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A Historiography of the Amboyna Massacre: How Nationality Affects the Writing of History

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Foreword

Without the aid of friends, family, my fellow students, and others, this master's thesis would not exist. Thank you to: The University Library at Nord University for providing much-needed literature. My fellow students Knut, Ådne and Martine for always listening and transforming long days at the university into some of the highlights this last year. My supervisor Edda Frankot for always guiding me in the right direction, helping me translate nineteenth-century Dutch into English, and offering all her knowledge and thoughts. My parents and two sisters for supplying this student with meals and motivation during the last stress-induced moments of writing. And finally, Tora. I am grateful for all the love, support, and encouragement.

May 2023,

Lars Mikal Dragvik Hanssen

List of characters

Abel Price – EIC barber surgeon at Ambon. Imprisoned for alleged arson.

Augustine Peres – The “captain of the slaves” for the VOC. Born in Bengal and most likely Indo-Portuguese.

Edward Collins – EIC merchant at Larica factory.

Emanuel Thompson/Thomson – EIC merchant at Ambon.

Gabriel Towerson – Leader of the EIC’s traders at Ambon.

George Forbes – Scotsman working for the VOC and author of *True Relation*.

Herman van Speult – Governor at Ambon for the VOC.

Hytesio – The Japanese mercenary who asked questions to Dutch soldiers at Fort Victoria and aroused suspicions from Van Speult. There exists a variety of different spellings of this name like Shichizō, Hytjeio, Hitesio and various others.

Isaacque/Isaaq/Isaack de Bruyne – Advocate-Fiscal at Ambon who took the role as prosecutor of the English merchants suspected of plotting against the Dutch.

Jan Pieterszoon Coen – Officer of the VOC and governor-general of the Dutch East Indies. Famous for being the founder of Batavia and known for his ruthlessness.

John Beomont – EIC merchant at the Luhu factory.

Pieter de Carpentier – VOC Governor-General at Batavia.

Richard Fursland – Council President of the East India Company.

Richard Welden – EIC agent in Banda.

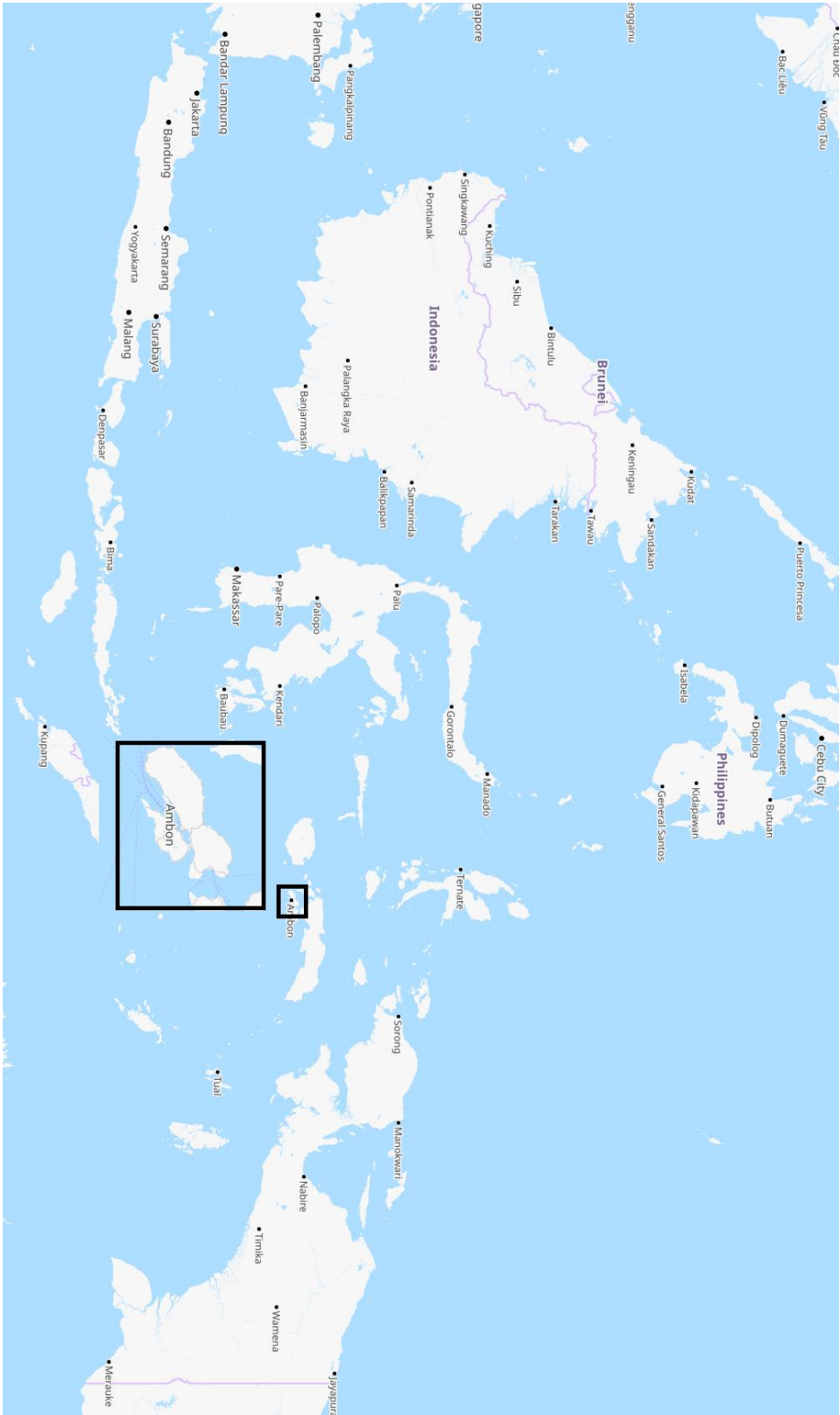
Sacube – Japanese mercenary employed by the VOC.

Samuel Coulson – EIC merchants at Hitu factory.

Sidney Migiell – Japanese mercenary employed by the VOC.

Soysimo – Japanese mercenary employed by the VOC.

Map of Ambon



¹ Planet dump retrieved from <https://planet.osm.org>, "Map of Indonesia with Ambon highlighted," (online: Open Street Map, 2023). <https://www.openstreetmap.org>. Edited by me.

1.0 Introduction

The cruelties committed on the English at Amboyna, which were certainly enormous, but which seemed to be buried in oblivion by a thirty years' silence, were again made the ground of complaint.² – David Hume.

On a small island in Indonesia there occurred an episode named the *Amboyna Massacre* or the *Amboina incident* that affected the two, then allied, nations of England and the Netherlands. The island, now named Ambon, was attractive for traders due to the clove trade and its geographical position in the spice trade which was a highly profitable venture during the early modern period.³ The events that transpired at Ambon in February 1623 is to this day shrouded in a veil of mystery.

What we do know is that ten English men alongside ten or eleven Japanese and one Portuguese man were tortured and executed due to suspicion of a conspiracy by the Dutch. The Dutch, who were controlling Fort Victoria on Ambon, believed there was reason to fear that the English, Japanese and the natives of the island would band together to seize the fort and kill or capture the Dutch. The English believed this plot was fabricated to remove them from Ambon and the surrounding isles. This event caused turmoil in England, and it is commonly referred to as being one of the causes for the first Anglo-Dutch war (1652-1654): “This ‘Massacre of Amboyna’ as it was called in England, was to remain a source of bitter enmity between two nations.”⁴ For convenience’s sake I will be referring to the island as *Ambon* but label the massacre as *The Amboyna Massacre*. While the term *massacre* is associated today with “an indiscriminate and brutal slaughter of many people”⁵, it was seen as a specific type of cruel and barbarous murder in the seventeenth century, and not associated with mass murder.⁶ Seeing as the event with this terminology. I will continue to refer to it as *massacre*, but capitalized to clarify that I am referring to the Amboyna Massacre.

The incident sparked a propaganda war between the two companies in the form of pamphlets. The EIC and VOC pamphlets are important for the Massacre. On the other hand, their use as

² David Hume, *The History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Abdication of James the Second, 1688.*, vol. V (Boston: Aldine Book Publishing Co., n.d.), 428.

³ *A True relation of the unjust, cruell, and barbarous proceedings against the English at Amboyna, in the East Indies, by the Neatherlandish governour, and council there*, (London: Printed by H. Lownes for Nathanael Newberry, 1624), 2-6.

⁴ Donald G. F. W. Macintyre, *Sea power in the Pacific; a history from the sixteenth century to the present day* (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., 1972), 41.

⁵ *Oxford dictionary of English*, ed. Angus Stevenson, 3 ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010). s.v. “Massacre (n)”.

⁶ Alison Games, *Inventing the English Massacre: Amboyna in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 78.

historical sources are questionable, as Adam Clulow also establishes: “The value of these pamphlets as historical sources is debatable. On the one hand they are based on first hand evidence and provide a coherent account of the events on Ambon, but they are even more obviously biased than the depositions and can only be used very selectively”.⁷ Biased history writing, as discussed, will most likely always exist. There are however degrees of how severe this bias is presented in a text. The pamphlets lean heavily into these presuppositions. Therefore, I think it is problematic to classify these chapbooks as historic writing.

Numerous books and articles have been written about the Massacre. Naturally many English and Dutch historians have written about it as they are the two major participants in what happened on Ambon in 1623. When researching the Massacre itself this characteristic of Dutch vs. English history writing was something that heightened my curiosity. This aspect of nationality in tow with the question of what one might gather from researching the history writing of this event led to the thesis.

1.1 Thesis

Not surprisingly, historians have tended to split along national lines, with British writers generally insisting that no plot existed [...] In contrast, many Dutch historians who have taken up the topic, including in a series of foundational articles written in the early twentieth century, agree that there was some sort of conspiracy and thus a basis for VOC action.⁸

The Amboyna Massacre was suggested to me by my supervisor as a possible subject for writing a master’s thesis. I then read through Adam Clulow’s book *Amboina, 1623* and was fascinated by how confusing the aftermath was due to a lack of proper confessions, sources, and generally a strew of judicial problems. Further digging led me to how this has been handled by historians and claims such as by John Furnivall peaked my interest: “It was here that the growing tension came to a head in the tragedy that after three hundred years is still known to English historians as “the massacre of Amboyna” and to Dutch historians as the “massacre” of Amboyna”.⁹ This concept of nationality splitting the opinion of historians enthralled me and raised a myriad of questions: why are they defending their own nation, is it some form of national loyalty, what do the sources claim, are there presuppositions based on nationhood? This led to the development of my thesis.

⁷ Adam Clulow, "Unjust, Cruel and Barbarous Proceedings: Japanese Mercenaries and the Amboyna Incident of 1623," *Itinerario* 31, no. 1 (2007): 23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511530000005X>.

⁸ Adam Clulow, *Amboina, 1623: Fear and Conspiracy on the Edge of Empire* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), 4.

⁹ J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 29.

My main question is: Does nationhood affect the presuppositions in the history writing concerning the Amboyna Massacre? As the famous Amboyna Massacre was an incident between different nations, how does the historian's nationhood affect their writing? Also, has the narrative of the Massacre changed over the four hundred years or has it remained fairly consistent? Yet, it is not enough to simply judge the works in regard to just nationality, as historians are influenced by countless factors. But what exactly is the relationship between nationality and history writing?

1.2 Nations and Nationalistic History Writing

A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a Nationality, if they are united among themselves by common sympathies, which do not exist between them and others [...]. This feeling of nationality may have been generated by various causes. Sometimes it is the effect of identity of race and descent. Community of language and community of religion, greatly contribute to it. Geographical limits are one of the causes. But the strongest of all is identity of political antecedents; the possession of a national history and consequent community of recollections, collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past.¹⁰

These considerations from John Stuart Mill are a good baseline discuss the concept of nations. Indeed, this whole thesis builds upon the idea that nations are a part of an individual's identity – which in turn could affect how they write and perceive history. While there is always an agenda of writing history, the aim is to uncover the past and try to portray it accurately. This is undoubtedly an impossible task. One can never fully explain how or why something happened because there will be sources missing, subjective opinions, biases, or imagine connections that never existed. The aforementioned constituents can affect a historian's perspective.

The concept of nations has been and is a heated debate among several fields. A nation as it is mainly defined by dictionaries is as a large body of people who share the same language, culture, government, and history.¹¹ One can generalize this to a people who share a common belief of belonging through these shared constituents. Ernest Renan defines the nation as “soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present” and as “something fairly new in history”.¹² I find this definition to be in line with our earlier one as one part is the nation's history, and the other in the present (shared language, culture, government, and so on).

¹⁰ John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1872), 120.

¹¹ *Oxford dictionary of English*. s.v. “Nation (n)”.

¹² Ernest Renan, “What is nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 9 & 19.

If a nation is made up of several parts, what is a state? There are several definitions that have existed through history, and it is difficult to accurately portray all variations of a state. This leads to a generalisation. This is acceptable in this thesis as it is limited to European states. A state can be defined as: “a nation or territory considered as an organized political community under one government”.¹³ State then refers the political organization of a territory or group. One must remember that a state can house several nations. Therefore, it is to be understood that *nation* and *state* are two different things. The question then is: how are nations formed?

There are mainly two leading theories on the formation of nations: 1. *Traditionalist* which believes nations to have existed long before modernity, and 2. *Modernist* which believes nations to be a modern political phenomenon.¹⁴ Within these two extremities there are several other theories which emphasize different aspects on the formation of nations. We can however summarize that the modernist’s approach to nation formation is driven by politics, modernity, mass media and as Benedict Anderson formulated it, an *imagined community*. He clarifies that “it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹⁵ The modern state, and especially industrialization, created nations according to modernists and Lotte Jensen believes that this approach has been dominant in academia. Nevertheless, traditionalists argues that nations are a premodern creation and they do so by using examples such as England, Sweden, France, and the Dutch Republic as early nations and nation-states that also emphasize the aspects of culture.

Nations themselves are imagined and exist as long the mass of people believe in it. While there might be some part within humankind to form seek groups that share some of the same features, to assume nations as something rudimentary existing within human nature is a stretch of the imagination. To examine the concept of the Amboyna Massacre as part of nationalistic history writing one must first determine whether nations existed/exist. Which parts then constitutes the sum of a nation – what is required? As mentioned above the dictionary states that a nation is a group of people who share the same language, culture, government, and history. Let us therefore explore each one and other relevant factors that contribute to creating a nation, beginning with language.

¹³ *Oxford dictionary of English*. s.v. “State (n)”.

¹⁴ Lotte Jensen, *The Roots of Nationalism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 10-14.

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

A common language gives us the ability to communicate with the other members of society and Azar Gat believes shared language to be **the** main bonding element of premodern peoples.¹⁶ Without a shared language it would be impossible for nations, in a large scale, to exist as the individuals cannot communicate and create the subsequent required elements for a nation to exist. Not only is language needed for the ability to communicate, but the semantics themselves of the language can contribute to a form a nation. In England during the 17th century several radicals wanted to rid the English language of Anglo-Saxon words and several others like John Dryden did not care for the ‘Latinizing, Italinizing, or Frenchizing’ of English.¹⁷ This shows us that language is an important element of identification and unity. The want to remove other languages’, and therein other nations’, influence upon your own signals the want to strengthen the feeling of the nation or in this case – Englishness. Strengthening one’s own language is also key in creating a nation, as Shrank demonstrates when she examines several reformation writers in England and their efforts of creating the nation after the split from the Roman church.¹⁸ Likewise in the Netherlands we can highlight that an important factor for the nation was the adoption of the vernacular instead of High German.¹⁹ When the language one actually speaks becomes the written language and gets standardized this will lead to form unity between the nation’s inhabitants. One might see it as a legitimizing of the people’s communication. Language binds people together by giving them the ability to communicate and identify themselves – not only by the similarities of speaking the same language, but also because it sets one apart from others who speak a different language.

This highlights another contributing element of creating a sense of the nation – otherness. As exemplified by language, the act of distinguishing your group from another can help strengthen a feeling of togetherness. Gijs Rommelse’s displays this rather well in his chapter “Negative Mirror Images in Anglo-Dutch Relations, 1650-1674” by examining anti-English and anti-Dutch pamphlets during the Anglo-Dutch wars.²⁰ According him these images of the other were often the exact opposite of the nation’s own self-image, which therefore would strengthen their own identity by reacting negatively to the portrayal of the others. Ergo having someone else to compare your nation with helps strengthen the bonds within it. This will reappear when I discuss the

¹⁶ Azar Gat, "Premodern Nations, National Identities, National Sentiments and National Solidarity," in *Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815*, ed. Lotte Jensen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 33-34.

¹⁷ Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152-53.

¹⁸ Cathy Shrank, *Writing the Nation in Reformation England 1530–1580* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8-9.

¹⁹ Gat, "Premodern Nations," 40-41.

²⁰ Gijs Rommelse, "Negative Mirror Images in Anglo-Dutch Relations, 1650-1674," in *Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815*, ed. Lotte Jensen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 199-200.

pamphleteering related to the Massacre. As for now it is important to remember that distinguishing oneself from another party helps strengthen the perceived image of the nation's self.

For premodern European nations there is one institution that cannot be overlooked for its importance in creating a shared community – the church.²¹ Modernists often emphasize the importance of modern institutions in creating the nation but fail to see how Christianity and its church might have acted as the modern institution's forefather. In Europe the church was a dominant part of people's life and as an institution it helped form nations.²² Gat also stresses the fact that this is true for all religions as it helps create a common identity. In the case of England and the Netherlands, Christianity was dominant and so was the Bible. Being the first printed book and the best-selling book of all time, the Bible was essential to the citizens as it probably was one of the few wide-spread reading materials available for the general public, but it also helped bring the faith into the home, rather than just being able to experience the doctrines and stories of the church through the priest.²³ It is also of importance to note the importance of translating the Bible into vernacular, which helps strengthen the aspect of a common language as vital to a sense of belonging. As previously noted, Shrank showed that the reformation led to writers actively trying to create the nation as something separate from the Roman Church which suggests that religion is a powerful tool in creating a nation.

History in this sense can be defined as either the nation's past or a historical discipline. I believe that the nation requires a shared past to display their origin, but this can be "manufactured", so to speak, by historians. National history is an important aspect of creating and legitimizing the nation and to create a shared history between the nation's inhabitants.²⁴ Even Benedict Anderson stresses the importance of an "immemorial past" in creating the idea of the nation.²⁵ Historians have and will continue to have an important role in creating the nation. The Netherlands is a great case to exemplify this as it is a fairly young European state that emerged during the early 1600s after their resistance against the Spanish.²⁶ Waszink clarifies that a new state such as the United Provinces needed to be legitimized through an account of its history and that task went to Hugo Grotius. Grotius provided the emerging nation with a historical past to create a sense of common origin. History has served this purpose in several nations.

²¹ Gat, "Premodern Nations," 33.

²² Azar Gat and Alexander Jakobson, *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 220-23.

²³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 40.

²⁴ Ola Svein Stugu, *Historie i bruk* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 2008), 45-47.

²⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 11.

²⁶ Jan Waszink, "The Low Countries," in *Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815*, ed. Lotte Jensen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 137-38.

Many modernist authors believe government, or perhaps administration to be paramount in forming nations. Is this the case? While it is true that many nations are governed by a centralized administration, which in the case for pre-modern nations was mostly a dynastic administration, there are nations that this does not apply to or have not until recently. I believe that a nation is formed when a group of people *believe* themselves to be *one people* and that government is not required before the formation of the nation, but rather something that can develop. A modern example of this is the Sámi people that lives in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. They have their own distinct culture, way of life, language(s), religion, etc. but they are still governed by the earlier mentioned nation-states. The first three have given them their own parliaments, but nonetheless the Sámi is a nation that do not have their own government. This is just one of many examples like the Native American tribes, Hawaiians, Scots, and up until 1919 the Irish nation. If a nation has its own government, it is likely that this helps strengthen the unity and feeling of the nation, but it is not a necessary requirement as one can chiefly observe with the Irish nation.

The final part that many associate with defining a nation is culture. The concept of culture is problematic, at best, to define. Nevertheless this definition provided by Causadias is not perfect, but suitable: "Culture is a system, a dynamic whole that creates and is created by people, places, and practices."²⁷ In a way culture is a collection of many of the aforementioned constituents that form a nation. It also includes a plethora of other concepts as well such as national figures, holidays, national day, places of cultural heritage, etc.

What then forms a nation? While there are many different ways that nations can take shape, I imagine there are some aspects that are crucial in the formation of every nation: a common language, a sense of otherness (us vs. them), culture, a shared past (history), and the role that religion plays in not only forming a powerful institution, but also a united faith or way to perceive the world. A nation in its simplest form can be defined as a mass of individuals who perceives themselves as one people. I believe this to be present in the written material on the Massacre.

Finally, there is one crucial point to make in the context of nations and whether they are premodern or modern phenomenon - nations can change. Early medieval nations cannot have been the same as the modern nations after the industrialization simply because they are two different eras and every aspect of what constitutes the nation has changed to some degree. The nation that we perceive today is not the same as those who came before us. Hadfield puts it very simply: "It is obvious that nations have not existed in the same form throughout their histories"²⁸ The English

²⁷ José M. Causadias, "What is culture? Systems of people, places, and practices," *Applied developmental science* 24, no. 4 (2020): 311, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2020.1789360>.

²⁸ Andrew Hadfield, "Vanishing Primordialism," in *Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815*, ed. Lotte Jensen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 49.

or Dutch nation that existed in the 1600s cannot and will not ever be the same as the ones we perceive today. The fact that the English nation of 1623 is not the same as the one in 2023 does not however mean that both are/were in fact nations. Waszink states that: “the early modern perception of nationhood must have been very different from ours and not, or at least to a much lesser degree, tied to the nation-*state* in its various aspects”.²⁹ The identity associated with a common nationhood will then develop.

I believe that the early material that I have researched for the Amboyna Massacre underlines that these authors imagined themselves as part of one nation, even before industrialization. This is the most important element – that the individuals themselves believe it to be true. I have shown how the constituents of what makes a nation was present before the seventeenth century and that nations can and will evolve.

1.3 Theory and methodology

How can one analyse nationalistic history writing? Historiography is often defined as the study of the writing of history, or the history of history.³⁰ One can define it as the study of history writing, or an analysis of a historian’s methods, arguments, reflections, sampling, choice of sources, choice of literature, school of thought, etc. In this chapter I want to contemplate the benefits, and issues, of historiography as a method when researching the aspect of nationhood within the works on the Amboyna Massacre.

