not be limited to Van Daalen after all – fly in the face of the booklet’s title (How Civilized Holland in the Twentieth Century Creates Peace and Order in Atjeh), which put the civilization of the Dutch in opposition to the unnamed “other” society of the Atjehnese. The title suggests that the booklet was more concerned with the self-image of the Netherlands as a nation than with what was happening on the ground in the Dutch East Indies. At first glance, the title may seem sarcastic: the Netherlands considers itself a civilized nation but acts as a barbarian, as the Atjehnese. The booklet, however, shows no sarcasm whatsoever and is dead serious in reducing the Atjeh War to “the system” and the system to Van Daalen. Given this, the word “civilized” is not ironic but bitter: the Netherlands was a civilized nation, it simply did not act as such, and this was all Van Daalen’s fault. The photograph, as Wekker himself argues, both shows the system and stains the army; it makes visible both the system and its dirt. Mary Douglas writes:

dirt [is] matter out of place... [This] implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt, then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systemic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. (2002: 44)
This unclassified residue, then, is a threat to the integrity of the system. Wekker tried to pass off the massacres in the Gajo and Alas lands as exceptions, as the work of a one-man system, but in the meantime ended up staining the whole army and Dutch civilization. Dirt and the system proved more difficult to separate than Wekker had hoped. Wekker wanted to present KR2 as an icon of the Van Daalen system, but as he also sensed himself, it became an icon for much more.

Still, Wekker got what he wanted, be it with a considerable number of twists. The articles began to come out two weeks before the debate on the budget for the Indies for 1908, so the timing was perfect. With a weakened Minister of the Colonies and the liberal Cabinet’s hands tied behind its back by the social-democrats, the Wekker articles gave the critics their weapon in the form of the most gruesome details of the Dutch Atjeh regime. Basing themselves on Wekker’s booklet, Van Kol recounted how soldiers placed bets on who could kill the most Atjehnese, how corpses were mutilated, and how an Atjehnese man was tied to the railroad tracks and run over by a train;110 De Stuers named the use of dum dum bullets, illegal in international law, and the fact that villages were riddled with such bullets (ibid: 200); and Thomson, himself an Atjeh veteran, related his own experiences:

I experienced it myself during my short stay in Atjeh; without any remorse I cooperated in burning whole kampongs, cutting down fruit trees, killing cattle that were left behind. What the people would feel if they found a heap of rubble instead of a house, we did not think about. I was not struck by a fusilier who kicked over a corpse to look for money in its pockets. A print like the one I took with me of marechaussees who let themselves be photographed in a conquered benteng, feet placed on Atjehnese children’s bodies, did not fill us with horror. (ibid: 216)

Like De Stuers and Wekker, Thomson believed that the perceptible order of the photographs would not be tolerated in the Netherlands. Thomson is referring here to the 1898 photograph (PD) from the Pedir expedition, which just like the 1904 photographs has reappeared regularly throughout time. His account corroborates that things that were self-evident within the imperial distribution of the perceptible in the Indies were no longer unproblematic in 1907 in the Netherlands.

The debate ended with a motion by liberal J. W. IJzerman which said that:

110 Verslag der Handelingen 5 Nov. 1907: 197-8.
The House, trusting that the Governor-General will conduct an independent research concerning the actions of our troops in Atjeh, and that the results of this research will be handed over to the House as soon as possible, moves on to the order of the day.\footnote{Verslag der Handelingen 6 Nov. 1907: 247.}

This resulted in three reports being written: one by Van Heutsz on Van Daalen’s civil policies as governor of Atjeh (Van Heutsz 1907), and two by the commander-in-chief of the KNIL, M. B. Rost van Tonningen, – one on Van Daalen’s military policies and the other on the Wekker accusations \footnote{See letters by Van Heutsz, Van Daalen, and the other main figures in this case in Naarding 1938.} (Rost van Tonningen 1907a, 1907b). The latter report acquitted Van Daalen of most of Wekker’s charges, and Rost van Tonningen concluded that what remained could not be proven. Putting Wekker’s argument on its head, he wrote: “That among the patrols sometimes bad deeds are done or cruelties are committed – which moreover, as ‘Wekker’ presents them, mostly lie outside the period during which general-major Van Daalen was in command – cannot be passed on to the commander” (1907b: 108).