History writing has undoubtedly changed from 1623 to 2023, but what exactly is history and how does one define it? One way is to simplify it like John Warren exemplifies: “History is the past, and historians are those who study and write about history”.³¹ This is a very crude and one-dimensional view of history because it portrays the historian as a sort of literary archaeologist that must find and uncover what occurred in the past. E.H. Carr, on the other hand, sees it as a social science and that the goal is “the study of man and his environments, of the effects of man on his environment and of his environment on man”.³² A better definition, but history is not just a science, as its place in the cultural past is important for both individuals and the legitimacy of a state’s past. John Tosh therefore offers a “hybrid discipline” in that history is a science belonging both to the humanities and social sciences in that it’s both an academic discipline and important for cultural heritage.³³ Tosh’s definition then is the most fitting. History is most definitely

²⁹ Waszink, "The Low Countries," 135-36.

³⁰ *Oxford dictionary of English*. s.v. “Historiography (n)”.

³¹ John Warren, *The Past and its Presenters: an introduction to issues in historiography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), 1.

³² Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?*, 2 ed. (Penguin, 1987), 86.

³³ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, methods and new directions in the study of history*, 6 ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 42-43.

a scientific discipline, but it is also a part of the cultural past. National holidays, heroes from the past, figure heads of the state, symbols with an origin in the past are all important elements of people's day-to-day life. History, especially as part of the cultural past, can therefore be said to help shape nationhood and be an important mark of identification.

The Amboyna Massacre took place in 1623. The newest study of it that I include in my historiography was published in May 2020. That is a period of almost four hundred years. Not only is it then interesting to see how the narrative of the Massacre has changed, but also how history as a field has evolved. Historians undoubtedly shape the history that they write as history exists in the works of historians.³⁴ That is an unfortunate truth, but there is always an agenda with writing history and its author cannot fully remove themselves from the product that they create. History is not the past; history is the product of historians and not the objective truth. Thus, researching the historiography of the Amboyna Massacre can give a fascinating insight into how historians themselves shape the narrative, how history as a subject has changed over the centuries, how researching source material has changed, how the contemporary affects the historian, how the language applied by the historian develops, and finally how the nation influences historian as well as the change of nations over time.

One of the greatest benefits of historiography is the ability to see how the historian's contemporary environment affects them. Historical awareness has taught us the importance of viewing the past as its own unique period affected by several different factors such as government, climate, geographical borders, religious beliefs, norms, worldviews, class, politics, ways of life, society as a whole, and a range of others. The time one lives in certainly shapes and influences historians and through historiography one can, especially across such a long period, identify how time and its uniqueness affects history writing. However, this holds true for anyone writing historiography as I am undoubtedly influenced by my time and the current stage of the field of history. It is impossible to liberate oneself from the grasp of the present, and therefore this is not the aim. The aim is to identify and compare all of these elements between the nationalities. Doing so can highlight how these works could be affected by an author's nationality.

Not only is it fascinating to try to unravel all these elements regarding the torture and execution at Ambon, but there are also quite a few aspects of the events of what happened before, during, and after the 22 February of 1623. As Alison Games puts it: "historians have continued to misunderstand what happened there, forever tripped up by the word massacre".³⁵ She believes that many misunderstand the events that transpired, and questions the use of the word massacre.

³⁴ Warren, *The Past and its Presenters: an introduction to issues in historiography*, 30.

³⁵ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 201.

Nonetheless there are, as one can see further on, not only a lot of confusion but also varying depictions and conclusions concerning the Massacre.

Since the execution of these men at Ambon and till today a lot has happened in the methodology of history. There are a wide variety of different schools of thought within history writing like the Annales School, Economic history, Big history, Marxism, Military history, New military history, and so on. All of these emphasize different values of writing history, like Marxists viewing class struggle as crucial for advances in society and often with a deterministic view of history (the socialist revolution). Technological advances have led to new discoveries. Internet archives and digitalization of sources has made it far easier (or perhaps more difficult in regard to the vast amount of information available) to research, especially accessing material that previously might have been inaccessible. Simply the act of reading sources and making sense of the words is not as straight forward as one might think. Some documents might be fabricated, one might not understand the author's intent or meaning, language development, and even though the historian might have a vast collection of sources to draw examples from - they might not be enough.³⁶ Other fields related to historians has also seen development like anthropology, palaeography, archaeology, psychology, etc. which can help the field of history as well. In archaeology, Carbon-14 has been a useful tool to help date objects dating since its development in the middle of the twentieth century and reach new conclusions, which then in turn affects history writing. All this accumulates into a variety of possible changes with how the Amboyna Massacre can be handled differently by historians.

The focus of this thesis is to examine the literature on the Amboyna Massacre. Perhaps the most interesting aspect is to examine how the different historians use the primary sources and what conclusions they come to and if they are similar or vastly different. Do they make use of different secondary sources, do they interpret the primary sources differently, or have they simply adopted separate views on the historical event? E.H. Carr has a lovely analogy on how the historian can shape their conclusions based on the same sources: "The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on like fish on the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him".³⁷ These differences can originate from several possible factors like time, environment, school of thought, workplace, ideologies, faith, etc. The identity of the historian is present in their writings. Perhaps then nationality is one of these factors.

³⁶ *Historiography*, ed. Zoe Lowery (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, in association with Rosen Educational Services, 2015), 129-35.

³⁷ Carr, *What is History?*, 9.

1.3.1 The five criteria

For my methodology when examining these different works, I make use of John Warren who offers a list of several criteria in evaluating the historian in his work *The Past and its Presenters; an introduction to issues in historiography*.³⁸ The following five criteria are the same as those used by Warren when assessing historians:

- A. What type of history is being written?
- B. What historical techniques are employed?
- C. Language and style?
- D. What does the historian see as the purpose of history?
- E. What impact has the historian had on historiography?

These criteria will be used in evaluating the history of the Massacre in 1623 and trying to unearth if there exists a “nationhood bias” toward the incident. It is not enough to simply to look at the author’s nationality and conclusion, as there are so many variables to account for. The goal then is to present the author’s description of the Massacre and then examine the criteria and see how they differ and/or where they are similar. The first criterion, type of history, is crucial especially since the aim is to perceive how/if nationality influences the historian and this could be most prominent in national histories often named “the history of England/The Netherlands”. Does one stay neutral and objective, or does this put a *stain* on the historical work? The type of work being written can also affect all the other criteria. I have chosen a variety of different types of literature to study, which will be detailed below. This naturally affects how much time authors spend on it, how many sources are applied, how many techniques they can make use of, and what parts of the Massacre they choose to examine.

As for the historical techniques it will also be interesting to see the development of the field of history by comparing works in vastly different time periods and how exactly they differ. An important part of the analysis concerning this criterion will be examining the use of sources, what types are primarily used, and how source criticism is handled. Which works make use of the pamphlets, statements from the victims, or the letters from the likes of Van Speult, Gabriel Towerson, and other source material that can be related to the Massacre? If they do not make use of these sources, what do they then utilise? Will the authors come to different or similar conclusions by applying the same sources? Do the authors cite each other, what are the believed consequences of the Massacre, and how does this affect their arguments? These are all some valid questions I have asked myself when examining the sources.

³⁸ Warren, *The Past and its Presenters: an introduction to issues in historiography*, 32-35.

Language and style can also differ vastly due to the standards of society, development of academia, linguistic changes, and the nature of the work in question. In my use case it is not as interesting to see how the language itself has changed, but rather what terminologies they apply and what kind of language they use to relate the incident. To clarify, some historians, make use of vocabulary like: “so-called”, “bloody”, “cruel”, “gruesome”, “inhuman” to preclude naming the Massacre itself. This often gives a tell-tale sign of the writer’s opinion on whether the English were innocent or not. Some even put in quite a lot of effort to express their own opinion on their matter – inserting colourful language. Here I want to examine if such terminologies are more common in certain time periods and by which nationalities. This can tell us something about historians trying to be objective or not over these four hundred years since the incident. Does the trend show that newer works reflect a more objective view and understanding of the past (historical awareness) or is this more apparent in older works? I expect that the nationalities will colour the language used to describe the Massacre itself. These aspects of language and style are thus of notable interest when reading through and analysing these different works.

It is important to keep in mind that there might be some flaws with examining an author’s language and style. The author’s original meaning with writing something might be misinterpreted by me, or the semantics of what he means are skewed when written on a page. Considering that some of these texts are centuries old, this might also affect how I as a modern reader read these works. Language evolves in tow with society. Keeping historical awareness in mind is crucial when analysing these texts, though it will never be perfect.

A quick note on objectivity before moving on to the next criterion. While objectivity and trying to distance oneself from the incident itself is often valued as important for “good” historians, is that a golden rule in writing history? Warren explains that objectivity can skew the intention of the historian, like a Roman historian wanting to teach moral and political lessons from his history writing.³⁹ He compares this to criticizing Herodotus for not using footnotes. This signals a very important thing to remember: my intention is not to rate the historians based on a scale, but rather compare them simply for knowledge and trying to uncover trends in the research of the Amboyna Massacre. Contemporary history will most certainly be criticized in the future as the time and the social sciences evolves – which I think is important to acknowledge.

The nature of the work also affects the historian’s purpose of history. There are as I clarified further up in this thesis, varying definitions of history itself, which means there are diverse opinions on its purpose. Why do we write history and spend time analysing the past? Is the purpose

³⁹ Warren, *The Past and its Presenters: an introduction to issues in historiography*, 34.

of the historian in question to educate the readers, shine light upon a forgotten event of history, correct what they believe to be errors of former historians, see new connections, understand the world, a study in itself, learn lessons from the past, preserve the past and its values, prepare for the future, and so on. John Tosh when questioning the uses of history remarks: “The fact that historians themselves give very different responses suggests this is an open-ended question which cannot be reduced to a tidy solution”.⁴⁰ Mostly this criterion will be relevant when gazing upon the long lines of history, i.e., to see how it develops under this four-hundred-year period.

The final criterion by Warren is the impact the historian has had on historiography, which will not have a major spotlight in this work. The four other criteria are much more relevant for examining the Massacre and this final criterion is more useful when looking at the overall trends of historiography as a field or if a certain historian has revolutionized it in any way, like founded a new school of thought.⁴¹ It is not useful when examining one specific event in history.

Lastly it is important to note that while these are structured into five different criteria, it would be foolish to look at them separately. They come together to form the entire narrative that the historian is presenting, and therefore will influence each other. Language and style of a history book aimed for the general public will most likely be entirely different than a research article presented in a history journal. Which then also affects the purpose and the techniques. These criteria are then points of reminders to look out for, but I will not be going through the literature presenting each criterion from A to E. I will rather point out the criterion when suitable, and sometimes comment on two or more at the same time.

1.3.2 Literature

Now that I have established how I will apply Warren’s criteria to study the historiography, I must select what literature to examine. There exists quite an extensive list of literature that portrays the Amboyna Massacre at great length and some that briefly mentions it in a passing sentence. Since the incident occurred in 1623 and had a spot in the public’s eye for decades the selection spans centuries. My selection of works then require some justification.

The early part of my research was spent scanning various databases for texts on the massacre. This resulted in a compiled document where I highlighted the similarities and differences that I found. This led to a number of potential works to delve deeper into, as I had to limit myself to some extent so as not to make this master’s thesis unnecessarily large. The literature needed to

⁴⁰ Tosh, *The pursuit of history*, 23.

⁴¹ Warren, *The Past and its Presenters: an introduction to issues in historiography*, 34.

cover especially both English and Dutch authors to examine the differences in nationality. However, it also required that the selection was based on time of publishing as to analyse whether this affected their writing. I also needed different types of history to inspect. To accomplish this, I ended up analysing sixteen pieces of literature on the Massacre, ranging from a few pages to one entire book dedicated solely to it. The selection is chosen based on the works I found to best represent the different time periods, common consensus between nationalities, type, and importance in the historiography. Some works have also been chosen because of their uniqueness and are useful in highlighting differences in the history writing of the Massacre.

The selected works are: Macaulay's *The History of England from the accession of James I. to that of the Brunswick line, vol I*, St. John's *The Indian Archipelago; its history and present state*, Van Rees' *Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde in Nederland tot het einde der achttiende eeuw*, Boulger's *The Story of India*, Hunter's *History of India Volume VII*, Stapel's *The Ambon "Massacre" (9 March 1623)*, Coolhaas' *Notes and Comments on the so-called Amboina massacre*, Vlekke's *Nusantara: A History of the East Indian Archipelago*, Hyma's *A History of the Dutch in the Far East*, Bassett's *The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623*, Masselman's *The Cradle of Colonialism*, Furber's *Rival Empires of trade in Orient 1600-1800*, G. Milton's *Nathaniel's Nutmeg*, Shorto's *The Island at the Centre of the World*, A. Milton's *Marketing a massacre: Amboyna, The East India Company and the public sphere in early Stuart England*, and Games' *Inventing the English Massacre: Amboyna in History and Memory*. They are listed chronologically and are published between 1763 and 2020.

Since my thesis seeks to explore the role of nationhood in writing history, it requires that I review works written by both British and Dutch authors. There are works by English, Scots, and Welsh historians and I want to refrain from reducing these nationalities to *English*. The umbrella-term British then best represent these differences. Considering that the "Englishmen" at Ambon, as they are often referred as, also included Scots and Welsh it makes sense to treat them as "one part" of the historical debate concerning the Massacre. The selected works give me seven British and six Dutch texts to analyse, as well as three American. I opted to include the viewpoints of a few Americans as a sort of baseline since, obviously, their nation was not part of the incident.

I must acknowledge that I do not speak or read the Dutch language. This of course has limited my choices. Fortunately for me some Dutch authors have written in English. However, this historiography would be nothing without *Dutch Authors on Asian History* by Meilink-Roelofs, Van Opstall, and Schutte. This collection of articles and essays from Dutch historiography on the VOC translated into English proved valuable for a student with no comprehension of the Dutch language. Translation will never be one hundred percent accurate, but it is much better to

rely on texts translated by Dutchmen rather than digital tools. Translation done by humans who comprehend both languages will do a much better job of translating the proper semantics of a text. The essays were collected and edited by Meilink-Roelofs and van Opstall (with Schutte completing the work), two historians skilled in both the history of the VOC and WIC (The Dutch West India Company). In this collection they translated the articles by Stapel and Coolhaas, which it would have been unfortunate not to have included in a historiography of the Amboyna Massacre concerning their relevance. I also struggled to find twenty-first century literature written by a Dutch historian on the Massacre, which negatively impacts this historiography as the last Dutch author analysed published his work in 1963. Nevertheless, I feel I have managed to spread the nationalities as even as possible, considering my limitations, and I will take this into consideration when I discuss the findings.

Finally, Willem Coolhaas, Alison Games and Adam Clulow have previously commented upon previous literature regarding the Ambon incident in their selective works. However, a systematic analysis on the historiography of the Amboyna Massacre such as this has not previously been conducted. I think there is still a need for further research on the Massacre, as both Games and Clulow has proved these last years. I hope that this historiography can improve this research.

2.0 Background

Before diving into the literature, I want to provide the reader with some background on what happened at Ambon in 1623. This is necessary to understand why the Amboyna Massacre has been disputed over for so long. To achieve this, I will primarily make use of Adam Clulow's *Amboina, 1623: Fear and Conspiracy on the Edge of Empire* to retell what occurred on this little island in the Spice Archipelago, four hundred years ago. Then I will touch upon how the two East India Companies and their pamphlets affected the legacy of the incident.

2.1 What happened at Ambon?

The justifications for applying Adam Clulow's book on the Massacre are numerous. It is published in 2019, and while newer does not automatically mean better, the field of history terms of methods has advanced significantly since the seventeenth century. The author is well-versed in the Massacre itself, but also has a deep knowledge of European expansion, the seventeenth century, transnational events, and East Asia. In addition, he makes use a variety of sources (Dutch, English and Japanese), a sizeable quantity of second-hand literature, as well as a mindset of not trying to justify one side over the other, but rather adopting a neutral view. Some of the other authors that are to be analysed in this historiography are also referenced below. Clulow's work will be prioritized as it will not be analysed in the historiography and will therefore serve as a baseline.

The reason for the European interest in the Moluccas, which are known as the Spice Islands, was that they grew two spices that the Europeans were particularly interested in – nutmeg and cloves. According to Giles Milton nutmeg was “the most coveted luxury in seventeenth-century Europe” due to its medicinal properties and food preservation, while also only growing on the Banda islands.⁴² Cloves meanwhile were also said to cure several illnesses and were the most valuable preservative spice.⁴³ These mainly grew on Ambon. The spices were highly valuable during the seventeenth century and the fact that they primarily existed on the Banda Islands means that this geographical area was of significant economic interest for the trading companies.

The geographical location of the island itself is also of importance as Masselman points out: “Because this island [Ambon] was the main staple for cloves and because, from it, control could be exercised over the Banda Islands, it could be called the key to the Spice Islands”.⁴⁴ Not only

⁴² Giles Milton, *Nathaniel's nutmeg: how one man's courage changed the course of history* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999), 3-7.

⁴³ John Horace Parry, *Europe and a wider world, 1415-1715*, ed. Sir Maurice Powicke (London: Hutchinson University Press, 1966), 32.

⁴⁴ George Masselman, *The cradle of colonialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 114.

was the island itself a gold mine for the two companies, but those who controlled Ambon controlled the Spice Island of the East-Indies, which of course means even more profit and security for the traders living overseas.

To secure these profits and control the trade was the task of *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*/the United East India Company (VOC) from the Netherlands, and the East India Company (EIC) from England. It is important to note that while these East India Companies were indeed companies they differ from our modern concept of companies in several ways: they could conduct diplomacy, raise armies, establish colonies, execute prisoners, fight wars, and seize territorial possessions.⁴⁵ Clulow specifies that the VOC “was created in part to carry the fight against Portugal and Spain” which gave them this “arsenal of privileges and powers”.⁴⁶ These companies therefore had quite the authority and means to procure trade. The EIC and VOC were fierce competitors that fought to secure these spices.⁴⁷ The English repeatedly tried to undermine the Dutchmen’s position in the region and violent episodes quickly arose because of the conflict. Flags as national symbols were violated, prisoners were tortured, repeated humiliation of each other which accumulated into a tense situation.⁴⁸ Paradoxically, the two companies were allied and cooperated in the period leading up to the Amboyna Massacre.

In 1619 something unexpected happened to the merchants in the Moluccas: the two companies signed a treaty of cooperation in the Spice Islands according to which the EIC, were to pay for a third of the expenses in exchange for a third of the profits.⁴⁹ Though the two companies were in theory cooperating, the VOC had more resources available to them while the EIC were poorly funded.⁵⁰ Fort Victoria, the fort on Ambon, was controlled by the Dutch before the treaty and still belonged to them. Clulow estimates that there were between eighty and a hundred Dutch soldiers in the garrison based on the judges and a later description in 1627.⁵¹ There were also about a dozen Japanese soldiers at Castle Victoria that were employed by the VOC. This was common practice for the VOC in early seventeenth century Southeast Asia.⁵²

This is how the two European nationalities ended up on a small island together, living in close quarters. The treaty seems to have been made between the two companies as to suppress the

⁴⁵ Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert, *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, Asian History, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 15.

⁴⁶ Clulow, *Amboina, 1623*, 30-31.

⁴⁷ Clulow, *Amboina, 1623*, 40.

⁴⁸ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 22-26.

⁴⁹ D. K. Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," *J. Southeast Asian Hist* 1, no. 2 (1960): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0217781100000107>.

⁵⁰ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 26-27.

⁵¹ Clulow, *Amboina, 1623*, 64.

⁵² Clulow, *Amboina, 1623*, 77.

repeated fighting between them. Alison Games also suggests that the VOC (who had a stronger foothold in the Moluccas) paid the price of cooperation in the East Indies due to a need for an Anglo-Dutch alliance against the Spanish in tow with King James I's attempts to arrange a marriage between Prince Charles and the Spanish princess Infanta.⁵³ Nevertheless, this treaty and involuntary attempt at cooperation between the merchants increased Dutch anxiety for an English attack who enjoyed the goods of the VOC while under their protection.⁵⁴ Living so close together in such a remote place only festered mistrust and saw a rise in petty conflicts.

During the night of 22 February 1623, the Japanese soldier Hytesio (or Shichizō) was seen patrolling the fort walls of Fort Victoria asking questions about the defence and organization of the castle to the youngest and most inexperienced Dutch soldiers.⁵⁵ This caused suspicion from the Dutch and the governor on the island – Herman van Speult. Hytesio was seized by soldiers and brought to Van Speult for questioning due to his interest in fort security. The answers he provided, namely that it was for his own amusement, did not satisfy the governor who decided that he must be questioned under torture to reveal the truth. His: “arms and legs were wrenched apart and bound roughly to the doorposts. As he struggled, a cloth was placed over his mouth and tied tightly behind his head” and they proceeded to waterboard him.⁵⁶ Under this torture Hytesio admitted to the existence of a Japanese plot to take control of the fort. Van Speult figured that the Japanese working alone was an impossibility and proceeded to question him on who their accomplices were. Hytesio then answered that the English, the slave overseer, and the slaves were part of it. This naturally terrified the Dutchmen and Van Speult. An EIC merchant named Abel Price was already imprisoned for drunkenness and a threat of arson, and he was quickly questioned by the Dutch whereupon he confirmed Hytesio's confessions. He was also tortured. This caused the rest of the English merchants to be tortured as well. Augustine Peres (the Portuguese), the VOC's slave overseer was also tortured. A trial was started by Isaac de Bruyn, advocate-fiscal of Ambon (similar to a public prosecutor) who collected confessions from the men.⁵⁷ The accused were tried by council of Ambon judges. The men were sentenced to death because of the gruesome act of treason against the Dutch. On March 9 twenty-one or twenty-two men – ten English, ten or eleven Japanese, and one Portuguese – were executed and the Amboyna Massacre was born. It was the start of a controversy that would last decades and put a strain Anglo-Dutch relations.

⁵³ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 28-29.

⁵⁴ Clulow, *Amboina, 1623*, 96-98.

⁵⁵ Clulow, *Amboina, 1623*, 115-16.

⁵⁶ Clulow, *Amboina, 1623*, 1-3.

⁵⁷ Clulow, *Amboina, 1623*, 124 & 43-45.

2.2 The Pamphlets

When news of the Massacre reached Europe, pamphlets were quickly produced. Pamphlets were a cheap and effective way of spreading information during the 1500-1700s. Margaret Spufford argues that English society in this period was moving towards increased literacy even in the lower parts of social standing as evidenced by the mass amount of cheap print, their wide audience, feminine readership, bibles, and the rise of elementary education.⁵⁸ The available printed material during this period therefore suggests that pamphlets, or chapbooks, were part of popular culture and read by a number of social groups at least in English society. News of the Massacre then would naturally spread throughout society. The history and legacy of the Massacre is intertwined with the publication of these pamphlets.