Van Heutsz’s report on Van Daalen’s civil policies was, however, crushing. Van Daalen, Van Heutsz wrote, did not always act with the necessary moderation; his behavior was surly, rough, arbitrary, and strict; and the general impression was not very favorable. Van Heutsz’s critique of Van Daalen had already led to the latter’s resignation in December 1907, which was accepted in May 1908. Van ’t Veer notes that after his resignation, “[w]hat was supposed to be the main point [the military policies] became a side issue. The debate completely focused on the political policy of Van Daalen – and on the actions of Van Heutsz” (1969: 288). Van Heutsz, namely, had shown a remarkable change in his appraisal of Van Daalen, and the question arose whether he had not sacrificed Van Daalen to save himself. In January 1908, however, the liberal De Meester cabinet – which included the weak Minister Fock who was not on excellent terms with Van Heutsz – was replaced by the Christian cabinet under Heemskerk, and by the time of the next round of debates on the Indies, the Minister of the Colonies was again Idenburg who was particularly close to Van Heutsz. Idenburg successfully defended Van Heutsz, while Van Daalen was also not forgotten. In 1909 he was promoted to lieutenant-general and in 1910 to commander-in-chief in the Indies. Idenburg defended these decisions by stating that there was nothing wrong with Van Daalen himself and that he functioned perfectly
before 1905, when Dutch policy in Atjeh was all about subjugation. But because pacification and consolidation had become the key issues since then, Van Daalen was not in the right place anymore (Idema 1924: 223). This meant that, officially it was still the case that nothing was wrong with the Gajo and Alas expedition. Van Daalen, in Idenburg's view, just did what he did, and sometimes his environment benefited from this, and sometimes it did not.

In the way the Dutch handled this case, a peculiar sequence of compartmentalization, expelling/purging, and re-incorporation becomes visible. The massacres had to be somehow dealt with but not head-on, as this would give them too much significance. First, their horrors were restricted to – or we could say the unease they caused were projected onto – Van Daalen's civil policies. Then there was another transfer of the horrors from the figure of Van Daalen to Van Daalen's relation to Dutch policy, the result of which was that he was pushed to resign not so much because he had done something wrong but because he was more or less in the wrong place at the wrong time. Finally, the cleansed Van Daalen could be reincorporated in the system and promoted to the highest rank.

Wekker had tried to bring Van Daalen down by investing the latter with the memory of the 1904 massacres and all other cruelties committed in Atjeh. The Dutch parliament and military, who were confronted every year with the attacks of De Stuers and other MPs, saw an opportunity to turn Van Daalen into a scapegoat. Through him, anxieties were deflected, and he was sent away as an intruder. In the meantime, KR2 had been reframed in a crucial manner: transposed from Kempees's book to Wekker's booklet, it moved from the social frame of the military to exactly those circles that criticized the army. While KR2 and also PD were once used by the army to communicate its progress, they were now being used to attack Dutch imperial policy, while the scenes they depicted were critically transmediated into political cartoons like Hahn's.

**Uncomfortable Colonial Conservatism**

From 1907, the photographs disappeared from sight, only to appear again in 1938. Between these two dates, the political situation in the Indies had changed considerably. Indonesian nationalism was growing strong, and the Dutch colonial regime, especially after 1918, had become more and more reactionary and had turned the Indies into a police state. It was in the context of this reactionary colonialism that three of the 1904 photographs (KR2,
KR3, and KL1) were republished and resemantized by a fierce opponent of the conservative course – without, however, losing their troubling effects.

In 1938, the Dutch journalist H. C. Zentgraaff published these three photographs in a book called *Atjeh* (Figure 2.8). It was a bestseller, with 13,000 copies sold in a short period of time (Bosma 2005: 61). *Atjeh* is a large book of coffee table format with three hundred pages, more than 150 photographs, and several drawings, facsimiles of texts, and maps. The photographs are printed in 25 groups of four pages that are spread throughout the book. All are captioned, but the text hardly ever directly refers to a specific image.
Three of the photographs are of the massacred villages from 1904: KR3 (with Van Daalen standing on the wall), KR2 (with the river of bodies), and KL1. They are blown up to a size of 30.5 by 21 centimeters, a little bigger than A4 paper size (Figure 2.9).
The book is a collection of stories on the Atjeh War and on Atjeh in the mid-1930s, when Zentgraaff traveled through it. A number of chapters are devoted to the history and present state of the Gajo land, to which he also traveled. In his introduction, Zentgraaff says he wanted to write a different book on the Atjeh War than others had done before him, one that did not glorify the Dutch and treat the Atjehnese as evil traitors. He wrote:

The truth is: that the Atjehnese, men and women, in general had fought brilliantly for what they saw as their national or religious ideal. Among those fighters a large number of men and women are to be found that would be the pride of any people; they are not inferior to the most magnificent of our war figures. (1938: 1)

Offering an image of the Atjehnese as the brave and undaunted people that they are would only enhance the Dutch army’s prestige, Zentgraaff wrote. Having gained access to the Dutch military archives, and having interviewed many Atjehnese as well, Zentgraaff made his readers enter a zone in which history was brought to them in a fair and balanced manner.

Between 1894 and 1896, Zentgraaff had himself been a soldier in Atjeh. Later he served again in Atjeh and in many other places in the Indies before leaving the army in 1907 (Drooglever 2006: 209). Already as a soldier, he had started writing for newspapers in the Indies. He was critical: in 1903, for instance, he wrote a series of articles in the Java-Bode entitled “Maltreatment of Government Workers” on the suffering of Chinese coolies in the Banka tin mines, which led to a government investigation. He was also critical of the living conditions of the KNIL soldiers (ibid). In 1912 he wrote in the Nieuwe Soerabaja Courant about a violent military expedition to the island of Soemba (ibid: 210). From 1917, he wrote mainly for the Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, becoming editor-in-chief in 1924. In 1932, he became editor in chief of the Java-Bode. From that moment onwards, he became more of an opinionmaker than a newshound. According to historian P. J. Drooglever, he catered mostly to the sugar planters in Java, while his opinions “showed little of the indignation of the young soldier at the injustice he observed” (ibid: 211). The older Zentgraaff campaigned against the government, Indonesian nationalism, ethical policy, and socialism. Between 1929 and 1931, he became the most visible spokesman for the National Society (Vaderlandsche Club), a reactionary political group that wanted to stand up for the totoks (the powerful group of white Dutch immigrants in the Indies) against what it saw as the weak attitude of the government with regard to Indonesian nationalism. On behalf of the National Society, Zentgraaff wrote in 1929 that
the government was concerned about all groups in the Indies except for the Dutch: “We ask for the preservation of our place beneath the Indische sun on historic, moral, and economic grounds. We especially want to encourage a more powerful Dutch national life as the best contraceptive against the mad demands of Eastern nationalists” (quoted in Drooglever 1980: 31). In the 1930s, Zentgraaff turned to fascism and national-socialism and is said to have asked the leader of the Dutch national-socialist party (NSB), A. A. Mussert, to be put on the party’s list of candidates. He never became a member, however, and distanced himself from the NSB when it embraced anti-Semitism (Drooglever 2006: 212). Drooglever writes that Zentgraaff’s fascism was primarily reactionary, aimed at preserving the status quo of the Dutch in the Indies. This went together with a certain vitalism in which there was a romance of enthusiasm, sturdiness, and optimism, and a celebration of irrationalism. In Zentgraaff’s work, a glorification of authority was paired with anti-materialism, anti-individualism, and a wish to strengthen national ideals (1980: 110).