The VOC were the first to publish their account, most likely as to defend themselves and the actions taken by the Dutch council at Ambon, with the publication of *Waerachtich Verhael vande Tidinghen ghecomen wt de Oost- Indien (A True Declaration of the News That Came Out of the East Indies)*.⁵⁹ Shortly after the EIC published their own pamphlet titled: *A True Relation of the Unjust, Cruell, and Barbarous Proceedings Against the English at Amboyna in the East- Indies, by the Neatherlandish Governour and Council There*. This also included the *True Declaration* translated to English and a response to this by the EIC: *An Answer to the Same Pamphlet*.⁶⁰ Both of these pamphlets were translated so that they could be read both by Dutch and English. There are also other pamphlets published later: *A Remonstrance of the Bewinthebbers or Directors of the Netherlands East India Company, lately exhibited to the Lords States General, in justification of the proceedings of the Officers at Amboyna, against the English, An Authentick copy of the Acts of the processe against the English at Amboyna*, and *A reply to the remonstrance of the Bewinthebbers or Directors of the Netherlands East India Companie lately exhibited to the Lord States-Generall in justification of the proceedings of their Officers at Amboyna against the English there. True Relation* also featured woodcuts depicting the torture of the English and Alison Games adds that they draw heavily on Protestant martyrdom. A picture of one of these drawings (there are numerous) is included below. The pamphlets generated a lot of attention and caused a public outcry against the Dutch in England.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1981), 50-75.

⁵⁹ Alison Games, "Violence on the Fringes: The Virginia (1622) and Amboyna (1623) Massacres," *History (London)* 99, no. 336 (2014): 517-18, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12064>.

⁶⁰ Games, "Violence on the Fringes," 518-19.

⁶¹ Clulow, "Unjust, Cruel and Barbarous Proceedings," 22.



Figure 1 Front piece of the 1624 edition, printed by H. Lownes, of True Relation visualizing the water torture and use of fire to extract information out of the prisoners. Two other English merchants at the front represent the beheading of these men.

Denis Woodfield who writes of print history in England includes the EIC pamphlets: “These propaganda pamphlets were deliberately used with the limited object of embarrassing the Netherlands government over a single issue. The imprint had to be omitted to avoid implicating the English government. This use of propaganda follows a technique which is quite contemporary, even to the use of woodcuts of torture scenes where “photographs of atrocities” would be used today”.⁶² The English pamphlets regarding the Amboyna Massacre were printed and reprinted during the several Anglo-Dutch wars in both the 17th and 18th century as to stir up resistance against the Dutch.⁶³ Games also suggests that they define “English identity in terms of an anti-Dutch stance”. Gijs Rommelse has similar conclusions on Dutch self-image created in stereotyping Englishmen in pamphlets.⁶⁴ These pamphlets then influenced the public’s opinion of the massacre for decades and shaped national identity. This has likely affected historians’ opinions of the Massacre.

The pamphlets *A True Declaration* and *True Relation* are the first and most well-known regarding the Ambon incident. They approach the episode quite differently. The title of the pamphlet calls it “concerning a conspiracy discovered in the land of Amboyna, and the punishment following thereupon”.⁶⁵ For comparison the EIC pamphlet used strong words such as “unjust”, “cruel”, and “barbarous”, which can be defined as synonyms for “massacre”. Just this choice of how to name the incident signal their distinct narratives. They both frame each other for what happened at Ambon.

Both pamphlets claim that the Japanese soldiers identified Gabriel Towerson, the head of the EIC merchants, as the chief of the operations. The English merchants was questioned, whereupon they confirmed that Towerson planned the event and convinced the Japanese to join them so that he could be “the Master of the Castle of Amboyna”. Interestingly the VOC account this questioning as a lawfully and orderly examination, while the EIC depict it as examination under water and fire torture: “and then burnt him with lighted candles in the bottom of his feet, until the fat drooped out of the candles; yet then applied they fresh light unto him. They burnt him [John Clarke] also under the elbows, and in the palms of the hands; likewise under the armpits, until his inwards might evidently be seen”.⁶⁶ Dutch pamphlets often depict the torture as light and humane, as waterboarding at least cause no lasting injuries. They also emphasize that it was a

⁶² Denis B. Woodfield, *Surreptitious printing in England, 1550-1640* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1973), 50.

⁶³ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 106.

⁶⁴ Rommelse, "Negative Mirror Images," 208.

⁶⁵ *A True Declaration of the News that came out of the East-Indies, with the Pinace called the HARE*, (1624), i.

⁶⁶ For the English account see: *True Relation*, 5-11. For the Dutch account see: *A True Declaration*, 5-6.

proper judgement of criminals. For the EIC, the torture was an important part of framing the Dutch as exceptionally cruel and villainous.

Was such torture an extreme case back in 1623, or was it something more common? According to the authors of the VOC's depiction England is the only country that use a torture method where they place a man between two planks and press him to death.⁶⁷ They also claim that the English could not because the torture performed on Ambon was according to the laws of the government there and such was fitting due to treason by the English. According to Matsukata both the VOC and EIC resorted to violence (and diplomacy) to establish trade networks and resolve conflicts.⁶⁸ It is therefore reasonable to assume that in the competition of the spice trade violence was a part the life for the merchants, and something that both companies utilized to gain the upper hand.

In addition to a pamphlet war between the two companies, the Massacre was featured in several other media and became part of popular culture. Several plays either included the Massacre or depicted it, such as John Dryden's play *Amboyna: A Tragedy* (1673).⁶⁹ The Ambon episode featured in new pamphlets, reprintings, novels, histories, poems, essays, and rhymes.⁷⁰ They all focused on Dutch cruelty. This association with cruelty became "Amboyna's new legacy".⁷¹ While Clulow has expressed doubts on the inaccuracies of these pamphlets as sources, they are featured in most works regarding the Massacre and has definitely shaped the narrative.

⁶⁷ *A True Declaration*, 15-16.

⁶⁸ Fuyuko Matsukata, "Contacting Japan East India Company Letters to the Shogun," in *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 79.

⁶⁹ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 151.

⁷⁰ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 169.

⁷¹ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 162.

3.0 The historiography of the Amboyna Massacre

The Massacre has been covered by hundreds of writers since its occurrence. This has undeniably led to a great variation not only in the depiction of the incident itself but also in the use of sources and the discourse. The pamphlets illustrated how there are two main ways of viewing the Massacre: 1) The Dutch were cruel and committed judicial murder, 2) The English were plotting, and they were rightfully punished. How prevalent are these views in the literature and does nationality affect which stance is taken?

3.1 Catharine Macaulay: *The History of England, from the accession of James I. to that of the Brunswick line, vol I (1763)*

The first work to be examined is by the English historian Catharine Macaulay. Recognized now as an important female literary figure, this work is known for being controversial because of her republican sympathies. Shane Greentree notes that the word *sympathy* is “a crucial theme of the *History*”.⁷² Greentree also adds that Macaulay’s republican views are clearly articulated throughout the *History* in tow with her sympathy. Macaulay in her introduction to the *History* comments that she looks up to the “annals of the Roman and the Greek republic”, which were written by “learned men” and these studies “excite that natural love of freedom which lies latent in the breast of every rational being”.⁷³ Furthermore, her intention in writing this history is “to measure the virtue of those characters that are treated of in this history”. There is a clear idealization of history, and a measurement of individuals. While not a common practice of today’s historians she makes her goals clear to the reader. It only briefly touches upon the Massacre, but I thought it important to include this work as it is a very typical representation of how the Massacre is mentioned in various similar British works from both this era.

Macaulay has chosen to include the Massacre in chapter eight that focuses mainly on the political relationship with Spain, the marriage-treaty with France and generally on King James I of England. James I reigned over England at the time of the Massacre and was a part of its aftermath. The context it is placed in is James sending troops to aid the Dutch against the Spaniards. The English soldiers under the command of the Dutch, Macaulay writes, were seized by the pestilence which killed two thirds.⁷⁴ The rest either escaped the sickness or enlisted into Dutch service. This then she writes was “the second barbarous insult which he [King James I, of England] had received from the Dutch republic”, with the Massacre being the first.⁷⁵ On the incident itself

⁷² Shane Greentree, “The ‘Equal Eye’ of Compassion: Reading Sympathy in Catharine Macaulay’s History of England,” *Eighteenth-century studies* 52, no. 3 (2019): 300, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecs.2019.0015>.

⁷³ Catharine Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James I. to that of the Brunswick Line.*, vol. I (London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1763), vii.

⁷⁴ Macaulay, *The History of England*, I, 259-61.

⁷⁵ Macaulay, *The History of England*, I, 261.

she writes the following: “A plot was trumped up against the English, as if they had formed a design to destroy the Dutch settlement; all of them were seized, examined, and put to a variety of tortures that exceeded every diabolical invention of the kind that had been before known”.⁷⁶ The result of the Massacre she highlights as the Dutch remaining the “sole masters of the trade”. Whether she means the trade in the East Indies, the trade of cloves, or both is unclear. Continuing, she states that further actions against the Dutch were not taken as the English king valued Dutch friendship now that there was no hope for a Spanish alliance.

Though a brief account there are several things to take note of. Macaulay has chosen to remove the Japanese’s involvement in the plot. It is only mentioned that the English were falsely accused of a plot against the Dutch. I think it implausible that such a well-read woman as Macaulay has not herself read the original pamphlets, or any form of historic literature that include the Japanese, which means she has deliberately omitted them. A. Games comments upon how famous this case was as several personal libraries included both historic works mentioning the Massacre and fiction such as Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*.⁷⁷ Therefore it is reasonable to assume that she chose to omit the Japanese as they were not essential to her intention. It seems like it was included to show the brutality of the Dutch towards the British.

This lack of clarity leads to another aspect of this work – we do not know where she has gathered her information. We can however assume from her introduction, as mentioned above, that she has used annals and other historical works. Judging eighteenth century historians for not citing is not very productive, it is rather just something I want to point out as it shows historiographic trends. One should note that Macaulay was privately educated and did not attend university. Nonetheless, she has a clear understanding of what a proper historian should aspire to be: “It is the business of an historian to digest these [the historic material], and to give a true and accurate sense of them to the public” and labour to attain truth is a “indispensable duty of an historian”.⁷⁸ So from this we can determine that she has read at least some material on the Massacre and has tried to convey the “truth”. This of course also speaks of historical methods.

Erasing the Japanese reduces the Ambon affair to the two parts – English and Dutch. From the cited paragraph above, Macaulay takes a position to defend the English, claiming that the plot was fabricated by the Dutch. She writes that the EIC merchants retracted their false confessions “with their dying breaths” and the ones who did not confess resisted the gruesome tortures.⁷⁹ It is then presented as a typical martyrdom with her maintaining that the English were innocent,

⁷⁶ Macaulay, *The History of England*, I, 261-62.

⁷⁷ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 172-74.

⁷⁸ Macaulay, *The History of England*, I, x.

⁷⁹ Macaulay, *The History of England*, I, 262.

and the Dutch were “diabolical”. Aside from her pointing out that the soon to be executed men still confessed to be innocent, she does not provide any more “proof” to sway the reader into believing that they were innocent. Likewise, there is a total lack of reason for the Dutch wanting to trump such a plot onto the EIC merchants – except of course to have sole control of the trade. Nor does she explain the Treaty of Defence and how they were allied, though she might assume the reader of this work knows the details of what happened at Ambon considering its fame and when she wrote the *History*. Published in 1763 it was almost fifty years after the Third Anglo-Dutch War and only seventeen years prior to the fourth. These wars would likely affect British views on the Dutch negatively.

The above paragraph exemplifies her tone and style as being pro-English. Since it was written in the eighteenth century this also naturally affected her language. An example is that she makes use of a lot of semicolons and colons – creating lengthy sentences. It is also written in a more narrative style, as she focuses on the emotions of the merchants: “Those that purchased relief by confession retracted it with their dying breath”, and how she comments on the politics following the Massacre.

Lots of sources have pointed out the outrage in England after news of the Massacre, and the wars themselves must have contributed to more anti-Dutch feelings. Macaulay then as we can see from her writing is not the exception to this. Not only were the original pamphlets reprinted during the several Anglo-Dutch Wars, to stir up anti-Dutch feelings, but new pamphlets were being published in this time such as *Bloudy Newes*.⁸⁰ As explained the pamphlets were reprinted during the several Anglo-Dutch Wars, which means that both her and the rest of the population would have the Massacre fresh in mind as it was used to stir up anti-Dutch feelings. Though her account is brief, its tone shares similarities with *True Relation* – like the focus on the men’s declared innocence.

3.2 Horace Stebbing Roscoe St. John: *The Indian Archipelago; its history and present state* (1853)

St. John was a British journalist and author who wrote books such as: *History of the British Conquest in India* and *Life of Christopher Columbus*. *The Indian Archipelago* is written with the intent of describing the progress of European trade and conquest in the Asian Archipelago.⁸¹ He remarks that the Indian Archipelago has been neglected and that the nations of Portugal, Spain,

⁸⁰James Ramsey, *Bloudy newes from the East-Indies:: being a true relation, and perfect abstract of the cruel, barbarous, and inhumane proceedings of the Dutch-men against the English at Amboyna.*, (London: 1651), <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A76903.0001.001>.

⁸¹Horace Stebbing Roscoe St. John, *The Indian Archipelago; its history and present state*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853), v.

England, and the Dutch Republic have long competed for a share of monopoly on the trade here, thus shaping the region. St. John also clearly has a deep fascination and admiration for this area: “there are in the Eastern Archipelago the chief islands of the world, the most prolific soils, the rarest products, the most picturesque and brilliant scenes” as well as an understanding of cultural differences “The history of those islands is not the barren history of savages”.⁸²

With the intention then being to describe the history of European trade in the Indian Archipelago it is no surprise that the Massacre makes an appearance. St. John starts by detailing the treaty between the EIC and the VOC and that the English were “in most cases the aggrieved party” and the weaker one.⁸³ Thus, setting the tone of a weak English party in the Moluccas before jumping to explaining the events of the Massacre itself: “In February, 1623, Captain Towerson, nine other Englishmen, nine Japanese, and one Portuguese sailor, accused of a conspiracy against the Dutch in Amboyna, were seized, put on a mock trial, subjected to fearful tortures, condemned, and put to death, in violation of all law, all honour, and all justice”.⁸⁴ It is immediately clear by his colourful language that St. John views the Massacre as unlawful and unjust. He backs this up by explaining how the English were far fewer in numbers (twenty compared to three hundred), there was no evidence except those extracted from torture, the English did not have access to weapons or ships.⁸⁵ This is remarkably similar to the arguments used in the EIC pamphlets. He claims that there are one hundred more Dutch soldiers than the *True Relation*, which as Clulow has hinted at was already an exaggerated number. There is not much new here to analyse about the Massacre itself as St. John merely reuses what he has read in James Mill’s *The history of British India*.

The citation above includes the only mention of the Japanese and their involvement in the Massacre. Not only is the number of Japanese wrongly cited, but there is no explanation as to why they, along with the Portuguese, would possibly work together with EIC merchants. One might also wonder why there were “nine” Japanese on Ambon at all, considering that St. John omits that they were employed by the Dutch East India Company. Without the Japanese mercenaries’ involvement, the Massacre could have looked vastly different – or not have happened at all. The sources also reveal that there were at least ten, if not eleven, executed Japanese.

Horace St. John then shifts to detailing the outrage in England spurred on by the news of the Massacre and mentions the pamphlets, Dryden’s play, memorials, and petitions to King James

⁸² St. John, *The Indian Archipelago*, 1, vi.

⁸³ St. John, *The Indian Archipelago*, 1, 317.

⁸⁴ St. John, *The Indian Archipelago*, 1, 317.

⁸⁵ St. John, *The Indian Archipelago*, 1, 318-19.

I.⁸⁶ He regrettably remarks that despite the English nation's outrage the Dutch escaped any consequence for their "atrocious proceedings" because of the king's cowardice. The result was that the Dutch then gained sole control of the Spice Islands. Further on he spends his time characterizing Dutch expanse in the East Indies. He writes that the EIC was unable to achieve anything in the Spice Islands after being "dishonoured at Amboyna". His opinion then is that the Massacre caused the English to lose their foothold in the region. A bit further back in the book he identifies redress for the Ambon tragedy as a vital reason for war with the Dutch Republic stating: "The Amboyna tragedy was not yet forgotten in England".⁸⁷ He comments on the small amount that the Dutch paid to the Ambon victims – signalling that it was a key part of the peace treaty as well. He then has included the two most common consequences of the incident.

Horace St. John simply provides the reader with about four pages on the Massacre and its aftermath. Though there is not much new information here he does back up his claims with second-hand literature from the James Mill, in addition to Anderson's *History of Commerce*, Thornton's *State and Prospects of India*, John Bruce's *Annals of the Honorable East-India Company*, Hume's *History of England*. These are cited in the way of footnotes. Mill and Thornton's are cited the most. There is one pamphlet mentioned, *True Relation*, though he cites it when describing the pamphleteering and not to use it as a source of information.

His language and style are coherently pro-English throughout. He makes use of dramatics like: "When they approached the hour of execution, and stood on the verge of eternity, they repented, and recanted the excusable lie."⁸⁸ Much like the *True Relation*. He even claims that if the charges were true: "one vile act does not extenuate another". A claim he likely would not make if the roles were reversed. A similar sentence is written further down by St. John: "It may, indeed, be possible that our countrymen had concocted some wild scheme with the Javanese troops, but no offence of their could justify the punishment inflicted." So, even if the English were plotting, they did not deserve to be executed even though the two nations were supposed to be cooperating. Such claims, dramatics, and other guilt-laden words influence the text quite heavily. This is a common trope of nineteenth-century works on the Massacre.

Though he cites his information, he does not apply a criticism towards them – at least in text. There is no doubt in his mind that the English were innocent, though as we know the available material makes it difficult to uncover. Overall, in these pages on the Massacre there are few historical techniques applied. An example is the argument, phrased similarly to the pamphlets,

⁸⁶ St. John, *The Indian Archipelago*, 1, 319-20.

⁸⁷ St. John, *The Indian Archipelago*, 1, 337.

⁸⁸ St. John, *The Indian Archipelago*, 1, 317-18.

that the plot was doomed to fail – which meant that the English would never have committed it. Can we know for certain that the EIC merchants living in close quarters to the Dutch with constant irritation towards each other would not perhaps plan, or at least wish, to be masters of the fort? The point is that there is no real discussion. St. John is here to inform the reader of the events, without giving much detail on how or why. The Dutch merchants are simply characterized as cruel and evil.

3.3 Otto van Rees: *Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde in Nederland tot het einde der achttiende eeuw* (1865)

The first Dutch work to be covered the title roughly translates to: “History of political economy in the Netherlands until the end of the eighteenth century.” Otto van Rees (1825 – 1868) was a professor at Utrecht University. The Amboyna Massacre is detailed in the second chapter: “The East Indian Company in battle with her rivals”.

This is the only publication that I just have access to in Dutch - which results in me having to rely on Google Translate as a translating tool. In many ways this is unfortunate. Translating can never fully transfer the original language’s intent, especially when done by a program rather than someone who comprehends the actual language. This can result in errors and loss of meaning. One of the criteria that I am studying in these works are the language and style, and this might therefore not be fully accurate. The Dutch language has also evolved, like all languages since the time of writing in 1865 which makes it even more difficult. This must be taken into consideration. However, seeing as it has been such a difficult task to try and unearth Dutch authors who write about the Amboyna Massacre in the nineteenth century in English, using Google Translate is my only way of including a Dutch author in this period. Omitting this work would result in a gap in the historiography that I am not comfortable with.

Van Rees informs us that the English and the Dutch were in fierce competition in the East Indian Archipelago and due to Dutch strength, the English were losing their foothold.⁸⁹ He writes that Jan Coen was ready to face any adversary to take control of the region for the VOC. Further on Van Rees believes that the Treaty of Defence only resulted in causing bitterness and resentment, especially from the English, because they were in the shadow of the Dutch. The VOC merchants complained to the States General that the English were enjoying all the benefits of the treaty, while fulfilling none of their obligations for a third of the payments. Before addressing the Massacre, he believes that the English had a secret deal with the sultan of Bantam, which could endanger the Dutch at Ambon. Van Rees leads up to the discussion of the Massacre by explaining

⁸⁹ Otto van Rees, *Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde in Nederland tot het einde der achttiende eeuw* (Utrecht: Kemink & Zoon, 1865), 60-61.

Dutch superiority over the English in the Spice Archipelago, and that their only saving grace in staying there was the 1619 treaty.

The Dutch author writes this about the Amboyna Massacre: “A conspiracy, forged in February 1623 by English commercial agents to seize the Dutch fort at Amboina with the help of bribed soldiers, but discovered in time and punished by the execution of the guilty, gave the government in the Dutch East Indies a desirable occasion to settle with the Dutch government for good.”⁹⁰ The bribed soldiers are of course the Japanese, but they are not further mentioned by him. There is no more information on the events of the Massacre itself. This brief explanation shows that Van Rees, a Dutch author, fully believes that the English were plotting against the Dutch. He omits to include a plausible intention for the English, as he affirms that their position was too weak to survive on their own.⁹¹

The Dutch supremacy and the Ambon incident caused the English to lose their ground in the region according to van Rees, but he also comments that they still had some foothold remaining in Bantam.⁹² They finally gave this up in 1682 because they sided with the sultan of Bantam, rather than his son – which resulted in them being expelled from the East Indies Archipelago. Van Rees acknowledges that the English’s trade in the region took a hit as a result of the massacre but upholds that it did not wipe them out completely until decades later. This goes against the previous authors, and as we will see this idea will not come back until much later.

Other consequences he brings up is how the Massacre stirred up anti-Dutch opinions and he sees this a vital cause for the declaration of war in 1652 between the two nations.⁹³ Continuing, he states how retribution for the surviving merchants and the deceased’s families was part of the peace negotiations at Westminster in 1654. Here he also comments upon Van Speult and his decision at Ambon: “This Ambonese murder, as the English called the perhaps hasty execution of their compatriots, did give rise to heavy and long-lasting conflicts between England and the Republic”. The Amboyna Massacre then affected both the declaration of war and the peace treaty during the first Anglo-Dutch war.

Concerning sources, one can gather that he has read letters, especially those from and addressed to Coen as he mentions these in his text, and he would have most likely have read at least *A True Declaration*.⁹⁴ He does refer to a chronicle at page 65 (Kronyk), which suggests he has read

⁹⁰ van Rees, *Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde in Nederland*, 61-62. Translated.