This vitalist attitude can also be found in the pages of his 1938 book *Atjeh*. In it, the nineteenth-century policy of not systematically conquering all the outer territories is described by Zentgraaff as “negativism” (1938: 3), the imperial thought is said to have been hampered by “weakness” (ibid: 4), while people who have “a pathological fear for battle” (ibid: 1) are criticized. In contrast, what Zentgraaff propagates is a “gloriously offensive spirit” (ibid: 2), “an energetic battle” (ibid: 6), and the “happiness... of the ecstasy of martial work” (ibid: 44). The book is filled with episodes of epic glory and tragic loss from the Atjeh War, with special attention for crypto-erotic relations between Dutch soldiers and Atjehnese women warriors with their “deep cravings”. The Atjehnese are described as “a people in whom sexual longings work more strongly than in nearly all other peoples” (ibid: 63). While on the path of war, women bear children just as easily as they fight alongside the men. Zentgraaff creates a heady mixture of death, sexuality, blood, and fertility in which women’s bodies are eroticized on one page and butchered on another.

*Atjeh* has the structure of a scrapbook. There is no build-up of a central argument; what is told is not told chronologically; and in several places the text is interrupted by reproductions of hand-written letters and drawings. Though most of the text is in Dutch, quite a few words and passages are in English, French, and Malay. Quotations are found throughout the book, some of which are many pages long from all kinds of sources including Atjehnese. The photographs are often in the neighborhood of the texts to which they are most closely related but seldom next to them. The loose
structure of the book means that they can be connected to various other images and text passages.

The 1904 photographs have a rather slippery position in the book. Despite their large format, and despite their match with the book’s tale of blood and heroism, it nevertheless seems as if Zentgraaff is uncomfortable with their presence. First of all, he elaborately justifies the 1904 massacres by positioning the photographs as icons of a past in which the Atjehnese, specifically the Gajos, brought the massacres upon themselves by their continued resistance – a past in which the army had no other option and in which what was done was actually good for the Gajos. He writes about the Gajo land:

A good thirty years ago the Blang [field where several of the massacred villages lay] slept as an unknown beauty in the forest; in this land no military force had set foot yet... People knew that the Company [the name given by the Atjehnese to the KNIL] waged a war in Big-Atjeh and the countries at the sea, [but] the Gajo did not yet know the power of our army, and he lived in the simple trust on his weapons and strong bentengs. (1938: 195)

Zentgraaff positions the Gajo landscape and its inhabitants as feminine, passive objects that are waiting for things to be done to it by the masculine, active subject of the army. The landscape has, he writes, the “alluring sensation of a world, free of all culture and conventions, as the urgent call of Mother Nature to her straying children” (ibid: 183), and the people who inhabit it are presented as an integral part of it. But Zentgraaff does more than position the landscape and its inhabitants as feminine, for he also eroticizes them:

The central Gajo lands with its dreaming blangs: plump grass lands in a frame of mountains, is as a jewel, cast in a setting of robust allure. It lies, with all the charm of its virginity and totally distinctive nature, protected against profanation by a belt of mountains and forests...

He deplores the fact that when he visited this landscape in the 1930s, it was so easily accessible, for instance by car: “everyone... takes possession of it, without even a modest attempt at conquest”. The landscape, according to Zentgraaff, is no longer a “noble amoureuse”, but a “girl of pleasure” (ibid: 187). Here, both the reluctance of the landscape to give itself, being “protected” by the mountains, and the conception that it has “given” itself
to so many are summoned as rationalizations for violence. The figure of the virgin and the slut serve the same purpose: to position someone or something as deserving aggression because s/he is not complying with the possessive sexual wishes of a (masculine) subject – the virgin cannot be possessed because she gives herself to no-one, while the slut cannot be possessed because she gives herself to everybody. Earlier, Zentgraaff had also turned the Atjehnese into rightful objects of massacre, and even into objects that willingly took on this role, by saying that “they wanted to resist and die, they did not want to listen to summation or counsel, they have resisted and fallen” (ibid: 175).