⁹¹ van Rees, *Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde in Nederland*, 60.

⁹² van Rees, *Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde in Nederland*, 61-62.

⁹³ van Rees, *Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde in Nederland*, 62-63.

⁹⁴ van Rees, *Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde in Nederland*, 60-61.

some printed primary material. He also applies footnotes and from these he uses secondary literature from G. Lauts, J.A. van der Chijs, Lauts, Lieuwe van Aitzema, and P.A. Leupk. These Dutch authors he cites from wrote works such as: *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde van Nederlands Indië*, and *Geschiedenis van der veroveringen der Nederlanders in Indië*. They are history works on language, geography, ethnology and on the Dutch in the East Indies. Using only Dutch literature might be a factor in skewing his judgement on the Massacre since they would likely defend the VOC merchant's decision. Aside from these there are no new sources or literature of note that makes his work stand out. The historical techniques make it clear that he is well-read on the subject. It is presented in such a way that the reader is not meant to make up their own mind, but rather understands his opinions.

His language and style are hard for me to comment fully upon due to the need of translating with digital tools. However, what I can gather is that van Rees' style is written with a Dutch audience in mind as he spends time relating the supremacy of the Dutch and the weakness of the English. This combined with the portrayal of the Massacre suggests a pro-Dutch attitude that affects the writing. Still, I think that his expression is not ridden with jabs towards the English, it is presented more matter-of-factly. Adding to this we can briefly mention his purpose of history which, based on the title and his introduction, has the aim to explain the financial and industrial policies of the eighteenth century.⁹⁵

3.4 Demetrius Charles de Kavanagh Boulger: *The story of India* (1897)

Demetrius Boulger (1853 – 1928) was an English author who wrote several historical works such as *India in the nineteenth century* and *History of Belgium*. The publication I review for this historiography is part of a series of books on several different geographical areas. They are The British Empire, India, Australasia, Canada, and finally South Africa. Boulger wrote the volume on India. It is written at a time when India was part of the British Empire and the end of the Age of Imperialism. This will likely affect how he as a Brit frames the narrative.

Chapter two of this book is named “Our merchant adventures” which contains the Amboyna Massacre. It starts with the allure of India and the East Indies to the nations of Europe and the competition to get there. According to Boulger the Portuguese, and later the Dutch, took the South-East route to the Indies, while Britain clung stubbornly to attempt the North-west passage.⁹⁶ The other two nations then gained a stronger foothold in the region. The reader then is presented a narrative of the struggling English traders trying to gain access in the Moluccas and

⁹⁵ van Rees, *Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde in Nederland*, vi.

⁹⁶ Demetrius Charles de Kavanagh Boulger, *The story of India* ed. Howard Angus Kennedy, The Story of the Empire Series, (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1897), 13-15.

several “humiliations” by the Dutch such as the massacre at Pulo Condore, the fight in Pattania Harbour, and the sinking of several EIC ships.⁹⁷ Then after years of fighting the news of the 1619 treaty reached the Indies to help the English. After being expelled from Bantam the English set up a new station at Ambon “but even here the Dutch would not leave them alone”.⁹⁸

The account of the Massacre is nothing but original: “[Mynheer Carpentier] was resolved to expel the English from the Archipelago, the latter saw a good opportunity of realising this desire by inventing a plot on the part of the English residents at Amboyna to overthrow the Dutch with the co-operation of the Japanese”.⁹⁹ Claiming that the Dutch invented the plot is nothing new, but very few even mention Pieter de Carpentier, who was the Governor-General of Batavia for the VOC. Van Speult would have been the more obvious candidate for having invented the plot, but it seems Boulger believes the plan to rid the Indies of the English to originate from De Carpentier. He does not provide any evidence for these claims, not pamphlets, letters, nor secondary literature. It therefore stands on its own as a wild accusation. To clarify I do not expect him to have handled sources in the same way as modern historians but seeing as Horace St. John used sources in footnotes to back up his claims, this falls short. There could at least be a mention in the text of where he gained this information. Further on he assures us that to prove the existence of the plot, the Dutch captured and tortured the English, Japanese and the lone Portuguese as to extract confessions on the conspiracy. The plot by the English was then a plot by the Dutch to remove them from Ambon. Having obtained the confessions the Dutch then executed “ten Englishmen and their associates” on the 17th February 1623.¹⁰⁰ The number of executed Japanese is claimed to be nine.¹⁰¹ Aside from this, their role in is minimized. Even the Japanese sentry, Hytesio, asking curious questions to the Dutch is not mentioned.

From the earlier citations one can gather that Boulger was pro-English and attempted to victimize the EIC merchants: “The incident is very properly known to history as the Massacre of Amboyna”, and was outraged that it took thirty years for Cromwell to obtain compensation from the VOC.¹⁰² There is no mention of the tense situation between the merchants on Ambon, and how the two both used violence against each other in the Indies before the treaty. He also makes use of terms like: “barbarous act”, “victims”, “calamity” when referring to the Massacre, as well as “us” and “our” when referring to the EIC/English – which I interpret as a sign of a nationalist

⁹⁷ Boulger, *The story of India* 22-24.

⁹⁸ Boulger, *The story of India* 25.

⁹⁹ Boulger, *The story of India* 25.

¹⁰⁰ Boulger, *The story of India* 26.

¹⁰¹ Boulger, *The story of India* 25.

¹⁰² Boulger, *The story of India* 26.

agenda because of association to the merchants. His style then makes it clear that it is written with the intent of reminding an English audience this heinous act.

What then is Boulger's believed aftermath of the Massacre? He writes that "The Amboyna Massacre marked the relaxation of our grasp on what may be called the Dutch Indies, but it was the determining cause which led to the concentration of our efforts of the mainland of India itself".¹⁰³ His conclusion then is that even though they were driven out of the Spice Islands, their victories in other places gained them privileges from the Moghul in India. It can be read as a defence of the nation. We see this in how he argues that even though ten Englishmen were murdered and several more tortured, it gave them India – which was a bigger win than the Dutch got in the Spice Archipelago.

Boulger's work I find quite underwhelming due to him stating almost random claims about the Massacre without once backing them up by citing other historians nor the available sources. The number of historical techniques applied then is almost non-existing. His language and style are very pro-English, always highlighting how the English were victorious or gained more than the others in the end. The Amboyna Massacre is likely included to invoke a feeling of disgust towards the Dutch and display the British as hardworking and accomplishing more than the other nations by "playing" fairer. This work does not contribute much to the historiography of the Amboyna Massacre by examining any new sources, making new deductions, shedding light on other aspects, constructing new conclusions from known sources, etc. The Massacre is there to explain the English conquest over mainland India.

3.5 Sir William Wilson Hunter: *History of India Volume VII: From the first European Settlements to the Founding of the English East India Company (1907)*

Part of a multivolume this is the seventh volume regarding the *History of India*. Sir William Wilson Hunter is the first, of the analysed, who spends a considerable amount of time on the Amboyna Massacre. So much so that there is a dedicated chapter to it: "The End of the Struggle: The Tragedy of Amboyna". Most likely it is named after the play by John Dryden. Published in 1907 it makes an excellent choice to portray British history writing on the Amboyna Massacre at the start of the twentieth century. Sir William Hunter, a Scottish historian, spent about fifteen years in India in the Indian Civil Service.¹⁰⁴ Later in life he spent much time writing histories on both India and British India. We can therefore recognize that he has considerable knowledge of the area's culture, history, and geography.

¹⁰³ Boulger, *The story of India* 27-28.

¹⁰⁴ Francis Henry Skrine, *Life of Sir William Wilson Hunter: a vice-president of the Royal Asiatic Society, etc.* (New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901), xii-xiii.

Hunter starts the chapter off by affirming that the governor-general, Coen, wanted to claim the Archipelago for the Netherlands because the first governor-general received the command: “The commerce of the Moluccas, Amboyna, and Banda should belong to the Company, and that no other nation in the world should possess the least part”.¹⁰⁵ He also sees the treaty of 1619 as a sort of saving grace for the English in that according to “European diplomacy”, Coen had the right to go to war against the English because of the attacks and quarrels between the two nations in the Indies. From reading this introduction I gather that Hunter wants to signal that the Dutch, and specifically Coen, was planning to seize the entire Archipelago for themselves. He continues to inform of the Dutchmen’s plan by pointing out how miserable they made the English in Batavia, and that the EIC ordered the English out of the region in February of 1623 but that: “They arrived too late.”¹⁰⁶

On the Massacre itself Boulger informs us that: “On the evening of February 10, 1623, a Japanese soldier of the Dutch garrison had some talk with the sentries about the number of the troops and the times of changing the watch. When questioned by the Governor Van Speult next day, February 11th, he explained that he had merely chatted with the soldiers “for his own amusement.” Indeed, the steward of the Dutch factory afterwards declared that “it was an usual speech amongst soldiers to enquire one another how strong the watch might be, that they might know how many hours they might stand sentinel.”¹⁰⁷ This motivated the Dutch to interrogate Hytesio and the other Japanese, and then again to torture the English “by fire and water”.¹⁰⁸ Then after several days of interrogation and imprisonment, on: “February 27th (English date), the ten Englishmen, nine Japanese, and the Portuguese captain of slaves were led out to execution “in a long procession round the town,” through crowds of natives who had been summoned by beat of drum “to behold this triumph over the English.” Like the *True Relation* he tells of a “divine wrath” that fell upon the Dutch in the form of a storm that destroyed two of their ships, and a pest that killed “one thousand people”. He further claimed that “The innocence of Towerson and his fellow sufferers rests upon no such stories, whether false or true.”

The author has made use of a comprehensive list of sources which is referred to in the chapter. In addition to having used the pamphlets, such as *True Relation*, and several other accounts that are available: court minutes, letters, the writings of the English in their prayer-books, statements from the Dutch Council at Ambon, the depositions of the surviving six Englishmen, the answers

¹⁰⁵ Sir William Wilson Hunter, *History of India Volume VII: From the first European Settlements to the Founding of the English East India Company.*, 9 vols., vol. 7, ed. Abraham Valentine Williams Jackson (London: The Grolier Society, 1907), 109-11.

¹⁰⁶ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 110-15.

¹⁰⁷ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 115-16.

¹⁰⁸ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 123.

of the Ambon judges, the statement of the Dutch steward at the factory, and he cites someone named Hallam.¹⁰⁹ This Hallam is most likely the English historian Henry Hallam. The list of material he applies portrays statements from both sides of the struggle. While his information is from these sources, it is not always transparent within the text where he has gathered which information as there are no footnotes. He often mentions that X person wrote to X in a letter but does not specify which letters. However, he relies heavily on the pamphlets for information: “Authority for all these statements may be found in the first pamphlet, “A True Relation””.¹¹⁰, and these are not the most objective historical sources to rely on. This naturally colours his writing in such a way that it is a retelling of the *True Relation*. His main arguments which defend the English can also be found in the EIC pamphlet: absence of evidence (except confessions under torture), neglect of safeguards as portrayed by Dutch law on judicial torture, the improbability of the plot, and that the declarations died with the victims.¹¹¹ As such he declares the ten Englishmen were unjustly sentenced to death.

He then provides much more info on what occurred after the Amboyna Massacre. The king and nation was outraged by the news, however, the king had to dry his tears and not mention the Massacre as to show goodwill to the Dutch envoys negotiating a treaty to become allies to fight with Spain.¹¹² The aftermath of the Massacre is depicted by him as a political mess between England and the Netherlands, where James I’s hands were tied because of negotiations with the Dutch Republic in both trade and war, in addition to the Dutch upholding that the incident was properly handled as stated in treaties and by their jurisdiction at Ambon.¹¹³ The six surviving English witnesses were sent to the Netherlands and awaited trial for several years where nothing happened. Hunter then sees Cromwell’s taking of the crown of England as them finally receiving a “real man” on the throne.¹¹⁴ He claim this because Cromwell led to the case being brought up again and retributions finally repaid as both the London Company and the heirs of the executed English traders at Ambon received money. Not only then does he believe the Massacre was a cause for the first war, but he claims that: “The memory of a great wrong unredressed and of innocent blood unavenged embittered their trade rivalry, intensified each crisis of political strain, and furnished a popular cry for two wars.”¹¹⁵ It also affected Anglo-Dutch alliance for a century. He however does not believe that the Massacre caused the English to withdraw from the islands

¹⁰⁹ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 117-19 & 46.

¹¹⁰ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 121.

¹¹¹ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 128.

¹¹² Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 129-31.

¹¹³ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 139-48.

¹¹⁴ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 154-55.

¹¹⁵ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 155.

as he points out that the president in council at Java had decided to withdraw from the clove and nutmeg Archipelago before the Massacre.¹¹⁶

In many occasions Hunter use the terminologies of “us”, “we”, and “our” when regarding the English back in the seventeenth century: “In Batavia Coen made our position so miserable [...]” and “So far from restitution having been made to us under the treaty of 1619.”¹¹⁷ This justifies analysing British historians as one part since Hunter as a Scotsman identified with these long dead English merchants and saw them as “brethren”. It also accumulates evidence of a nationalistic agenda. His career in India has likely affected these identifications with the English. We see this in how he frames the narrative throughout the chapter of the poor and innocent English being falsely accused and how “the ten Englishmen were unjustly done to death”.¹¹⁸ Hunter’s arguments and phrasing then both reflect a pro-English tone throughout the narrative.

The first half of the chapter is basically a retelling of the contents of *True Relation*, and the next half is about the political aftermath, and how the company had to rely on the English crown to achieve judicial redress.¹¹⁹ This is a first for the examined historians, as up till now they have simply included the Massacre in the context of larger events and the history of the East Indies. This has led to quite short accounts. Hunter’s chapter however spans fifty-four pages. I have also highlighted how Hunter writes with a nationalistic agenda and identifies with the English merchants. It is likely that his career, and possibly James VI of Scotland’s ascension to the throne as James I of England in 1603 affected how Hunter interpreted the Massacre.

3.6 Frederik Willem Stapel: *The Ambon “Massacre” (9 March, 1623) (1923)*

A Dutch historian who has written several works concerning Dutch East Indies, colonial history, and Indonesian history. The work I am examining is the first article with a sole focus on the Massacre. The previous works have all been sections of large historical works that have covered broader fields. Here Stapel gives us his thoughts and opinions of the famous Massacre with a narrower focus. This work can stress how type of history affects the writing of history.

“The present author requests attention for an occurrence which took place 300 years ago in this country [...] in the hope of shedding light on a historical event which is still seen by many (not only English) as a shame on the Company servants involved”.¹²⁰ These words are from the opening paragraph of Stapel’s essay and signals a distinct outlook that not many Dutch authors adopt,

¹¹⁶ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 115.

¹¹⁷ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 111 & 12.

¹¹⁸ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 128.

¹¹⁹ Hunter, *History of India Volume VII*, 7, 154-58.

¹²⁰ Frederik Willem Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre" (9 March, 1623)," in *Dutch authors on Asian history*, ed. Marie Antoinette Petronella. van Opstall Meilink-Roelofs, Margot E. Schutte, G. J. (The Netherlands: Foris Publications, 1988), 184.

and supports the credibility of Stapel as trying to embrace a more open interpretation of the Massacre. This announcement however stands in the shadow of the title that places the word massacre between quotation marks, most likely to question the terminology as well as signalling a pro-Dutch attitude.

Another sign of pro-Dutch attitude is how Stapel writes of the tortures. Not once is the form of torture (water and fire) remarked and he describes these events as “light infliction of pain”, with only two English confessing after “severe torture”.¹²¹ He does later state that the English “exaggerated the degree of torture” and by this he refers to the pamphlets.¹²² It is reasonable to assume that the act of being waterboarded, which the Dutch often referred to as a humane method of torture, felt gruesome. Stapel then downplays the sincerity of the torture.

Stapel’s narrative of the Massacre is as follows: “A Japanese soldier in English service was caught investigating the fortification at a forbidden place and pumping the sentry. [...] after torture he declared that he had been sent out spying by the English [...] The Council now considered it desirable to take all the English into safe custody [...] after light torture he [Towerson] admitted that the confessions of the others were true. [...] On the grounds of *lèse majesté* he proposed that all the accused, with the exception of two Englishmen and two Japanese, be executed by the sword”.¹²³ I have chosen to abbreviate but include the most important parts. From this one can gather that the language and style applied by Stapel is quite different from British authors, as he chooses phrases like “light torture”, “safe custody”, and “*lèse-majesté*”. A stark contrast from terms like “bloody”, “cruel” and “barbarous”. He has also selected to state that Hytesio worked for the English. He most likely means that as of that moment working for the English, though he does not elaborate that the Japanese were in Dutch employment – which I believe Stapel is aware of. On the amount of men killed he writes: “ten Englishmen, ten Japanese and one Portuguese lost their heads on the scaffold.”¹²⁴

Stapel believes that the Massacre was a thorn in foot for the English’s relationship with the Dutch and the population in London was in such an uproar that no Dutch were safe.¹²⁵ He comments on the Massacre’s role in works such as *History of the Barbarous Cruelties and Massacres* by R. Hall and Dryden’s play. To this day “the Englishman still speaks with bitterness of the “Massacre””.¹²⁶ The longevity of the Massacre in the English nation might be as a result of the case striking at the heart of the Englishmen, but more likely because of what Stapel tries to hint at –

¹²¹ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 184-86.

¹²² Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 186.

¹²³ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 185-86.

¹²⁴ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 186.

¹²⁵ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 187-88.

¹²⁶ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 188.

it was implemented as a propaganda tool to rouse the English against the Dutch whenever necessary.

Now to the thesis of his article. Stapel makes a list of 4 accusations by the East India Company in the pamphlets *The Answer* and the *Reply* that he wants to examine:¹²⁷ 1) The conspiracy was forged by the Dutch to remove the English from Ambon, 2) The English were too few to even be able to kill the Dutch and capture the fort, 3) “The Dutch Governor and his Council were not competent to try the English”, and lastly divided into six parts 4) A. The sentence was not based on evidence, only confessions from torture, B. “The acts of the College of Judges at Amboyna ... are neither agreeable to the forms of other Courts, nor uniforme in themselves”, C. The prisoners at Ambon were not free of bonds at least a day after the torture – which was a general principle of Netherlandish law, D. It is not clear what confessions were gathered with or without torture, E. The prisoners did not sign their confessions when “free of bonds and irons”, F. “The same confessions are full of contrarities”. Some of these claims we have already gone through with previous authors, especially English, and Stapel does create an accurate representation of the EIC’s and English authors line of reasoning. I will briefly summarise these accusations.

Let us start with the first accusation. Stapel makes use of the *Memorial of the Heeren Bewindhebbers to the States-General* (12 October 1624) to argue against this by pointing out that Coen could do the same as he did on Banda and shut down the English trade, as well as the fact that the Ambon Council pardoned two Englishmen so they could secure the EIC’s goods.¹²⁸ If this was the intention he believes it to be the work of individuals, and not the VOC.

To combat the claim that the English were too few in numbers the author lists several reasons why this is a bad excuse for there not existing a plot: they had “won” the Japanese, they had more than six servants and slaves because: “this is thoroughly implausible to anyone who knows those times and its customs”, there was an English ship on its way, the attack would happen when the governor and a number of soldiers were not at Ambon, the pamphlet *Reply* admits: “the foolishnesse of the plot excuseth no man”.¹²⁹ To me Stapel exaggerates the English’s force though he makes some valid points. However, had he had a source to back up his claim that the English most likely had more servants and slaves, it would have made him much more believable.

The next point is the competence of the Council at Ambon. Judicial decisions was reserved to the Council of Defence as stated in the 1619 treaty. Stapel remarks that the treaty specifically

¹²⁷ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", 188-92.

¹²⁸ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", 188-89.

¹²⁹ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", 189.

states that all “disputes” between the two had to go to the Council, and he refers to the Dutch historian J.K.J. de Jonge and his *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië* who argued that no jurist would classify a criminal case as a dispute, but rather an offence which was to be punished within the jurisdiction of where it was committed.¹³⁰ Stapel also writes that Herman van Speult as Governor of Ambon had full right to administer justice by VOC decree.

For the final accusation I will keep it brief. Stapel reject the complaint that all the confessions were drawn out with torture because the “tortures on Ambon were in no way imposed with exceptional stringency”, and Edward Collins admitted to the conspiracy without any torture.¹³¹ He agrees that there are inaccuracies in the documents, but shuts down the notion that all interrogations were conducted on the same day.¹³² He agrees that the confessions were not confirmed within twenty-four hours after torture, but again downplaying the torture stating that only “minor torture with water” was applied.¹³³ Accusation E is also true in Stapel’s view since there is no documentation that the confessions were signed. Finally, the complaint that the same confessions are full of contrarities. On this he admits that contradictions are found in the interrogations like what the plan actually was and the dates being different. This however Stapel advocates is natural when discussing the various possibilities of attack, and if there was no plan of a coup then there would not be so many parts of the confessions being similar. Usually, this argument is used to signal that there was no coup because if it really was planned out then the merchants and mercenaries’ statements would be largely consistent. Stapel turns this around by pointing out that it was planned because all the confessions state Towerson had won over the Japanese.

Frederik Stapel admits that: “From the above it is sufficiently clear that the judicial procedure left very much to be desired”.¹³⁴ However, he emphasizes that this should be expected from VOC employees who only followed the basic practice (of illegal torture) which had been in use for 200 years at that point: “They acted as was always done in the Netherlands or in the Indies”. I think this is a fair assessment as we should not try to insert our values or practices on to the people of the seventeenth century. As we have seen in the period leading up to the Amboyna Massacre, violence was a common part of life in the East Indies between the English and the Dutch. Nevertheless, the depictions of the torture are quite violent, and the scenes were met with outrage from the English which perhaps signals that it was unnecessarily brutal.

¹³⁰ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 189.

¹³¹ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 190-92.

¹³² Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 191-92.

¹³³ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 192.

¹³⁴ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 192-93.

Two documents often cited to signal English innocence is Towerson's declaration of innocence, written in captivity, and Samuel Coulson's which he wrote in his prayer-book. Stapel addresses these documents but shuts both down. Using the authentic copy of the case documents he quotes Towerson who to show his confession of guilt: "Alas! If it were to beginne againe, it should never be done!", when questioned by Herman van Speult on if this was his reward for friendship and hospitality.¹³⁵ This same quote is found in the VOC pamphlet *A True Declaration*.¹³⁶ Furthermore on Coulson's innocence, he merely his declaration of innocence as a sign of his guiltlessness alone. This he backs up by reminding the reader of John Beomont's (EIC employee at Luhu on Seram) repeated confessions – even after receiving a pardon in Batavia.

At the end of his article, he sums up his findings in four points.¹³⁷ 1) In 1623 the English on Ambon had prepared an attack on the Dutch authority there. 2) The competence of the judges in the action on the matter cannot be doubted. 3) In the procedure a number of informalities were committed, which were not however contrary to the practice in the Motherland. 4) It is not justified to speak of judicial murder. He then has repeated many of the similar arguments as found in Dutch pamphlets and by Dutch historians, though with a solid list of sources to back him up.

In his bibliography the majority of literature is from Dutch authors, with the only English author being George Edmundson and his *Anglo-Dutch Rivalry*. The sources he makes use of are both VOC and EIC pamphlets, letters from De Carpentier and the Council, and the authentic copy of the case documents. He also makes use of manuscripts such as *Memorie* and *Copie authentique van de confession en sentiën van Mr. Towerson ende complicen*, which he has accessed in the national archive. Stapel and Coolhaas are the first to examine these.¹³⁸ His list of sources is impressive, and he builds up his arguments based on these. The use of sources and his conclusions identify one difficulty in examining all of these works. Did Frederik Stapel believe there was no conspiracy before doing his research, which made him use the source material he did - or was it as a result of the research that he unearthed his conclusions? For Stapel his nationality could have affected his choice of literature, seeing as it is mostly Dutch, and also the way he viewed the sources. It is difficult to point to one specific author and state the reasons for his conclusion and choice of literature, but Stapel is also an example of a Dutch historian who chooses to question the EIC pamphlets and merchants, more than he does the VOC. He defends Van Speult and his men for not knowing any better and acting according to the situation. However, his work with these historical techniques implies a dedicated historian.

¹³⁵ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", 193-94.

¹³⁶ *A True Declaration*, 8.

¹³⁷ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", 194.

¹³⁸ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 200.

Stapel gives his thoughts on the consequences of the Massacre. On the wars he writes: “Until the Peace of Breda in 1667, this event repeatedly served as excuse for declarations of war, detentions of ships and other unpleasantness”.¹³⁹ It then was a cause for both the first and the second Anglo-Dutch War, and other disputes between the nations. There is no discussion of how this affected the English’s spice trade, except from confessing that if the Dutch wanted to remove the competition there would have been better ways to accomplish that.¹⁴⁰

How then is the language and style of this article? Firstly, it is appropriate to comment on the title. Placing *massacre* between quotation marks makes the historian’s opinion on the Amboyna Massacre quite clear. It was not a massacre – it was a validated punishment of criminals and “not justified to speak of judicial murder”.¹⁴¹ Stapel writes clearly and with a mostly neutral tone without any attempts at literary effect and unnecessary phrases. There are hints of a lecturing tone and elements of bitterness towards the English complaints of the Massacre, and he sides with the Dutch. He also claims that his investigation is impartial and that one must reach the following conclusions based on the research.¹⁴²

Stapel’s intention in writing this article is stated in the introduction. He specifies that his attention to the Amboyna Massacre is not a result of “feeling of jubilee but rather in the hope of shedding light on a historical event which is still seen by many (not only English) as a shame on the Company servants involved”.¹⁴³ From this use of phrasing itself and the rest of the article it seems that he seeks to educate the reader on what transpired on this historical event. This is an article meant to not only educate the readers, but also point out the various “mistakes” other historians have made. He lists several of the arguments used against the VOC men and goes through them one by one, using the aforementioned sources to make his case against English innocence.

3.7 Willem P. Coolhaas: *Notes and comments on the so-called Amboina massacre (1942)*

Willem Coolhaas (1899-1981) was a Dutch historian and government official in the Dutch East Indies.¹⁴⁴ Well-versed in Indonesian culture and society he also had a keen interest in Dutch colonial history. The editors of *Dutch Authors on Asian historiography* state that he was crucial

¹³⁹ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 186.

¹⁴⁰ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 188-89.

¹⁴¹ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 194.

¹⁴² Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 194.

¹⁴³ Stapel, "The Ambon "Massacre", " 184.

¹⁴⁴ Willem Philippus Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments on the so-called Amboina massacre," in *Dutch authors on Asian history*, ed. Marie Antoinette Petronella. van Opstall Meilink-Roelofs, Margot E. Schutte, G. J. (The Netherlands: Foris Publications, 1988), 196-97.

for the history of the VOC as he completed *Jan Pietersz. Coen: Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf in Indië* and what they claim as his opus magnum: *Generale Missiven*.

This article shares a similarity in the title with Stapel's as they both clearly show their opinion of this event being classified as a massacre by the English. Coolhaas goes a bit further by calling it the "so-called" Amboyna Massacre. The purpose with the article is to explain the situation in Ambon most accurately and provide an answer to all the wrong conclusions that previous scholars have come to, much in the same vein as Stapel. It seeks to explore how later historians have erred when handling criminal cases of the VOC in the Indian Archipelago, namely by using "the most famous of the said criminal cases" – The Amboyna Massacre.¹⁴⁵ He also covers the trial and the propaganda that followed. The article is split into three parts.

Concerning the first part I want to comment that Coolhaas starts his article by showing insight into the lives of the European communities in the Spice Archipelago during the seventeenth century and tries to imagine how their daily life must have been.¹⁴⁶ He comments on what it must be like living so far away with just a handful of Europeans from different social origins, climate, environment, food, sanitary conditions, alcohol, lack of religious services, and administration of justice in these remote areas. Including these thoughts and discussions on the life of a VOC or EIC merchant in the Moluccas is fruitful and, in my opinion, quite necessary if one seeks to understand their decisions and actions. Having lived and worked in the area for a long time combined with his knowledge and interest in history he shows historical awareness and a comprehension of how the traders' life. This historical technique is something all historians should strive after. Life in Ambon for these traders from Europe is difficult to comprehend, and their environment would have affected every part of their decisions. He also comments on the role of the historian who has an overview of how events transpired and how this affects the research: "Looking back as we do from the vantage ground on which we stand, it is possible to see that in these islands the establishment of territorial dominion must have preceded commercial freedom". This view is present throughout the entire article.

In the second part he moves on to detailing how the Massacre has been handled. There is a clear-cut distinction in Coolhaas' opinion of English and Dutch historians writing about the Amboyna Massacre. For example, British historians are mostly criticized by Coolhaas for repeating the

¹⁴⁵ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 200-04.

¹⁴⁶ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 201-03.

same wild accusations and for generally presenting a biased description of the Massacre at Ambon.¹⁴⁷ He presents a mini-historiography, so to speak, on the Massacre mentioning several English historians like B. Willson, A. Wright, and H. Ross to present how they have handled the incident in a lacklustre way. He faults them for repeating the arguments found in *True Relation*. Generally, our Dutch scholar asserts that British historiography on the Massacre is stained with a “false representation of the malicious legend”.¹⁴⁸ An exception to this seems to be George Edmundson, who receives praise from Coolhaas – in which he writes: “he personally does not regard the trial as a murder”. Fellow Dutch historians receive mostly praise from him: “Stapel’s article and Colenbrander’s account, together with De Jonge’s description, supplementing one another as they do, give a clear description of the actual events and their consequences, that is to say, as far as these can be reconstructed from the all but clear sources”.¹⁴⁹ He refrains from detailing the Massacre himself and believe the above-mentioned sources to be enough. Stapel’s article, which I analysed above, is extensively applied by Coolhaas and he gives him much credit for his objectivity and restrained discussion.¹⁵⁰ However, he is also not afraid to correct Stapel on errors: “Stapel’s information (p. 212) regarding the sentence demanded by Fiscal de Bruyn and the sentence actually imposed is not quite correct.”¹⁵¹ He favours Dutch literature, but let the sources decide his opinion rather than nationhood.

This clear distinction between the English and Dutch historians, is also present in how he handles the pamphlets. Though the VOC was the first to publish its account and published some more he describes the English pamphlets as “propagandistic literature”, one-sided and distorted views of the incident.¹⁵² He also labels them as “lampoons” which signals a derogatory opinion towards them. The English pamphlet in question are *True Relation* and *The Answer*. While these are indeed doubtful as sources, the same can be applied to the VOC pamphlets as they are written by a biased part of the Massacre. This, however, is not commented upon even though he makes use of *Authentick Copy* in his article, like when he discusses how many Japanese were executed. There are several instances where Coolhaas makes it obvious that he values Dutch sources and literature more than English – which makes sense seeing as supports the decision made by the Council at Ambon.

¹⁴⁷ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 204-05.

¹⁴⁸ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 205.

¹⁴⁹ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 205.

¹⁵⁰ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 204-05.

¹⁵¹ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 205.

¹⁵² Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 210-11.

Though he is pro-Dutch regarding the Massacre, he does not deny that the situation was messy: “The “confessions and sentences” have been so carelessly drawn up and are so full of inconsistencies and errors and so summary they give no clear idea either of the proceedings at the trial or of what the English and Japanese had actually been up to”.¹⁵³ He harshly criticizes Isaacque de Bruyne, the Fiscal, biting off more than he could chew which resulted in a load of legal errors. After commenting on the various judicial errors he maintains that the Dutch at Ambon did the best according to their abilities and that during the later hearings by the VOC they maintained that the confessions of the English were handled correctly: “Though the number of formal errors in the procedure was large, there is nothing to show that the Amboina judges were not acting in good faith.”¹⁵⁴ This he defends by commenting upon several trial documents and hearings. Coolhaas then covers the reaction of the English and the spread of pamphlets, which were grossly exaggerated considering the evidence he has pointed out: “The assertions of the English lampoons certainly provide no grounds for this.”¹⁵⁵

The third and final part is the longest and is concerned with the competition in these islands and how a struggle such as the Amboyna Massacre was likely to occur due to the forced cooperation.¹⁵⁶ In this part he makes use of letters to shed light on the merchants’ situation and how they must have felt: “Let us pause here to try and put ourselves in the position of these Dutch and English company employees posted in the numerous remote factories, where ships seldom called.” and “There were all kinds of signs pointing to a general attack”.¹⁵⁷ He continues by arguing that the English, though small in numbers, could achieve a lot with such an attack, and find them all a sorry lot of “braggarts, drunks and swindlers”.¹⁵⁸ Generally he spends his time here arguing for why the English would likely attack.

Nearing the end, he applies the confessions of the Japanese and English at Ambon to establish three possibilities for the plot, which could be combined in either way:¹⁵⁹ “1) They waited for the English ship for backup, 2) the “Moors” of Seran were in on the plot, 3) they were going to strike when the governor-general Van Speult was not present at Ambon.” He goes through each of these and concludes that: I have the impression that Towerson himself had no clear idea of how he was going to seize the castle.”¹⁶⁰ He then finishes his article by describing how such an

¹⁵³ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 207.

¹⁵⁴ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 208-15.

¹⁵⁵ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 216.

¹⁵⁶ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 217 & 32.

¹⁵⁷ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 220 & 24.

¹⁵⁸ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 226-28.

¹⁵⁹ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 228-29.

¹⁶⁰ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 229-33.

outfall at Ambon was likely due to the nature of competition and that the “murder” was more important for propagandistic purposes rather than internal politics.

On the number of executed men Coolhaas comments that one of the eleven Japanese was spared execution, in addition to ten Englishmen being sentenced to death.¹⁶¹ In his footnotes he comments that Stapel mentions twelve Japanese, which he sees as impossible as there were only eleven. He also refers to the *Authentick Copy* pamphlet’s naming of the nine sentenced Japanese, where Soysimo (Coolhaas spells it as Soysima) and Sacoube were the two spared. This then should be nine executed, but using De Carpentier’s letters to the Gentlemen XVIII, De Carpentier wrote that ten Japanese had been executed. To make sense of this Coolhaas believes that only Sacoube was spared due to his poor age and health, while Soysima was not because his confession was almost identical to the other executed Japanese and therefore, he believes his name was omitted as a result of an oversight. This logic is supported by Adam Clulow in his article on the Japanese at Ambon.¹⁶²

The article is well-documented, and Coolhaas spends considerable time backing up each of his claims. I have already commented upon the range of secondary literature he makes use of, and how he values the Dutch authors more than the British, and will therefore jump to going through his sources. He applies *Calendar of State Papers*, various letters between the VOC and EIC merchants, manuscripts such as Stapel used, interrogations, court documents, and confessions. This combined with how he formulates himself and his aim of understanding the past makes it clear that Coolhaas makes good use of historical techniques.

Though this is a well-researched article his language and style is clearly pro-Dutch, such as the comment above on the nature of the English merchants present at Ambon. This is a dominating part of the article with a myriad of examples like: ““The execution of the English and the Japanese was at the same time a warning to the people of Ternate and Seran and to such half-friends as the captain of Hitu of what they could expect!” and “There was certainly no reason for the little wretch [Beaumont] to put on a brave front now that the danger was over.”¹⁶³ Coolhaas certainly lets his subjective opinions shine through throughout the work. However, it seems like he does not want to defend the VOC merchants because he shared a nationhood with them. It is rather because he believes that is what the available material suggests.

¹⁶¹ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 206.

¹⁶² See Clulow, "Unjust, Cruel and Barbarous Proceedings," 24. This article and his aforementioned book on the Massacre cover the Japanese mercenaries’ part in the Ambon incident in much more detail than any other literature. As we have seen the Japanese’s role has been scarcely mentioned up until Coolhaas, and will only be mentioned in future works.

¹⁶³ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 225 & 27.

On the after-effects Coolhaas comments on both the spice trade and wars: “When on 11th April 1623 the English president issued the relevant orders to Towerson in Amboina, Welden in Banda and Gunning in Malayu, the tragedy had already taken place and Towerson was no longer alive.”¹⁶⁴ The Massacre did not cause the English to withdraw from the Moluccas, the economy did. Earlier he establishes that the Massacre “served as an excuse for war in every minor conflict between the Dutch and Englishmen for 50-odd years”.¹⁶⁵ He also comments how the English up to his time of writing still view it as judicial murder. Coolhaas then see the Massacre as a thorn in the Anglo-Dutch relations that affected the wars.

Coolhaas writes a thorough article on his thoughts and opinions on the Amboyna Massacre. His grasp of history and professionalism cannot be doubted as he has delved into the research of the topic. As the title suggests he criticizes English “lampoons” and historians to have blown the incident out of proportion, naming it a massacre, especially since he thinks the sentence of the English and Japanese was just. There are several instances of him style adopting a demeaning tone against the English, strengthening the English vs. Dutch nature of the Massacre.

3.8 Bernard H. M. Vlekke: *Nusantara: A History of the East Indian Archipelago* (1944)

Bernard Vlekke was A Dutch historian who worked in the United States at Harvard University. He wrote a lot on Dutch history like *Evolution of the Dutch Nation*, and *The Netherlands and the United States*. This work is a history of the Netherlands Indies and as Vlekke puts it: “is intended to be an introduction into the study of the development of Indonesian civilization and of the effect of three hundred years of Dutch influence of the Malay world”.¹⁶⁶ Vlekke wrote this book during the Japanese invasion of the archipelago and he himself states that this made it a “nerve-racking task”.¹⁶⁷ This area, formerly known as the Dutch East Indies, had been under their rule for centuries. The Japanese invasion and surrender in 1945 lead to a declaration of independence of Indonesia – which the Dutch gave in to in 1949.¹⁶⁸ He makes use of anthropology, linguistics, geography, and other fields when presenting The Dutch East Indies’ history.

The Massacre is included in chapter six named: “Jan Pieterszoon Coen, The Founder of the Dutch Commercial Empire”. The chapter starts with an account of the political constellation of the Indonesian Archipelago and Vlekke informs the reader that European influence had not changed the political powers much until the start of the seventeenth century.¹⁶⁹ However Coen

¹⁶⁴ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 220.

¹⁶⁵ Coolhaas, "Notes and Comments," 204.

¹⁶⁶ Bernard H. M. Vlekke, *Nusantara; a history of the East Indian archipelago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), v.

¹⁶⁷ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, vi.

¹⁶⁸ Mark T. Hooker, *The history of Holland* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 137.

¹⁶⁹ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 105.

knew that the key to controlling the East Indies was sea power alone and therefore he established a treaty with the sultan of Ternate, who experienced Spanish counterattacks in 1606.¹⁷⁰ This in addition with the suzerainty of the States General by Ambon, Vlekke contends “made the Netherlanders virtually the dominant power in the Moluccas”. The Dutch historian then establishes how they came to control most of the East Indies.

Coen, according to Vlekke, was a remarkable young man who wrote his political program for Dutch control of the Spice Islands with two main arguments: 1) commerce was necessary for Netherland’s welfare and depriving the Spanish of resources, 2) they had a legal right to monopolize the trade because the Dutch had begun the trading in these territories.¹⁷¹ Vlekke then paints the picture of a dedicated young business man who rightfully seized these territories for the Dutch republic, and therefore signalling that the islands (including Ambon) rightfully belonged to them and not the English. Opinions on Coen seems to have changed in recent years: “Coen, the ruthless VOC governor-general in the Indies” and many remark his brutality and use of slaves.¹⁷² He depicts the English as the weaker party taking advantage of the Dutch: “The English East India Company had been founded two years before the Dutch, but had developed more slowly. [...] the merchants of London followed their more powerful neighbours wherever they went, hoping to profit from the pioneer work of others”.¹⁷³ Not only did the English lurk after the VOC and took advantage of their superior force, now they had to cooperate: “In 1619 they made a treaty providing for joint commercial and military action, but the alliance remained without practical effect.”¹⁷⁴

So, the chapter starts by establishing Coen and the Dutch superiority over the English in the region. The Massacre itself is not mentioned until near the end of the chapter: “For many years the English activities in the Indies were at an end. The Famous “massacre of Amboina” of 1623, though often commemorated in the English literature and propaganda of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was merely a dramatic epilogue. It was not even a massacre. Eight Englishmen were executed for an alleged plot to seize the fortress of Amboina with the help of the Japanese mercenaries”.¹⁷⁵ Where he got the number of eight English being executed is perplexing seeing as he cites Stapel who has the correct number of ten. Something else to take note of is that Vlekke claims it to be an alleged plot, while also declaring that: “They had been judged by the court of Amboina, where the procedure had been fairly legal, certainly not more illegal

¹⁷⁰ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 108-10.

¹⁷¹ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 117-18.

¹⁷² Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 24.

¹⁷³ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 111.

¹⁷⁴ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 124.

¹⁷⁵ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 124-25.

than many other procedures in England or the Dutch Republic in that century, though it would have been better to postpone the execution of the condemned until the governor-general could have attended personally to the cause”.¹⁷⁶ So Vlekke admits that the legal procedures could have been better, but still considers the judgement to have been just. This is in line with Stapel and Coolhaas. It is clear from his tone that he thinks the English have exaggerated the event, and comments upon the use of *massacre* as a term. Continuing, he also remarks that the Amboyna Massacre was just one of many bloody acts in the history of colonization. This is a fair point to comment upon, as there have been many skirmishes in the East Indies, but the Ambon incident is perhaps the most well-known. The Japanese are, just mentioned this one time and he provides no context for why they were there or why they would cooperate with the English. That is a shame considering he makes use of Coolhaas’ article.

Vlekke expressed that the Massacre was a “dramatic epilogue” and that “The English considered that the execution of their countrymen gave them a good pretext to withdraw with dignity from a position that had become hopeless. They pretended to leave the Moluccas, not because they could not do any profitable business, but in protest against the cruelty of the Dutch officers”.¹⁷⁷ So he concludes that the English used the Massacre as an opportunity to withdraw from the East Indies unprofitable venture, while saving face and blaming Dutch malice. Some argue that the Massacre caused the English to leave the East Indies, while others like Vlekke believe that the EIC saw it as a perfect opportunity to leave since the factories were not profitable. He does not comment on how this affected the Anglo-Dutch Wars. The chapter leans heavily on Stapel and Coolhaas’ respective articles.

Vlekke gives his thoughts on the use of torture He states: “Torture was applied, but this was unhappily normal in those days”.¹⁷⁸ He also affirms: “In those times, diplomatic relations were even more complicated than in our days. All quarrels were reported by both sides to headquarters in Bantam”.¹⁷⁹ This is written in the context of the fierce competition in the Banda Islands which turned into cooperation (the Treaty of 1619). These comments reveal that Bernard Vlekke keeps historical awareness in mind when writing history.

As mentioned above he comments that the incident was not even a massacre. So far in this historiography we have seen evidence of differences in defining this historical event. Brits comment upon the cruelty of the murders and the Dutch define it as justice towards criminals. The way the nationalities define the Ambon incident indicates whether they believe the English plot was real

¹⁷⁶ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 125.

¹⁷⁷ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 125.

¹⁷⁸ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 125.

¹⁷⁹ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 112.

or not. This part of the English vs. Dutch narrative highlights some of the national prejudices observed so far.

For the Massacre itself Vlekke cites Stapel's "*De Ambonsche moord*".¹⁸⁰ It seems then that this is a popular article, at least for Dutch historians as Coolhaas also made use of it. Leading up to the discussion of Ambon he also applies books by H.T. Colenbrander, Liewe van Aitzema's *Saken van Staet en Oorlog*, and *Verhaal van eenige oorlogen in Indië* which was published in the Chronicle of the Historical Society in Utrecht (*Kroniek, van het Historitch Genootschap, gevestigd te Utrecht*). The author of the latter is unknown. We can make an educated guess that Vlekke has most likely read the pamphlets but refrains from citing them. The literature is from mostly Dutch authors, which backs up his opinion on the Amboyna Massacre. That then is it for the bibliography. Considering that the content on the Massacre in the chapter itself is about a page long and also considering the nature of his work he does not require more. He has cited a well-researched article by Stapel, and he writes of the Massacre in the context of the English leaving the Moluccas.

Vlekke's take on the Massacre is nothing special in that it does not provide anything new to the research. His reliance on mainly Stapel's article and the briefness of it further suggests this and is therefore a repetition of previous research. There is also a lack of discussion on several aspects of the Massacre, like why the English would want to seize the fort considering the near impossibility of success. It is then presented as a just punishment of criminals and how the Dutch continued to thrive in the Moluccas under the guidance of Coen.

3.9 Albert Hyma: *A History of the Dutch in the Far East* (1953)

This publication was originally published in March of 1942 while the Japanese havoeked in the Pacific and the Dutch East Indies. Written during the Second World War and detailing an area that up to that point had solely belonged to the Dutch for hundreds of years. This work then is written in much of the same context as Vlekke. While similar, I chose to include Hyma to identify what similarities and differences there are between the two publications. Hyma's focus is on the history of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia and this newer version includes a chapter on the Japanese invasion of said area. It does not feature much on the Amboyna Massacre as he tries to cover quite a considerable time period of Dutch rule in the Spice Archipelago. Nevertheless, what he writes is quite interesting.