Pursuing the sexual imagery, Zentgraaff describes the army as a plow that “penetrated the old soil deeply” (ibid: 200). The phallic symbol of the plow emerges in a passage in which Zentgraaff describes just how strongly the Gajo land was affected by the 1904 expedition, but he soon gives a twist to this description to present these effects as productive:

Western peoples begin their chronology with the day of Christ’s birth; the older Gajos with the arrival of Van Daalen’s column. And they say: ‘When Obos Panalan [the name given to Van Daalen by the Gajos, according to Zentgraaff] came I was an eight year old boy’, or: ‘Our house was built three years after Panalan’. The column overturned the past, which became a thing outside the radius of attention. Thus deeply did the plow penetrate the old soil, and like that, against the background of blood and fire, stands the name of our leader: ‘I sometimes think that never blows so red / The rose as where some buried Caesar bled; / That every Hyacinth the Garden wears / Drops in its Lap from some once lovely Head’. (ibid: 200)

Here, the coming of Van Daalen is equated with the coming of Christ, the savior and redeemer who “overturned the past” (original sin) and restored Man’s bond with God. His sacrifice led to new life. The blood sacrifice of Christ is equated with the blood sacrifice by Van Daalen: both are said to have led to a better life, in the latter case for the Gajos.

Next to justification, the second way in which Zentgraaff tries to smooth over the effects of the photographs is through liminalizing them. Writing about the Gajo land in the mid-1930s, he notes:

113 This last poem, quoted in English in Atjeh, is from Omar Khayyam (1084-1122) as translated by Edward FitzGerald.
At the moment everything is well and quiet on the Blang... It is well over a quarter century ago that here the last resistance was crushed, and a new generation was formed, that was not tied with blood and flesh to the horrible days of the big war, which it only knows from the stories of the elderly. This is how that bloody period every year sinks deeper into the past. (ibid: 194)

A bit further on, he emphasizes the forgetting of these events by asking “Did four thousand Gajos die here or were there more? Who knows exactly?” (ibid: 195). The Gajo land and the younger people are no longer tied to what happened thirty years ago, Zentgraaff suggests; a new generation has replaced the elderly and the past has sunk away. The quiet of the present is emphasized by a contemporary photograph of the Blang in which the massacred villages once lay, captioned “Pretty landscape in the ‘Blang’”. Taken together, this photograph and the 1904 ones form a narrative in which the first is both the ending and the beginning: Atjeh was like this before the KNIL came to it, and it is like that again. The “pretty” photograph shows both the essence of the Gajo land and what Van Daalen’s expedition had turned it into. It therefore overwrites the 1904 photographs and turns the massacres into rites de passage.

Next to strategies of justification and liminalization, Zentgraaff’s disquiet with the photographs is also apparent through his showing the photographs’ passe-partout, that is: the framing of the photographs as media. The book has two sentences in which a direct reference is made to the photographs of the massacred villages. The first one has as its central subject “the figure of Van Daalen”:

A tough and merciless fighter, but one who never himself tried to avoid any risk and who did not hesitate allowing photographs to be made of the benteng Koeta Lintang, conquered during the Gajo expedition, in which the bodies of 561 killed men, women and children lay. (ibid: 174)

The making of the photographs is presented as a heroic deed. In ascribing courage to this photographic production, Zentgraaff positions the photographs as possibly hazardous to Van Daalen, especially in relation to “folks that did not reach to his knees” who “painted a picture of him as a man without a heart, the personification of the most brutal violence” (ibid: 175). The massacres are described as “horrible, though not one centimeter outside the necessity of war.” Zentgraaff’s conclusion: “Despite his failures – who of us does not have bigger ones, without the compensation of his marvelous characteristics? – his figure stands radiant and undefiled in the history of
Atjeh” (ibid: 175). This is a much less assured tone than the one encountered in Zentgraaff’s introduction, for instance.