The chapter I am commenting on is named "Occupation of Malay Archipelago", which is another name for East Indies, or Nusantara. He starts off the chapter portraying the Dutch's triumph over

¹⁸⁰ Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 124-26.

the other nations present: “The struggle which the Dutch from 1610 to 1623, carried on in the Far East against the English, the Spaniards, and the Portuguese, resulted in the loss of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the East Indies and the failure on the part of the English to maintain their trade in the same region”.¹⁸¹ He then emphasise that 1623 marked the end of the sea-rivalry in the East between the English and the Dutch. While not explicitly mentioning the Massacre, he does mention the year that it occurred and suggests that it drove the English out. It is so far common for Dutch historians to comment upon the VOC’s strength in the region and the weakness of the others.

To set the scene he summarizes the Dutch and the English’s interest in these islands and that the Dutch paved the way for the English because the VOC’s fleets were of greater number and strength.¹⁸² Then he brings up various encounters and conflicts between the two nations that soured their relationship, like English killing Dutch at Bantam. Rather morbidly he describes the Dutch governor-general Reael as a “rather kindhearted person” because he “decided not to molest the English on the island of Poelo Run.”¹⁸³ These conflicts Hyma believes to have made the Dutch wary against the English and this therefore resulted in taking measures against them, which he backs up by quoting director-general Coen: “It is impossible for us to remain at friendly terms with the English. We had better declare war [...]”.¹⁸⁴ We know that the two involved parties fought for control over the spice trade, which often resulted in violence. Hyma, however, without a proper source, makes the claim that the English outright said they would drive the Dutch out of Ambon.¹⁸⁵ The picture Hyma repeatedly paints at the beginning of this chapter is of the cruel Englishmen who seized ships, and forts, while some Dutch generals were “kindhearted” for not “molesting” the English, even though both parties inflicted violence upon each other - as evidenced by VOC aggression towards the English.¹⁸⁶ The conflict that predates the Massacre is represented as the English trying to spoil the Dutch’s rightful place and ownership of the Spice Islands. He quite often depicts the English as having an overwhelming superiority in numbers, especially in regard to their fleet.¹⁸⁷ This approach of a weak VOC and strong EIC in the region is quite different from other Dutch author’s portrayal.

¹⁸¹ Albert Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: George Wahr Publishing Co., 1953), 108.

¹⁸² Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 109-13.

¹⁸³ Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 111.

¹⁸⁴ Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 112.

¹⁸⁵ Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 113.

¹⁸⁶ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 21-25.

¹⁸⁷ Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 114-18.

The treaty of 1619, which arrived in the East Indies in March of 1620, forced these two groups to unite and work together, which Hyma describes as “unexpected” and “unwished”.¹⁸⁸ He frames the reason for the signing of the treaty as not due to the companies’ wish, but rather to the pressure from King James I and Johan van Oldenbarnevelt: “The national governments would not permit their merchants to wreck the negotiations”.¹⁸⁹ The treaty forced two enemies into close proximity and Hyma quotes Coen writing to the VOC directors: “[the English] had driven themselves out of the East Indies, and you have put them back”.¹⁹⁰ The English then, according to Hyma, was retreating from the Spice Islands due to Dutch superiority.

The Massacre itself is described briefly: “in 1623 occurred the notorious Amboina massacre, when the infuriated Dutch officials had twelve Englishmen executed for alleged treason”.¹⁹¹ It is of note that he chose to characterize the Dutch officials as “infuriated”, as before this he writes of Coen’s anger towards the VOC directors for signing the 1619 treaty and allowing them back into the East Indies. So far, his writing has been very pro-Dutch, but this choice of adjective I believe shows some sign that Hyma thought the Dutch men at Ambon overreacted. Again, it is seemingly difficult to establish how many men were executed as in this case the number is stated to be twelve. He does not, however, err on the number of Japanese - because he chose to not mention them at all. So far this is the shortest version of the Massacre, and like Vlekke, it does not expand much upon the incident.

As for the effects this had on continued trade in the Moluccas, Hyma argues that the treaty in 1619 helped bring the English back into the Indies and that the leadership of Coen “succeeded in depriving the English of all but a small share in the trade”.¹⁹² Continuing, he contends it led the English to move their focus towards mainland India. The Massacre is not claimed to be the cause of this. It seems the Massacre is included more for context and its fame rather than actually being significant to the history he wants to write. The English were losing ground already before the Massacre, but it was under Coen’s leadership that they almost drove them completely out. If the Massacre did contribute, it was not the leading cause as many others have claimed – that is what I interpret from this historian. The several Anglo-Dutch wars are detailed in his work, but the Massacre is not stated to be one of the causes.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 122-23.

¹⁸⁹ Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 126.

¹⁹⁰ Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 127.

¹⁹¹ Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 127.

¹⁹² Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 127.

¹⁹³ Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 42-43.

What sources are used? De Jonge, Colenbrander and Du Bois are commonly used during this chapter as references in the form of endnotes.¹⁹⁴ Aitzema, *Calendar of State Papers*, and Van der Chijs are also referenced one time each. Hyma also makes use of English, Dutch, and French secondary sources -though mostly Dutch. Letters, especially from Coen which he finds in the *Calendar of State Papers* are commonly used and they are the only cited sources in relation to the aftermath of the Massacre. For the Massacre itself he provides no sources of information, which might explain the fault of twelve executed English, rather than ten. As this chapter focuses on the occupation of the Malay Archipelago he does not need to spend a lot of time on the Massacre, especially as I deduced above that he does not deem it as a significant event. There are no other noteworthy historical techniques used in his writing of the Massacre.

Albert Hyma's *History of the Dutch* as has been expectantly pro-Dutch and makes use of mostly Dutch literature. The Massacre is utilized to portray how the Dutch, and specifically Coen, achieved superiority in the region, as well as showing English cruelty – for plotting against them. Unlike other Dutch historians Hyma frames the EIC as achieving superiority in numbers in the region, and the VOC as the weaker party. The Massacre then marks an end to this English cruelty and unfairness, since the Dutch had paved the way for them.

3.10 David Kenneth Bassett: *The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623 (1960)*

Dr David Kenneth Bassett was a Welsh historian who specialized in The East India Company and South-East Asia. Bassett's article from 1960 featured in the *Journal of Southeast Asian History* is widely used by contemporary historians like Alison Games and Adam Clulow as a useful and knowledgeable source of information regarding the Amboyna Massacre: “the historian D.K. Bassett published a thorough and well-researched article in 1960”.¹⁹⁵

Bassett opens the article by defining the English as “unfortunate” and that he does not want to touch on “the more controversial aspects of the Amboyna tragedy”.¹⁹⁶ This use of the term *tragedy* we have already witnessed with the historian Hunter, though rather than a nod to John Dryden's play by the same name, Bassett seems to use it more literally. He maintains that what happened at Ambon was a tragic misunderstanding or a “terrible mistake” because the English were indeed innocent.¹⁹⁷ However, he does not seek to undermine the Dutch belief in a plot, which is why he describes it as so tragic – it was a series of misfortunate events.

¹⁹⁴ Hyma, *A History of Dutch in the Far East*, 280-82.

¹⁹⁵ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 201.

¹⁹⁶ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 1.

¹⁹⁷ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 1-3.

Like many English authors D.K. Bassett that believes that the English were innocent.¹⁹⁸ He himself touches upon the aspect of nationality in his article: “the plausibility of the Dutch accusation has never commanded much respect in the estimate of British historians and it is unlikely that this attitude will change”. Bassett does however adopt a very nuanced view of the Massacre: “On the other hand, there is every evidence to suggest that Speult, despite English suspicions to the contrary, was genuinely convinced that an English plot was afoot to overthrow his government.”¹⁹⁹ He explains that he understands the actions of Van Speult due to the strained relationship between the two nations in the East Indies.²⁰⁰ He also uses Towerson’s earlier letters to question the man’s willingness to perform such a plot due to his good-nature as a man who wanted the EIC to buy Van Speult beer and a gold necklace for his wife.²⁰¹ He further on raises doubts on Towerson’s lust to murder the Dutch as he apparently received a warning from the English Council at Batavia for being too pro-Dutch. It then seems like Bassett goes out of his way to try to distance himself from what many of his fellow British historians have previously done and looks at the case from both sides.

The article starts with Bassett explaining the execution: “Nine other Englishmen, ten Japanese, and one Portuguese shared Towerson’s fate”.²⁰² He contemplates several aspects: Why were the men executed so rapidly, especially considering that the Dutch garrison with an overwhelming majority of forces compared to the twelve English could have easily been kept in chains and transported to Batavia?²⁰³ Making use of Dutch historians he states their reasons for the necessity of execution: it was impossible to transfer the prisoners to Batavia, and doing so would weaken to Dutch garrison. He counters these arguments swiftly by stating the fact that two Englishmen who were saved from the execution were already being transported, and: “Dutch vessels which sailed between Batavia and Amboyna carried a complement of some one hundred men and could easily have provided a guard for twelve Englishmen in irons”.²⁰⁴ Why execute them when they had already been captured and neutralized, is the point he makes.

After contemplating the need for execution Bassett advances towards the much familiar defence that many British authors have used to ridicule the idea of the plot to seize the fort - the impossibility of it. He remarks that most English complaints stemmed from the other factories at Banda and in the Moluccas, yet not from Towerson at Ambon.²⁰⁵ Therefore he concludes that any sign

¹⁹⁸ Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 1-2.

¹⁹⁹ Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 1.

²⁰⁰ Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 1-2.

²⁰¹ Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 1-2.

²⁰² Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 1.

²⁰³ Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 2-3.

²⁰⁴ Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 3.

²⁰⁵ Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 3-4.

of uprising should have stemmed from these areas rather than from Ambon since Towerson saw the bickering between Dutch and English as “fopperies” not worthy of his attention and Towerson’s fondness for the VOC governor-general.

D.K. Bassett makes a compelling argument against the existence of an English *coup d’etat* by using President Fursland’s letters to Towerson sent in December 1622 and early 1623.²⁰⁶ The letters show the EIC’s desire to retreat from the Spice Archipelago due to the high cost and told Towerson to be ready “to come away” as soon as an English ship could be sent – which would not be any time soon due to the monsoon and the unavailability of ships. Bassett then uses this to argue that the plot’s probability of success vastly drops as one of the main arguments from the VOC’s pamphlets was that the English were awaiting assistance from an oncoming ship to aid them resulting in the need to act swiftly. Bassett writes: “even when that ship arrived, its captain would almost certainly be authorised to withdraw Towerson and his subordinates”.²⁰⁷ Bassett undermines the common Dutch argument for the need of both torture and execution of the men by using the letters from Fursland. He also speculates that Fursland would probably not support Towerson’s plot. However, he agrees that Fursland’s letter telling of the English withdrawal might not have arrived until after the beheading of the fated men, as letters from England to Ambon took a long time, which Bassett frames as “the real tragedy of the affair”.²⁰⁸

Bassett’s article focuses not however on the plausibility of the plot, or whether the English were innocent or not. His research is rather on the effects on the spice trade. A common notion, as observed in this thesis, is that the Amboyna Massacre led to an English withdrawal from the Spice Archipelago. Here he declares that “Dutch historians are more prone to error on the first count [trying to describe the immediate consequences] than English writers”.²⁰⁹ As an example he criticizes B. Vlekke for stating that the EIC used the “massacre” as a tool to withdraw from the Spice Islands with dignity. Bassett sees Vlekke’s arguments as faulty because he claims that all dignity was already lost due to the need for withdrawal and the fact that the VOC supplied them with a ship to be used to send the English merchants back home. Through the work he also cites both English and Dutch historians like Stapel, Hall, Vlekke, De Klerck, Harrison, and the Danish historian Kristof Glamann. He agrees with the authors Stapel, Hall, and Harrison that the Massacre sped up the English withdrawal from the East Indies, but he denies that this also applied to the settlement of Batavia, as he finds no evidence for this.²¹⁰ Bassett then sees the short-term

²⁰⁶ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 4-5.

²⁰⁷ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 5.

²⁰⁸ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 6.

²⁰⁹ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 6-7.

²¹⁰ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 7.

consequences of the Massacre as speeding up the withdrawal from the factories that were already going to be abandoned. It did not force the EIC out.

Bassett denies the claims that the Massacre caused the English to completely withdraw from the spice trade in Indonesia, and rather focus their efforts on India. He asserts that “the consensus of opinion, is that the Amboyna affair was disastrous for English commerce in Indonesia”.²¹¹ To strengthen his disagreement with this statement he proclaims that it is ignorant to believe that since there are so few details on English activity in the East Indies after 1623 – nothing of importance must have happened. Continuing his efforts he argues that even though the EIC lost the cloves, mace and nutmeg production, pepper was still a highly valuable product which was approximately 50% of the value of Dutch cargo from Batavia, and the search for an alternative headquarter was initiated in October of 1623.²¹² He strengthens his line of reasoning by including numbers from *Commercial Relations between India and England* by Bal Krishna who studied the Factory Record from Java and the numbers shows that there were two and a half times more ships travelling in the nineteen possible trading seasons from 1659 to 1681 than compared to the period of 1602-1616.²¹³ Trade between Bantam and London must then not only have continued, but also flourished as Bassett shows. This continues for many years as the EIC focuses its efforts solely on the pepper trade as Bassett displays by going through the tonnage of each year, the demand for pepper in England, and the price of it.²¹⁴ These numbers, Bassett concludes, show that “sixty years after the Amboyna “Massacre”, the English Company at last found itself on the wrong side of Sunda Strait, while the Dutch Company apparently was triumphant throughout the East Indies”. The conclusion he makes is that the trade stopped in 1682 because pepper became profitless, mainly due to the amount of nations providing the product and prices then dropping. The trade of cloves stopped earlier, but not because of the Massacre – it was already profitless long before which was why president Fursland of the EIC wanted the English to retreat from Ambon. He relies mostly on letters between the Companies, spice merchants, trade records, General Ledgers, and diaries which he primarily gathered from the *Java Records* to back up his claims. He also comments on how the wars affected trade negatively in the period, but does not comment on the Massacre causing any of these wars.²¹⁵

The type of history being written here is a more analytical one based on the Amboyna Massacre’s effect on the spice trade. He incorporates elements of economic history using shipping numbers,

²¹¹ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 8.

²¹² Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 7.

²¹³ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 8-9.

²¹⁴ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 15-18.

²¹⁵ Bassett, "The “Amboyna Massacre” of 1623," 13-14.

sales numbers, and general data on the spice trade in the seventeenth century to establish that English trade in the Moluccas still maintained long after the Massacre. Bassett's focus is distributed more towards the spice companies and their directors as agents shaping history, though he touches upon individuals like Towerson and Van Speult when discussing the Massacre itself and tries to understand both their view points. The Japanese are so to speak ignored. Hytesio, remaining un-named, is brought up as the cause of interrogations and their fate at the execution block is commented upon, but that is it. His focus on the English spice trade and the type of history might explain this choice.

Bassett adopts a language and style that is easy to read and understand. The article is framed as him taking the reader through the details and facts available and then displaying his thoughts and conclusions on the matter. His tone I would describe as neutral, but he does emphasise when he believes other writers have erred on certain matters and can use strong wording like: "there can be no doubt".²¹⁶ As for the historian's purpose one might gather that Bassett believes it to be to look at the whole picture of a case and examining the available material before making any assumptions. He criticizes other historians for framing Towerson as a cold-blooded murderer without looking at the "character and outlook" one can gather from his letters.²¹⁷ Here he should have emphasized some source criticism towards these letters as a reliable source of character. He also, as previously mentioned, slams the notion from other historians that if there is little available material and knowledge of English interest in East India, then nothing of interest could have occurred. From these assertions then it seems that Bassett highly values the importance of proper research to understand history.

This Welsh historian, unlike many earlier English historians, handle the Massacre with a lot more neutrality and objectivity. Rather than framing the Dutch as cruel and evil men who massacred the English, he frames the narrative as a series of unfortunates and misunderstanding. He tries to place himself in the men's shoes to understand their situation – he has a high level of historical awareness. The Dutch he believes had the right to be terrified of a plot, but he maintains that the English were innocent. To defend his arguments he uses pamphlets, a great list of letters from the EIC, and both Dutch and English literature to make his case that trade in the Spice Archipelago maintained "firstly in cloves and later in pepper", thereby challenging this common consequence of the Amboyna Massacre within the history community.²¹⁸ Using footnotes it is easy for

²¹⁶ Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 11.

²¹⁷ Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 1.

²¹⁸ Bassett, "The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623," 18.

the reader to know where he has gathered his information and to he applies them to supply additional thoughts on various matters.

3.11 George Masselman: *The Cradle of Colonialism* (1963)

Masselman's perhaps most known work is "an account of how the Dutch set in motion the cycle of colonialism in Southeast Asia" as the author himself writes in *The Cradle of Colonialism*.²¹⁹ He will concentrate on the VOC, and more specifically Jan Pieterszoon Coen's efforts as an individual in colonizing the East Indies. Masselman is a Dutch historian. The Ambon incident is included in the chapter named "The English Withdrawal". What changes in historiography can we expect from Masselman who is the last Dutch historian to be analysed?

The chapter starts with Masselman detailing Coen's accomplishments as a formidable administrator, and one that complained to the company for signing the 1619 treaty that gave the English an opening into the Spice Island monopoly that Coen had secured for the Dutch.²²⁰ Continuing, he recounts how at Coen's departure for the Netherlands, the English "proved that they were unable to compete with the Dutch, and were forced to withdraw from practically the whole of East Asia" as a result of them lacking support from London, which meant that they could not pay their third of the Treaty of Defence agreement.²²¹ Masselman argues that this would then have led to a peaceful English withdrawal from the East Indies if it were not for the conspiracy brewing in the background.

It is perhaps no surprise that Masselman, in tow with the other Dutch historians, believed that there was a conspiracy. As the book focuses on Coen, Masselman clarifies that Coen had left for Europe before the Massacre and was therefore not a part of it.²²² He also informs that Coen warned Van Speult against suspicious activity from the English, which we know from the letters he sent him. Many English authors have argued that this led to Van Speult being paranoid and exaggerating the events, but this is not further commented upon by Masselman. It appears that Masselman includes this as to enlighten the reader of Coen's foresight and the Englishmen's willingness to go through with such a plot.

On Hytesio's patrolling of Fort Victoria, Masselman makes some curious mistakes: "A Japanese soldier in the English service had been caught inspecting the fortification at a spot where the English were prohibited".²²³ It is uncertain whether he means that the lone Japanese soldier at that moment was working for the English, or if he means that all the Japanese mercenaries were

²¹⁹ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, vi.

²²⁰ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 424-25.

²²¹ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 429.

²²² Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 430.

²²³ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 430.

employed by the EIC. Of the soldiers, sources seem to indicate that only Sidney Migiell had worked for the English previously.²²⁴ It still makes no sense, because the Japanese were employed by the Dutch East India Company. Secondly, Hytesio was not caught inspecting a prohibited area, but rather asking questions on fort security and protocol.

After finding Hytesio the other Japanese were examined and confirmed the attack on the Dutch fort, which then led to the examination of the English. Some “confessed freely”, while others were tortured “as was the accepted procedure”.²²⁵ Towerson was identified as the leader of the plot and Masselman claims that “His plan was to overrun the Dutch fort and kill off its garrison as soon as an English ship had arrived to give the required support.”²²⁶ He asserts that Van Speult and the council debated whether to send them to Batavia, as per the agreements of the Treaty of Defence, or execute them on the spot. He claims that execution was chosen as to set an example to others wanting to try something similar – a point that Coolhaas brought up. On the number killed he writes: “Ten English merchants and nine Japanese soldiers were beheaded”.²²⁷ Aside from the fact that he omits the Portuguese, I find it disappointing that he errs on the correct number of Japanese, especially considering that Professor Hall, who is cited in this very chapter, comments that there were eleven Japanese arrested, and ten executed.²²⁸

Following the execution of the men and the news reaching England in which the Englishmen reacted out of hand, blaming the Dutch for unlawful torture, and inventing a conspiracy only to drive the English out of the Spice Islands.²²⁹ He counters this last claim as the directors of the Dutch Company stated to be able to expel the English by “different means if they wanted to”. Furthermore, Masselman sees this outcry in England and the anti-Dutch feelings it spurred as a “collateral cause for the outbreak of the first English-Dutch war”, as well as the second Anglo-Dutch war in 1665.²³⁰ Moreover, he includes the effect it had on Anglo-Dutch relationship between the traders at Batavia where the governor general apparently wrote: “we are stuck with them here as with a difficult woman”.²³¹ He does not go into further detail, perhaps only wanting to display Dutch supremacy in the East Indies.

As previously commented upon, Masselman believed that if not for the Massacre, the English would have withdrawn peacefully from the Spice Archipelago. Their withdrawal then would

²²⁴ Clulow, "Unjust, Cruel and Barbarous Proceedings," 25-26.

²²⁵ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 430.

²²⁶ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 430.

²²⁷ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 430.

²²⁸ Daniel George Edward Hall, *A history of South-East Asia*, 3 ed. (London: Macmillan, 1968), 310.

²²⁹ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 431.

²³⁰ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 431-32.

²³¹ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 432.

have happened either way. However, he notes that the English remained until 1684, though they struggled and expended all their resources.²³² Again he brings up Coen's inclusion in this: "The English also lacked a man like Coen who had the foresight to act quickly and decisively when the interest of the Company was at stake, even if it meant going against his instructions from the directors at home".²³³ Coen was a competent and fierce general-governor that accomplished lots for the VOC in the Dutch East Indies, and perhaps the EIC would have fared better with a similarly competent man at the helm. The conclusion is that the incident at Ambon was not the reason for the English East India Company stopping their endeavours in the east. They were simply out of resources and lacked proper leadership.

Masselman consequently refrains from calling the events at Ambon a "massacre", only once commenting upon the English's use of the phrasing: "The Dutch would refer to it as the Amboyna incident, but the English bluntly called it the Amboyna massacre".²³⁴ This comment further solidifies how Dutch and English historians consequently framed the incident in vastly different ways. It is also a great example of Masselman's language and style, much like this quote: "The instigator of the plot had been the head of the English factory, Gabriel Towerson; he was an impetuous and disagreeable person, disliked by some of his own countrymen".²³⁵ Others have claimed that Towerson was too Dutch-friendly and had great respect towards Van Speult based on the letters between him and the EIC directors. This is ignored by Masselman who present him as a typical villain who planned to kill the entire garrison and capture the fort. Which in all fairness can be a true depiction if he did instigate the plot.

On the use of sources regarding the incident on Ambon, Masselman does not cite any. Nevertheless, I know he makes use of sources like letters because he comments on letters sent by Coen.²³⁶ He does at least cite his secondary literature. In line with the previously analysed Dutch historian these are primarily from other Dutch historians. Frederik Stapel's *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch-Indië*, De Jonge's *Opkomst*, and the article *Aanteekeningen en opmerkingen over den zoogenaamden Ambonschen moord* by Coolhaas which is analysed above. These three were used in addition to the British historian Daniel Hall's famous work *A History of Southeast Asia*. Hall's work is actively referenced here.

As far as other historical techniques, I think Masselman shines in his discourse of the trial: "In any event, they had greatly exceeded their authority by carrying out death sentences on the spot.

²³² Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 432.

²³³ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 432.

²³⁴ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 429.

²³⁵ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 430.

²³⁶ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 430.

The accused should have been sent to Batavia, where the case could have been reviewed by a higher court. This would have avoided serious consequences".²³⁷ It would have changed the consequences of the incident especially since one of the main complaints from the EIC pamphlets is the decision by Van Speult and the court at Ambon to execute the accused after a quick trial, rather than sending them to Batavia as stipulated in the Treaty of Defence from 1619. The comment on the hasty decision for execution proves that Masselman is not blinded by national bias and a need to support their every move. Many Dutch authors have agreed that the legal procedures regarding the Ambon incident was far from perfect. Masselman also shows insight into the region and the limitations of communications during that time.²³⁸

George Masselman's presentation of the Amboyna Massacre is a fairly standard one, considering his nationality and the type of history being written. The work is intended to cover a vast geographical area and several hundred years of Dutch colonialism. The Massacre then receives only a small spotlight of about four pages. This also explains, but does not justify, his lack of sources and relying only on secondary literature from primarily Dutch authors. Considering that he includes one British source but chooses to bestow more value on the writings of the Dutch authors at least signifies to me that nationality has had a form of impact here. It could also just mean that he awards them more credibility as historians because knows Stapel, De Jonge, or Coolhaas. He has most likely read a lot of their previous works as they are all Dutch historians with a focus on the East Indies which could also influence him. However, this is most likely true for British authors, or all other nationalities, who specialize in this area of history writing. Masselman's opinions on the incident are also very similar to the previous Dutch ones that I have reviewed. This signals that his nationality might be a deciding factor at least in the choices of literature, or if he has chosen the literature as a result of his preconceived opinion on whether there was a plot or not.

3.12 Holden Furber: *Rival empires of trade in the Orient, 1600-1800* (1976)

This work is part of a multi-volume series named *Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion* edited by Boyd C. Shafer. This piece by Furber details the European expansion in Asia and the rivalries of the East India Companies. While not a full-fledged book or devoted chapter on the Massacre, Furber goes into some detail on it while discussing the rivalry of the spice trade between the English and the Dutch. It is also of note that he is the first American author covered in this historiography. As such, Holden Furber's handling of the Amboyna Massacre can give us

²³⁷ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 431.

²³⁸ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 429.

some key insights into the aspect of nationality when writing history since the United States was not even a nation at the time. How will it affect his work?

The chapter of focus is chapter one: “Rivals for the Spice Trade: The Dutch and the English”. It starts with an account of the foundation of Dutch power in the region at the end of the sixteenth century.²³⁹ He also explain that many reacted to the Dutch’s cruelty, and especially Coen’s methods in colonization.²⁴⁰ Previous Dutch authors have revered and praised Coen for his brilliance in securing the VOC’s interests in the East Indies – proving that one can always frame the narrative differently. Modern authors, regardless of nationality, will generally agree with Furber’s portrayal of Coen. Here I think nationality sway how individuals consider the Dutch’s methods, especially if one compares Furber to Vlekke. Their different interpretations might suggest that an author writing of their own nation has some bias. Even so, Furber comments that Coen’s return to the Spice Archipelago was delayed because of the Massacre.

The account of the Massacre is short and straight-forward:

On March 9, 1623, the chief factor of the English East India Company on Amboina, Gabriel Towerson, nine other Englishmen, ten Japanese mercenaries, and the Portuguese overseer of the slaves were beheaded at the command of Governor Van Speult. A Japanese arrested on February 23 on suspicion of spying had confessed under torture to a plot whereby the English factors, aided by the Japanese soldiers, were to kill Van Speult and seize Fort Victoria as soon as an English ship appeared in the roadstead. Under torture the others had confessed; two Englishmen who confessed without torture were spared.²⁴¹

Most details are in line with the common consensus. He blames Van Speult for being too trigger-happy with the warning he received from Coen to be wary of the English, since he claims that the feat was impossible and both Coen and Towerson knew of the English planned withdrawal.²⁴² There is no cited source for this and it seems unlikely considering the amount of time needed for such a message to travel from England to Ambon by ship (several months). Others have believed that if the EIC and VOC merchants at Ambon was aware of the EIC backing out, the Massacre would never have taken place. Nevertheless, Furber frames the whole incident as a tragic mistake, much like Bassett’s portrayal of the events.

The aftermath of the Amboyna Massacre is identical to how most other historians write of it. It was one of the leading causes of the several wars between the two Protestant nations, which he

²³⁹ Holden Furber, *Rival empires of trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*, ed. Boyd C. Shafer, vol. II, Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 31-34.

²⁴⁰ Furber, *Rival empires*, II, 47-48.

²⁴¹ Furber, *Rival empires*, II, 48.

²⁴² Furber, *Rival empires*, II, 49.

backs up by remarking that one of the consequences after the first war was the compensation of the victims and the fact that Dryden wrote the play in the middle of the third war.²⁴³ On the effects of the trade in the east he further writes: “While the incident at Amboina played no part in the decision to close the factories in the spice islands and did not cause the English to confine their trade to the mainland, it aroused widespread, and often curious, repercussions, making the English position at Batavia impossible”.²⁴⁴ This conclusion is remarkably similar to Basset’s previously examined article, which is easily explained when we go through his sources.

Furber primarily cites D.K. Basset’s *The ‘Amboyna Massacre’ of 1623*, which is easy to tell as many of his arguments are almost identical to Basset’s. Other than that, he also makes use of Vlekke’s *Nusantara*, Colenbrander’s *Koloniale Geshiedenis*, and Meilink-Roelofs’s *Asian Trade*.²⁴⁵ As a reminder, Meilink-Roelofs was one of the editors of *Dutch Authors* in which Stapel and Coolhaas’ articles were included. All these are historians with a firm grasp on the colonization of the East Indies as well as the East India Companies. I think it also a good sign to include literature from both nationalities involved, as to minimize the subjective narratives from the two nations that I have seen so far in this historiography.

The chapter continues with him explaining that the Dutch achieved thalassocracy in Ceylon, Malacca and Japan.²⁴⁶ The Amboyna Massacre is then applied by Furber to explain how the Dutch achieved dominance and a precursor to how the region became the Dutch East Indies. In this brief account Furber sides with the English and makes use of the same rhetoric of the *True Relation* – the plot was impossible and therefore it could never have been planned to be executed. However, he upholds a more neutral tone by suggesting that Van Speult made a “tragic mistake”, rather than suggesting that the Dutch were simply cruel.²⁴⁷ Whether this is a result of him being American, or that the field of history has evolved to try to suppress these prejudices is difficult to establish. Perhaps both are true.

In his notes Furber makes an interesting comment on the aspect of historical research: “unanswered questions remain, and further research may unearth new facts, it is very difficult to accept the view put forward by earlier Dutch historians that Van Speult acted sincerely with some cause for suspicion”.²⁴⁸ This goes against his previous comment on Van Speult making a tragic mistake, but it seems that he suggests that there was no clear evidence for the English plot. However, this comment makes it clear that Furber sees the field of history as one that always evolves and

²⁴³ Furber, *Rival empires*, II, 49.

²⁴⁴ Furber, *Rival empires*, II, 49.

²⁴⁵ Furber, *Rival empires*, II, 345.

²⁴⁶ Furber, *Rival empires*, II, 49-52.

²⁴⁷ Furber, *Rival empires*, II, 49.

²⁴⁸ Furber, *Rival empires*, II, 345.

therefore can help us make new discoveries. It shows, however, that the Massacre is included in the chapter because of its importance afterwards as there are not many pages dedicated to it and he resorts to mainly relying on the work of other historians. There is nothing wrong with that, as it is not his intention to spend unnecessary time on it, and he has chosen literature from historians who know their craft. The work does not provide much to analyse regarding the Massacre, except showing that his neutrality might result from his nationhood.

3.13 Giles Milton: *Nathaniel's Nutmeg* (1999)

Now on to something a little different. I have chosen to review popular history book by Giles Milton that was a best-seller. He is renowned for his narrative popular history books and has won several awards. Published in 1999, *Nathaniel's Nutmeg* focuses primarily on Nathaniel Courthope and his mission to secure an English monopoly on the nutmeg in the Moluccas. While the demographic of this piece of history writing certainly is the general population, I still feel it is of importance. This is because it is “The most widely read account of the Amboina trial is Giles Milton’s popular history, *Nathaniel’s Nutmeg*, which sold hundreds of thousands of copies.”²⁴⁹ Another reason for choosing this work is to flesh out the criterion of type of history; How does the different intended audience affect the historian’s interpretations and portrayal of the occurrence in 1623? Milton dedicates the Massacre to the chapter aptly named: “Trial by Fire and Water”.

The “hero” of Milton’s tale is Nathaniel Courthope and his efforts as an English spy who worked hard to improve the EIC’s position in the east. According to the author, Nathaniel Courthope was a constant problem for Coen and a hindrance for the total dominance of the Dutch of the Spice Islands.²⁵⁰ His death by the hands of the Dutch then removed this obstacle and as Milton writes it: “leaving the Dutchman with unchallenged control of the Banda Islands”. This then led to Coen’s rampage of the East Indies, like destroying the English fort at Jakarta.²⁵¹ Milton believes that Coen sought “total annihilation of the English fleet”, but not before long the news of the 1619 treaty arrived. Here Milton interprets Coen’s reaction as one filled with hate and contempt, especially towards the English, as the companies had undone all his hard work, and Milton brings up that the treaty likely would not have been signed if the VOC knew the extent of the situation.²⁵² Early on we can already tell that the sides of the conflict is portrayed as more black and white than reality shows. Governor-general of the Dutch East Indies Jan Pieterszoon Coen

²⁴⁹ Adam Clulow, "Great help from Japan," in *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 180.

²⁵⁰ Milton, *Nathaniel's nutmeg*, 309-10.

²⁵¹ Milton, *Nathaniel's nutmeg*, 311-12.

²⁵² Milton, *Nathaniel's nutmeg*, 312.

is presented like a villain with contempt for the English. Nathaniel is the antithesis to Coen and the sympathetic martyr. Coen then sought to quell all resistance at various islands, as well as stopping at Ambon to warn Van Speult against conspiracies whereupon Van Speult replied: “and if we hear of any conspiracies ... we shall with your sanction do justice to them without delay”.²⁵³

Due to the Dutch’s number advantage both in men, forts, and ships, Milton sees the plot against the Dutch as “most unlikely”.²⁵⁴ He further on points out that the English struggled to make ends meet at their various outposts on the islands, and that the entire arsenal between the men consisted of three swords and two muskets. *True Relation* mentions this exact number of weapons, and this reliance on the pamphlet as a reliable source will be repeated throughout.²⁵⁵

The Japanese mercenary, Hytesio, is once again to blame for instigating the incident by scouting the walls and asking questions about the castle’s defences. However, he is not named in this work. Milton states there were about thirty Japanese employed by the Dutch at Ambon, and that they were “looked upon with suspicion”.²⁵⁶ While most historians debate whether there were nine or twelve Japanese on the island, Milton stands out from the rest. The pamphlet remarks that there “is not thirty [Japanese] in all the Island”.²⁵⁷ That Milton then sees it as acceptable to propose that there were about thirty Japanese from this single comment in a pamphlet, which can be considered a piece of propaganda, signals a lack of source criticism. Further on he does not state how many Japanese were executed. There is all in all just a lack of discussion and logical explanations.

Using the *True Relation*, Milton goes into extensive details on the torture of the English, describing who was tortured and in what manner – leaving no detail to the imagination.²⁵⁸ While we can with much certainty say that the English were tortured in the matter of waterboarding and use of candles, Milton does not contemplate that the source he uses to describe the torture is from the company’s employees that were tortured, and might not be completely accurate. Source criticism itself is lacking throughout. On another occasion he states that it is uncertain what happened to Towerson after written confessions from three fellow English yet “there is no doubt that the most brutal treatment was reserved for him” which he of course withstood.²⁵⁹ If it is uncertain what happened, is it then unreasonable to make such claims? This lack of historical techniques is a common part of *Nathaniel’s Nutmeg*

²⁵³ Milton, *Nathaniel’s nutmeg*, 317-19.

²⁵⁴ Milton, *Nathaniel’s nutmeg*, 319-20.

²⁵⁵ *True Relation*, 35.

²⁵⁶ Milton, *Nathaniel’s nutmeg*, 321.

²⁵⁷ *True Relation*, 4.

²⁵⁸ Milton, *Nathaniel’s nutmeg*, 324-28.

²⁵⁹ Milton, *Nathaniel’s nutmeg*, 331-32.

The narrative of the trial is very briefly depicted as a swift act of judgement by Van Speult and the fiscal. They were judged to be executed, but two men were spared to look after the Company's interests, whereupon Beomont was chosen since he had a Dutch merchant friend, as well as Collins in a stroke of luck where he, Thomson and Coulson had to draw lottery tickets.²⁶⁰ This scene is almost a direct copy from the one depicted in *Authentick Copy*.²⁶¹ Even though the English were condemned to death they still proclaimed their innocence and told the Dutch that they forgive Van Speult for what he has done to "poor innocent souls".²⁶² This portrayal of martyrdom is wrought from the pamphlet of *True Relation*.²⁶³

The Japanese are not mentioned again until the depiction of the execution where they were lined up against the opposite wall to the English.²⁶⁴ Apparently this angered both sides as Milton states that "each believed the other group to be the cause of their present plight". This did not last long as they both realized that each group had been tortured whereupon they embraced each other and stood together as their sentence was read aloud. Aside from this moment of international brothers doomed to the same faith, the Japanese are not a central part of Milton's portrayal of the Massacre.

As for the consequences of the Massacre the author writes that it: "destroyed any hope that England might have had of recovering ground in the Spice Islands. They also brought England and Holland to the brink of war".²⁶⁵ Like many other historians he believes that the Amboyna Massacre managed to drive the English away from further efforts in the Spice Archipelago. He does not specify that the Massacre caused the first Anglo-Dutch war, rather he sees it as an event that soured the two nations' relations and made war more likely.

The news of what transpired on Ambon caused uproar in London, and the king himself apparently shed tears of sorrow when he heard the tale told by Thomson and Coulson.²⁶⁶ Further on he mentions that Dryden used the event to "whip up anti-Dutch feeling" by writing his play. Milton then goes on to show the English's discontent with both the VOC's report of the Massacre where they justified Van Speult's methods and the lack of "real restitution for damages". He ends his chapter by claiming that the only way for the Dutch to atone, was for the English to reclaim the island of Run.

²⁶⁰ Milton, *Nathaniel's nutmeg*, 332-33.

²⁶¹ *An Authentick Copy of the Acts of the Processe Against the English as Amboyna*, (London: Printed by John Dawson for the East India Company, 1632), 34.

²⁶² Milton, *Nathaniel's nutmeg*, 333-35.

²⁶³ *True Relation*, 27.30.

²⁶⁴ Milton, *Nathaniel's nutmeg*, 337-38.

²⁶⁵ Milton, *Nathaniel's nutmeg*, 318.

²⁶⁶ Milton, *Nathaniel's nutmeg*, 340-42.

Giles Milton wrote a detailed account of the Amboyna Massacre, and he clearly uses a lot of quotes from both the English and the Dutch merchants – however he never cites where these quotations are from. The chapter is no more than a detailed retelling of the *True Relation* and he does not really add anything to the historiography of this event. There is no source criticism, discussion, or analysing at all. It is merely a tale of how unfortunate innocent English merchants were brutally murdered by the Dutch lacking any real evidence. Milton shows no doubt at all that the English were innocent, mostly based on the fact that the coup of Fort Victoria was so unlikely to be successful that no one would even think of executing it. In my opinion this work more closely resembles primary school history books as it is written like a historical narrative. Aside from using sources, the fact of the matter is that there are no historical techniques being employed by Milton, and from what I have read the purpose of history seems to be minimized to a story, rather than a field of research. Adam Clulow comments on *Nathaniel's Nutmeg* and how he treats *True Relation* as “essentially factual accounts of what happened in Amboina.”²⁶⁷ It is reasonable to make use of *True Relation* when writing on the Massacre as it is an important historical document. All the pamphlets should be read. Yet, one should not refrain from questioning any of these pamphlets on their value as “true” historical sources. They are written with an intention of defending their own company and nation. Giles Milton’s reliance on them reflects his lack of source criticism.

3.15 Russel Shorto: *The Island at the Centre of the World* (2005)

Like Giles Milton, Russel Shorto is a popular history author. This book is his most well-known. Unlike Milton however, Shorto is American. The agenda with *The Island at the Centre of the World* is to explore the Dutch origins of New York City – which stems from the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam on the island of Manhattan. One might not think this relevant in the context of the Massacre that occurred in the Pacific Ocean quite a ways from today’s New York, but he does include it as a vital part of the Dutch colony’s past and brings some new ideas. This is the reason I decided to include it in my thesis, as it does something new. I did not intend to use two popular history books, as I figured one would be enough to account for the differences between books intended more for a mainstream audience and those for academic research, or specially interested individuals. It was Shorto’s uniqueness and the fame of Miles Gilton’s book that spurred me to include them both.

The chapter being analysed is titled “The King, the Surgeon, the Turk and the Whore”. The chapter begins with a description of the “party-king” Charles I of England who absolutely hated the Dutch, mostly because their of rebel ways but also due to them “muscling the English out of

²⁶⁷ Clulow, *Amboina, 1623*, 203.

the richest source of commerce, the East Indies”.²⁶⁸ Shorto then adds that it angered the English king that he had to stay allied with them as to support their revolt against Spain due to Protestantism’s, or more specifically Calvinism’s, popularity in the Dutch provinces. I believe that these exaggerations are most likely here to humour the reader.

Shorto then describes a situation in which the English captured a Dutch vessel on its way to Amsterdam from “a certain island named Manathans”, on the claim that the cargo was gathered from English territory in the Americas.²⁶⁹ Shorto then claims that Charles I did this as a result of wanting to gain a stronger foothold in the New World colonies because they had lost foothold in the East Indies and this new territory could yield vast fortunes. Then the author asserts that reason for the English contesting the Dutch claim in North America being the result of the Amboyna Massacre: “probably in retaliation for a recent English assault on Dutch ships in the Indies, Dutch soldiers on Amboyna tortured and killed ten Englishmen, as well as several Japanese mercenaries, whom they accused of plotting to take over the fort”.²⁷⁰ The Amboyna Massacre then according to Shorto contributed to this hostage-taking of the Dutch ship, but also an increased English interest in the Americas. There is no source cited to confirm this. The statement signals that he believes the coup was staged by the Dutch.

The sentence from Shorto cited above has some statements that simplify the story quite a bit. While there is nothing inherently wrong with simplifying it, especially when one remembers that this is a book targeted at a more general public and its sole purpose is not to write about the Amboyna Massacre, it portrays the event with several errors. First of all, the Japanese are referred to as an add-on without really specifying their role. He does not clarify that the Japanese worked for the Dutch, and neither is the Portuguese nor the natives brought up as part of the alleged plot. Then he remarks that the Dutch *probably* killed the English because of their assault on Dutch ships. While this might be the case, the hypothesis lacks a proper build up. The treaty of 1619 or how the two East India companies were allied are not mentioned. The fact that the two companies were allied is an important piece of the puzzle, as if you withhold that information, you merely present two nations and their rivalry in the East Indies. Why would the Dutch not execute the English if they were locked in a bloody competition to secure the spices? Shorto’s explanation is therefore rather poorly executed, mostly because he fails to describe the complexity of Ambon in 1623.

²⁶⁸ Russell Shorto, *The Island at the Centre of the World: The Untold Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Founding of New York*. (London: Black Swan, 2005), 100-02.

²⁶⁹ Shorto, *The Island at the Centre of the World*, 104-06.

²⁷⁰ Shorto, *The Island at the Centre of the World*, 106.

Now for the unique part of this work and the reason for its inclusion: “England virtually ceded the East Indies to the Dutch shippers, and refocused its energies elsewhere in Asia. Thus, one resonant consequence of Amboyna, echoing through the coming centuries, would be the build-up of British India. Another was New York [...] and they [the English] were determined that the Dutch not have control of both the East Indies and the vast unknown riches of North America”.²⁷¹ I think this is the most interesting aspect of this history writing of the Massacre. Shorto embraces the recognized consequence that Britain focused their efforts on India, but the incorporation of the Americas is not part of the general consensus I have witnessed so far. While I think this is something one could argue for, I do not think Russell Shorto spends enough time and energy to back up his claim more thoroughly. I do believe it could be a possible scenario, though he has not been able to convince me.

The history of the propaganda material related to the Amboyna Massacre is also briefly mentioned and: “However outraged the English authorities may actually have been by the incident, they spun it ferociously for moral and political advantage.”²⁷² Shorto does not elaborate if these efforts had any effects on the several Anglo-Dutch Wars. He does claim that *True Relation* was published before the VOC pamphlet *A True Declaration*, which is false. Further on he comments that pamphlet’s portrayal of the Dutch as barbarous was probably no better than “English, Portuguese, or other European empire-builders”. This is a fair assessment to make as it reasonable that all these empires committed similar acts of violence, and the fact that the English and Dutch fought bitterly against each other before the treaty. The EIC pamphlets in tow with the woodcut illustrations did indeed depict the Dutch as cruel villains. He agreeably sees the pamphlets as propaganda, just like the play by Dryden.²⁷³ The rest of the chapter then focuses on the English and Dutch fighting for the claim over the Manhattan Island.

The Massacre makes its return in Shorto’s book a few more times. In one case he describes how the *True Relation* was reprinted and sent to The Hague twenty-eight years later as a confirmation from the English that they were rallying the nation to prepare for war against the Dutch.²⁷⁴ This he has gathered from the pamphlets *A declaration of the Parliament of the commonwealth of England, relating to the affairs and proceedings [...]* as well as *Nootwendige Observatien op het Antwoort van de Republiëcke van Engelant op drie schriften overgelevert by d’Ambassadeurs vande H. Staten Generael [...]*.²⁷⁵ As previously explained the pamphlets were indeed reprinted

²⁷¹ Shorto, *The Island at the Centre of the World*, 108.

²⁷² Shorto, *The Island at the Centre of the World*, 106-07.

²⁷³ Shorto, *The Island at the Centre of the World*, 107-08.