On top of the doubts already expressed in these sentences, the photographs are also opposed to a medium that is supposed to show “how he [Van Daalen] really was”, namely handwritten letters he wrote to his wife. Zentgraaff has photographed six passages from these letters and printed them on the pages of his book (ibid: 164-72; Figure 2.10). They function as visual counterparts to the photographs. He writes:

Through a fortunate coincidence, I have gained disposal of a number of private letters of Van Daalen, written in the years 1896 and 1897 to his wife, with authorization to quote what does not bear upon the private terrain of husband and wife. I will give several quotes that...can shed light on the figure of Van Daalen. (ibid: 162)

The opposition created here between the photographs and the letters is that the first are public and the second private. The photographs were made during a military operation by a staff member of Van Daalen, the second by Godfried and sent to Betsy, his wife. One of the fragments reads:

Bivouac Tamoen, 27 April 1897.
No news here. The longer it takes the tougher it gets. The population does not bring money, but buffalos, poor bastards. (ibid: 172)

The suggestion in Atjeh is that in the private sphere Van Daalen was true to himself, while in the public sphere he performed an identity and sometimes had to take harsh yet courageous action. The hand that killed was not the hand that wrote.

In a discussion of Heidegger’s text Parmenides, Derrida comments on the opposition created by Heidegger between handwriting and machine-writing:

The typewriter tends to destroy the word: the typewriter ‘tears (entreisst) writing from the essential domain of the hand, that is, of the word’ of speech. The ‘typed’ word is only a copy (Abschrift)... Furthermore, the machine offers the advantage, for those who wish for this degradation, of dissimulating manuscripted writing and ‘character.’ ‘In typewriting, all men resemble one another,’ concludes Heidegger. (1987: 178-9)

In Zentgraaff’s text, the handwritten letter is positioned as the locus of Van Daalen’s character, while the products of the camera – the photographs – make him absent. In this chapter of the book, Zentgraaff
counters the threat that these photographs pose to his main argument (“the army is right in everything”) by overwriting these photographs with Van Daalen’s letters, which are supposed to show “how he really was.” Seen within the context of the book as a whole, the impact of the photographs is mitigated by the presence of other elements that work to diminish their importance: paradoxically, they are both displayed and neutralized.
Conclusion

As the colonial period progressed, several authors from different sides gravitated towards the 1904 photographs as focal points for the debate on the expedition and on colonial military violence in general. That Wekker took over KR2 from Kempees’s book was partly because of the formal characteristics of this photograph, but most importantly because of the scarcity principle in cultural memory, which according to Ann Rigney leads to selection and convergence of memories. A photograph such as KR3, which in 1907 had not been published by Kempees or any other author, was simply not available to Wekker. Taking over KR2 from Kempees, moreover, framed it as a quote: because both books included the same photograph, they were, to borrow from Pamela Pattynama, “diachronically connected to each other” (2007: 6). For the informed viewer, this photograph carried with it traces of the army’s semanticizations which could then all the more forcefully be criticized by Wekker. This process in which later semanticizations reframed earlier ones can be interpreted as yet another form of doubling: KR2 in Wekker’s 1907 book not only recalled the 1904 expedition but was also a memory of the memory in Kempees’s 1905 book.114 When Zentgraaff took up the 1904 photographs in his Atjeh in the late 1930s, he framed them in a text that explicitly debated their meanings, thereby attacking Van Daalen’s critics among whom Wekker had been particularly prominent. Through refiramings like these, the photographs became contested terrain around which larger struggles could be organized.

A further factor of importance was the significance attached to photographs of atrocity as such, as could be seen from De Stuers’s speech and the showing of PD by Thomson. These two politicians framed such photographs as crucial cultural artifacts for the debate on the Atjeh War. This emphasis also led to a growing concentration of Dutch cultural memory on such images. Also the return of the figure of the soldier placing his foot on a dead Atjehnese (such as on the cover of Wekker’s booklet, in several drawings by Hahn, in PD as shown by Thomson) points towards the workings of the scarcity principle. With the rising importance of photographs as icons of war and suffering (like in Ernst Friedrich’s Krieg dem Kriege! from 1924-1926 or Robert Capa’s work on the Spanish Civil War), this process of concentration and convergence would only intensify.

What also became apparent is that, already during the colonial period, photographs of colonial atrocity became icons of both memory and

114 On the memory of memory, see Olick 1998 and Pattynama 2007.
forgetting. De Stuers, addressing the idea of such photographs, framed them as images that showed what should be remembered but was in fact forgotten. Also Hahn, with his drawing of the Minister on a pile of bodies, and Thomson, showing a ten-year-old photograph to his colleagues as an icon of an ongoing practice, used depictions of colonial atrocity as weapons against amnesia.

The photographs and reports of the 1904 expedition elicited an impressive amount of cultural production in the Netherlands. What were the circumstances that made this production possible? I argue here that two factors came together. First, the Dutch colonial army was becoming more and more blatant in its violence. Looking back on the two genres of captured leaders and colonial massacres as discussed in chapter 1, there is a marked distance between Pieneman’s painting of the banishing of Prince Dipanegara from the mid-nineteenth century and Neeb’s photographs from the Gajo and Alas lands from the early twentieth century. There was a development in the type, amount, and public availability of images of colonial violence: as they started showing more severe violence, their numbers grew and they became more widespread. Second, certain new frames of semantization were emerging, particularly those of Dutch guardianship for the natives and of social emancipation in the Netherlands. This rise of an ethical distribution of the perceptible is corroborated by a case from 1902 in which a brochure on coolie abuses in Deli had also been the subject of debate, though these abuses had been known about and discussed for years (Van den Doel 1996: 121; Breman 1987). It is precisely because these frames were emerging that is important for the way in which these abuses and the 1904 massacres were perceived, namely as something new and shocking. What happened was that discursive frames that had only recently become more dominant were confronted with an older perceptible order as visible in the photographs, which then came into view as depicting the inadmissible. The imperial perceptible order of the photographs clashed with an ethical distribution of the perceptible. My conclusion is that these violent colonial events became the objects of debate because they were perceived as something new, and that they were perceived as something new because their mediations forcefully pulled emerging frames to the center of attention.

It was exactly the gap between discursive frames in the Netherlands and the 1904 photographs that led to aphasic moments such as in Queen Wilhelmina’s speech, or the many other moments of hesitation and anxiety as described in this chapter. Among the supporters and the many critics of

115 The brochure is Van den Brand 1902, republished in Breman 1987.
the expedition, there was a constant anxiety that the photographs and other
mediations of the 1904 expedition might be semanticized in ways that were
at odds with the Dutch self-image, for instance as caretakers of the natives.
An anxiety connected to this was spelled out by Thomson who said that
when he himself had been in Atjeh, he did not think about the atrocities
he committed: what if these things had been happening all along but were
only now being observed? What else was happening and had happened in
Atjeh that did not fit the Dutch frame of ethical policy?
These anxieties, however, did not indicate that the Dutch were confronted
with something that was previously wholly unknown. According to Cohen,
there is a paradox in denial, as what is denied first has to be somehow
acknowledged. This brings him to define denial as follows:

A statement about the world... which is neither literally true nor a lie
intended to deceive others but allows for the strange possibility of simult-
aneously knowing and not-knowing. The existence of what is denied
must be ‘somehow’ known, and statements expressing this denial must
be ‘somehow’ believed in. (2001: 24)

In denial, a comparable paradox is operative as the one Weinrich and Pas-
serini identified in forgetting: we cannot deny/forget something unless we
acknowledge/remember it in part. What critics like Albert Hahn pointed
out was that the data (e.g. photographs) were available, the frames were
available (e.g. that of ethical policy or the misery of war), and the mean-
ings were available (given by himself and others), but that still there was
this denial. Roman Jakobson writes that with aphasics who suffer from a
similarity disorder:

the capacity for intersemiotic translation, i.e., transposition from one
sign system to another, is missing. Therefore the patient finds it hard to
name an object shown to him in a picture or pointed to by the examiner.
(1971a: 45)

Hahn showed that even when standing on top of a pile of bodies, the Min-
ister would not budge. This was probably true. In that sense, the waving
around of (imaginary) photographs in Dutch parliament by De Stuers and
Thomson missed the point: this was not a case of a lack of data, or frames,
or meanings, but of what Passerini has called “the connection between
memories and traces”. Too much was at stake to allow these photographs
to have those particular meanings.