²⁷⁴ Shorto, *The Island at the Centre of the World*, 321-22.

²⁷⁵ Shorto, *The Island at the Centre of the World*, 335-36.

for the Anglo-Dutch wars as to help sway public opinion against the Dutch, and then as a result of this make them pro-war. It is often unwise to go to war without having the public's opinion on your side.

As for sources and literature Shorto makes use of the pamphlets *True Relation* and *A Remonstrance* when he is writing of the Amboyna Massacre. He also frequently cites *Documents relative to the colonial history of the state of New York volume 1*, which is a collective of documents entailing New York's colonial history. These sources are only cited when he directly quotes from them, and it is therefore very unclear where the other information is extracted from, or if it his own conclusions.

3.16 Anthony Milton: *Marketing a massacre: Amboyna, The East India Company and the public sphere in early Stuart England* (2007).

A chapter in an edited book titled *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England*, this is written by the Brit Anthony Milton. He is a professor in history who specializes in politics and religion in early modern Britain. Several authors have contributed to this edited work and all chapters tackle the public sphere in early modern England in various ways. Milton is the last English author to be handled in this historiography. As the title of his chapter suggests his goal is to present the EIC's marketing of the Massacre, and not so much the Massacre itself: "It is the initial response to the Amboyna incident which will be the principal concern of this chapter".²⁷⁶

On the Massacre itself it is a short but accurate retelling of the events: "On 27 February 1623, Gabriel Towerson, the chief factor or merchant of the East India Company (EIC) in Amboyna, was beheaded after torture by command of the local Dutch governor, Herman van Speult. Nine other Englishmen, ten Japanese and one Portuguese shared the same fate, all charged with having plotted to kill Van Speult and overwhelm the Dutch garrison on Amboyna".²⁷⁷ The number of men executed is correct and he does not portray one side more favourably than the other. He continues then to tell the incident's notoriety and longevity in history writing, suggesting that the event has been "glossed by later English historians". Though short and lacking further details it serves Milton's purpose. Milton's thesis is that the EIC "launched a sustained propaganda campaign, using a range of media" to "whip up anti-Dutch and pro-Company sentiment" and to "avenge the massacre".²⁷⁸ In addition to the overall theme of the edited work, he seeks to explore how the EIC used the public sphere to sway control over the discourse of the Massacre all the

²⁷⁶ Anthony Milton, "Marketing a massacre: Amboyna, The East India Company and the public sphere in early Stuart England," in *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England*, ed. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 168.

²⁷⁷ Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 168.

²⁷⁸ Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 168-69.

while not rapturing the Protestant unity between the two nations. To accomplish this his chapter is divided into five parts. The first one details his thesis and the discussion of how the marketing of Ambon relates to the public sphere as discussed here.

The second part explains the role of the Company as both a department of state (due to its political trading supported by the crown) and a private monopoly.²⁷⁹ He explains this because the EIC was attacked by the public sphere in a series of pamphlets that argued they wasted men, material, ships, inhibited free trade, and neglected the deceased traders' families all the while trading for unnecessary luxuries. They therefore published their own pamphlets and held speeches to defend their position, which Milton believes shows how the Company knew of the dangers of acting against public interest since they made such efforts to sway the public sphere's opinion.²⁸⁰ Their position between the crown and parliament meant that "the EIC clearly had a substantial 'public relations problem' on its hands [...] when news of the Amboyna Massacre finally leaked out", which Milton then means that they had to appeal to the public as to reduce hostile attacks.²⁸¹ Milton has then showed how the Company was familiar with tackling the public's opinions and was therefore ready when the news of the Massacre arrived in England.

Part three then moves on to cover the writing and publishing of a written account of the Massacre, as the initial attempts to seek justice through King James I failed.²⁸² He adds that the VOC pamphlet also represented the English Company in the worst possible way. The VOC pamphlet was the perfect excuse for the EIC to publish their own Milton writes, and he adds that they adopted the use of woodcuts, representations of martyrdom, dramatic narrative, a biblical tone, while trying to maintain Anglo-Dutch relations, as depicted by the introduction to the *True Relation*.²⁸³ However, Milton suggests that the EIC knew exactly what they were doing as they dispersed the two thousand copies firstly to nobility as it would have the largest effect to sway policy.²⁸⁴ Continuing, there arose paintings, sermons, broadsheets, and plays on the Massacre, and stresses that the EIC had no involvement in these: "once a patriotic audience had been primed, a company could then in part sit back and watch a series of initiatives from independent authors, printers and playwrights" and that one key reason for these initiatives would be the hope of receiving patronage from the Company. Milton has then advocated for how the EIC initially swayed public opinion with *True Relation*, which caused the public sphere to react and publish their own works defending them and speaking their cause.

²⁷⁹ Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 169-71.

²⁸⁰ Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 171-73.

²⁸¹ Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 173.

²⁸² Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 173-74.

²⁸³ Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 175-76.

²⁸⁴ Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 177-80.

The fourth part builds upon the previous by exploring what the East India Company gained from these mediums portraying the Amboyna Massacre. He remarks how the EIC had to stay patient due to the English and Dutch's Treaty of Southampton, but in 1627 three VOC ships were held hostage by the British.²⁸⁵ However things took a turn because they were released after a year, and the Company and the crown's relationship were in decline due to the king acting withdrawn as to not further deteriorate Anglo-Dutch relations. The Ambon issue went unresolved for several years but Milton ends this part by eluding to its future success: "but it was not until the Anglo-Dutch wars of the 1650s and 1660s that Amboyna really captured the public imagination again".²⁸⁶ By this he refers to the pamphleteering campaigns used to inspire anti-Dutch sentiment, rather than proposing that the massacre was a cause for these wars. He adds no comment to how the Massacre affected the spice trade.

The final part of Milton's article seeks to conclude his findings. He proposes that one cannot hold the EIC responsible for an "orchestrated propaganda campaign" for publishing some pamphlets, as most of the other mediums are likely the work of individuals seeking private economical fortune.²⁸⁷ He claims that: "There is little evidence that the Company were really seeking to address some broader form of 'public opinion'" but rather sought to influence the political elite. He builds up this argument by remarking how the EIC was not just an economic ideology, but that elements of "political, religious and social legitimacy was also crucial" and that their efforts in replying to the Amboyna Massacre were "attempts to boost the Company's legitimacy in all these areas". This Milton believes was important for them because the Company relied on investors to secure their future.

This short review of Milton's chapter I believe shows that he had a firm grasp of historical techniques as he applies sources within his discourses to make the key arguments of his text. He has considerable knowledge of the period which shows in how he handles the complexity of the political relations between England and the Netherlands, and how he builds up his arguments. He of course applies familiar sources as the pamphlets and *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, East Indies*, but also throughout the chapter cites various documents from *India Office Records*. Unsurprisingly none of the authors I have covered is referenced by Milton, as his aim is quite different from the others. This chapter shows that a historian's intent naturally colours what sources they search for and ultimately which they end up referencing.

²⁸⁵ Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 181-83.

²⁸⁶ Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 183.

²⁸⁷ Milton, "Marketing a massacre," 183-86.

Milton's language and style signals a historian who seeks to understand the time period he writes of. He adopts a neutral tone that implies a want to uncover knowledge. Milton also builds up his arguments well and strives to back up his claims with relevant sources or literature. His conclusions are also not phrased in a deterministic way, rather he remarks that the evidence seems to suggest that they are like he concludes.

3.17 Alison Games: *Inventing the English Massacre: Amboyna in History and Memory* (2020)

Published in 2020 this is the newest work of research on the Amboyna Massacre that I examine in this historiography. It is also a full-fledged book. Games meticulously goes through the events before, during, and after the Massacre. Her thesis is not to blame either party. Instead, she focuses on uncovering and explaining how the English and the EIC invented the terminology of “massacre” as a sort of marketing tool for “restitution and maybe a touch of revenge”.²⁸⁸ Due to the length of Games' book I must keep it short and rather summarize as to not unnecessarily extend the length of this thesis.

The book is divided into six chapters, not including the introduction and epilogue. The first chapter “From Competition to Conspiracy” deals with the EIC and VOC's violent rivalry in the Moluccas and how they ended up signing the Treaty of Defence. She also covers the daily life and interactions of these two nationalities who had to cooperate. “The Amboyna Business”, the second chapter, serve to portray the discovery of the plot, the torturing of the English and Japanese, their imprisonment, and finally their execution. The next chapter “Inventing the Amboyna massacre” undertakes a discussion of the aftermath of the massacre mainly by focusing on the reactions from the East India Companies, the printing of the pamphlets, illustrations of the torture methods, and politics. It is also here that Games discusses the origin of the term “massacre” and how the EIC used this as a marketing tool – an important aspect of her main question. I will cover more on this further down. Chapter four named “The Reckoning” is about the EIC, the surviving merchants, and the quest of the families of the executed for compensation which would last thirty-one years. The six surviving members and their numerous court hearings are included here. She also covers the daily interactions between traders on Ambon and other islands, and how this caused a deep mistrust on both parties.²⁸⁹ The chapter ends with the Massacre and the pamphlets' role in the four Anglo-Dutch wars. The fifth chapter: “Domesticating Amboyna”, concerns the massacre's longevity in popular culture in several plays, manuscripts, paintings, books, the name “Amboyna” used as a synonym for cruelty, new pamphlets, its inclusion in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and its place in eighteenth-century

²⁸⁸ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 76.

²⁸⁹ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 114-17.

history books. The sixth and final chapter entitled “Legacies: Reinvention and the Linchpin of Empire” deals with how the events at Ambon in 1623 had been reinvented to a story of slaughter and one regarding only the British vs. the Dutch. Here she adds how authors and historians have dealt with the massacre, highlighting the several errors and conclusions made. The linchpin the title refers to is the massacre as an explanation for Britain’s focus on India.

Games’ thesis is an interesting one as she peers at the terminology of *massacre* and how the EIC used this. She explains that today we associate the term as a synonym for *slaughter*, but it was originally used to describe the chopping blocks of French butchers.²⁹⁰ Continuing, Games clarify how it transformed to mean a violent form of murder by appearing in pamphlets and plays detailing events like murder of Protestants on St. Bartholomew’s Day in 1572 which was written into the play *The Massacre in Paris* in 1593. Before the Amboyna Massacre, ten works were published with *massacre* in the title and like the events at Ambon, according to Games, they all feature three key elements: 1) violence, 2) blameless and defenceless victims, and 3) fear and uncertainty.²⁹¹ The nature of the alliance between the two nations meant that an account of the events was risky and the EIC avoided using the word *massacre*, but used the adjective *bloody* together with words like *butchery*, *murther*, *torture*, and *execucon* in the pamphlets the published.²⁹² They relied on synonyms and never had to write out the word *massacre*, but the readers would associate it as one. Here she also notes how *True Relation* was a powerful book that affected readers, together with the gruesome depictions of the woodcuts, which the EIC smartly published in both English and Dutch. This she suggests could have defined English identity in the form of a common anti-Dutch attitude.²⁹³ She also comments that one Epistle of *True Relation* implored the readers to embrace their English nationality and show solidarity with the dead merchants.²⁹⁴ All this marketing, that did not result in an immediate compensation, did result in ensuring: “the longevity of the Amboyna Massacre”.²⁹⁵ The Massacre’s fame might then not have been so wide-spread and discussed if not for the EIC’s efforts.

The language and style of Games’ writing is on the same level as Bassett. Sentences are not loaded with prejudice and contempt for either party, but rather she displays a want to understand these men and their decisions rather than judge them. She words herself with phrases like “suggests, may, evidence from [...], likely, indicate” and so on throughout the book. Not making bombastic claims without much evidence to back it up has been a staple for the history writing

²⁹⁰ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 78-79.

²⁹¹ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 76-79.

²⁹² Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 84-85 & 93.

²⁹³ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 106.

²⁹⁴ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 90-91.

²⁹⁵ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 111.

of the Massacre, and Games does the opposite by adopting such a style. She presents herself as a more believable source by presenting her arguments with sources and thorough discussion. This in combination with her almost always backing up her claims with sources and a discussion when she wants to persuade the reader allures to a competent historian who strives to seek objectivity. This change from a narrative to an effort in trying to convince the reader is a change I have observed in modern history writing.

Alison Games has a firm grasp on historical techniques: “Even if there were a conspiracy afoot, the only confessions the examiners accepted were those they believed. The confessions, then, tell us about the plot the VOC feared and envisioned”.²⁹⁶ This she backs up by remarking how the council believed the plot would start once the English ship arrived with backup, but rejected Johnson’s version that implied the plot would start once Van Speult left the island. She also uses similar situations in close proximity of time as bases for arguments: “There was nothing unusual in this era about Europeans’ tendency to see conspiracies afoot in the world” and cites *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe*.²⁹⁷ To summarize, Games’ book covers the topic of the Amboyna Massacre and its legacy by employing deduction, thoughts of reason, an understanding of the period and its geographical significance, as well as containing a sizeable list of sources and secondary literature to back up its claims.

Regarding sources, Games utilize a varied and extensive list in the form of endnotes. There are trial records, pamphlets, dictionaries, different calendars, letters, diaries, depositions, prayer books, plays, travel accounts, prints, interviews, articles, and history books. There also several recognizable names regarding the secondary literature like Meilink-Roelofs, Clulow, Milton, Masselman, Grotius, D. Hume, J. Swift, Stapel, Bassett, and Coolhaas. In addition to this her choice of secondary literature is there to supplement wherever necessary and convinces the reader that Games is well-read not only upon the Massacre itself, but also regarding the East Indies, pamphleteering, empire and colonial history, conflicts, eighteenth century England, eighteenth century politics and international relations, to name a few. Having such a diverse list of sources and literature certainly helps her credibility and makes it apparent that she has researched this topic well.

On the legacy of the Massacre and its effects on politics, Games writes: “Amboyna featured prominently in these texts” and “Parliament mentioned that the “cruel and bloody Business” in its rationale for war”.²⁹⁸ The tale of Ambon was transformed into a story of Dutch cruelty, she

²⁹⁶ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 54-55.

²⁹⁷ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 37.

²⁹⁸ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 137-39.

further underlines. Unlike the others that have viewed the Massacre as a vital part of the decision of going to war, she treats as part of a larger puzzle. It certainly influenced Anglo-Dutch relations, especially with the publishing of pamphlets, plays, songs, etc. On the idea that the Massacre hindered the EIC's further trade Games agree with Bassett, stating that he: "published a well-researched article in 1960 that dismantled the long-standing claims that the EIC gave up on the spice trade after and because of the incident in Amboyna".²⁹⁹ She also comments that: "at most it only accelerated a process already under way."³⁰⁰ The Massacre then was not to blame.

The effort and methods applied by Games in this work make it an important part of the historiography of the Amboyna Massacre. It meticulously goes over almost every detail concerning the Massacre and has a specified focus on the marketing and legacy of it. It also covers elements of its historiography. These aspects of the work that Games has produced I believe makes it a crucial piece of research that should be included in future studies on the Massacre.

²⁹⁹ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 201.

³⁰⁰ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 114.

4.0 Analysis

Having now reviewed sixteen works regarding the Amboyna Massacre, it is time to analyse whether the differences I have observed throughout are due to nationality or the other criteria. I will therefore categorize these works and discuss each criterion in detail to uncover whether or not these historians are prejudiced due to their nationality as well as including new literature on the Amboyna Massacre that has not been part of the historiographical analysis. At the end I will summarize my thoughts and findings regarding nationality as a factor.

4.1 Type of history

The first criterion affects the outcome of writing about the Massacre. In this list of works there is quite a variety of different types of histories: of a nation, of a geographical area, of European settlement/colonialism, of the East India Companies, of a certain individual, articles concerning the Massacre, and finally a dedicated book to the history of the Ambon incident. Obviously, the length dedicated to the Massacre in each of these works affect the amount of detail, so there is no need to comment further upon this. What is of interest, is to just briefly summarize the different types to see similarities and differences.

There are five works whose aim it is to write nations and/or a geographical area's history: *The history of England*, *The India Archipelago*, *The story of India*, *History of India Volume VII*, and *Nusantara*. Aside from Hunter who has a dedicated chapter about the Massacre, the rest merely includes it in other relevant chapters. Macaulay, St. John, and Boulger choose to include it as part of the English merchant ventures, while Vlekke places it in a chapter dedicated to Jan Pieterszoon Coen. These depictions of the Massacre are around two to six pages, except Hunter's *History of India* being the longest with fifty-four pages. About a hundred and eighty years divide the earliest and latest of these works, but they have several similarities especially the shorter ones. They explain that the English were executed due to an alleged plot, some mention the Japanese, and then turn to explaining how this affected the trade in the East Indies and/or contributed to starting the first Anglo-Dutch war. Hunter's chapter, being the longest of these five, goes into considerably more detail, especially in explaining the situation in the Moluccas preceding the event, the Anglo-Dutch relations between the traders there, more details on the tortures, and considerably more on the aftermath which he accomplishes by writing about the EIC's efforts in obtaining compensation and their marketing efforts. All these works are written either by British or Dutch historians, and though they write similar styles of history it seems that their nationality is the deciding factor that divides their opinion on the Massacre – suggesting that their nationhood influences their opinion on who was guilty and who was innocent.

There are four works pertaining to colonial, economic and trade history. They are: Van Rees' *Geschiedenis der staathuishoudkunde in Nederland*, Hyma's *A History of the Dutch in the Far East*, Masselman's *Cradle of Colonialism*, and Furber's *Rival empires of trade in the Orient 1600-1800*. All include the Massacre in a chapter dedicated to the spice trade rivalry between the EIC and VOC, with Masselman more precisely detailing the English's withdrawal from the region and seeing the Massacre as a primary reason for this. Hyma barely writes about it and seems to have included it just to explain how the Dutch succeeded in controlling the majority of the Malay Archipelago. Furber's chapter focuses on the rivalry of the spice trade between the two companies, but unlike Hyma and Masselman, he does not believe the Massacre caused the English withdrawal – which I accounted to his use of Bassett's article as a major source when writing this chapter. He does not dwell long on the Massacre and focuses on explaining Coen's further ambitions in the region and England's progress in India. Van Rees' has a similar approach as Furber, however his work is typically pro-Dutch. All four are aiming to explain the politics regarding the Massacre. Here it seems that the type of history is not a major contributor to how historians view the Massacre, but rather if they believed it was a major event that influenced matters in the region. In addition, nationality might have been a contributing factor affecting these historians.

The next category of works that I have placed assembled into a type, are the articles published in history journals: Stapel's *The Ambon "Massacre" (9 March, 1623)*, Coolhaas' *Notes and comments on the so-called Amboina massacre*, and D.K. Bassett *The "Amboyna Massacre" of 1623*. The first two have a different aim with writing about the Massacre itself, asking who plotted against whom, and the legacy of it and they are therefore quite analytical. Bassett mostly ignores the Massacre and wants to test the hypothesis that it ended English trade in the East Indies by writing more akin to economic history. This cannot, however, likely be accounted for by the different nationalities but rather unique intentions and this results in distinct examinations of the Massacre. Therefore, a relatively small historical incident can be used to examine many different aspects of history and the type change the perceived outcome of it.

Two popular history books are reviewed here, by an English and an American author respectively. There is no reason that popular history books should not contain proper historical research and techniques as seen in academia. They both write narrative-styled histories. Milton is, however, no different than the earliest historians like St. John, Boulger, and other nineteenth-century authors in that he resorts to relying too much on *True Relation*, pictures the Dutch as nothing but barbarous and sees no way for the English to be guilty. His history is mostly narrative. Shorto, however, I regard as handling the Massacre in a much more detached way – which could be the

result of his nationality, since they are the same types of history. Nevertheless, the work, as commented above, needs refinement. The Massacre is used not only to explain the common idea that it made England focus on India, but also the on the new land of America. An interesting theory, but he did not back up these claims proficiently. Still, it represents how the Massacre can be handled in popular history books quite differently from academia.

Lastly, we have Anthony Milton's "Marketing a massacre" and Alison Games' *Inventing the English Massacre*. These two have a similar goal in mind of researching the marketing of the EIC, and they both cover aspects of political, economic, and social history. Milton does not believe the EIC outright marketed the Massacre more than influenced the political elite, while Games believes the *True Relation* "directly affected" the public's opinions.³⁰¹ These two, one English and one American, both write of the Massacre in a much more nuanced way and do not resort to stating bold claims without anything to back it up with. Anthony Milton's English nationhood does not seem to have influenced his work. Alison Games is American and the other two Americans all present the Amboyna Massacre as more of a series of misfortunates that led to the execution of the English, also understanding why the Dutch would be anxious of a possible attack. This might indicate that their origin is of importance as their nation was not involved in the Massacre.

While my choice of works in this historiography points out a trend of British historians being pro-English, and Dutch historians adopting a pro-Dutch view, one could also argue that this is not the case. A. Milton and Bassett are two British historians who present the Ambon incident in a more refined manner – then again, their primary focus is not on the Massacre and who the true culprit was. There are of course examples of British authors that either suspect the English at Ambon were the guilty party, or agree that it was a judicial murder at best – not a massacre. Some of these are: R.H. Major in *Early Voyages to Terra Australis*, and W.H. Moreland in *From Akbar to Aurangzeb; a study in Indian Economic History*. The point to make here is that nationality does not necessarily equal affected prejudices.

What can we conclude from this? Well certainly that the Amboyna Massacre can be used in several types of histories like narrative-based, analytical, popular, political, colonial, economic, and social history. As expected, this changes the framing of the narrative, but overall seems not to affect whether or not there exists some sort of national bias, as there are examples of it occurring and not occurring in the same types of histories.

³⁰¹ Games, *Inventing the English Massacre*, 149.

4.2 What historical techniques are being employed?

The analysed works span the period from 1763 to 2020 and unsurprisingly there are quite a few changes that have occurred. Firstly, the most obvious fact is that the older historical works either do not cite their sources or rely heavily on the East India Companies' pamphlets as their primary foundation of information. Some also make use of annals, other histories such as Hume's, statements, and court proceedings. Source variety gets more frequent in the works at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries. Stapel's article marks a drastic shift in how sources are handled, cited, discussed, and criticized when compared to the five previous works. From here on out there is mostly a positive development in this area, except for authors like Masselman, G. Milton, and Shorto who, lacking a better way to phrase it, falls short this department. There is also an increased use of secondary literature, and several of the authors reference each other.

What are the most commonly used sources throughout the various works on the Massacre? Obviously, the pamphlets, and especially so *True Relation* and *A True Declaration*. Some regard them as more factual than others, but more recent works generally consider them as propaganda literature that have some useful elements to them. Their usefulness depends on the thesis – they work great if you want to research the East India Companies' reaction to the events or as a study case of political pamphleteering like Anthony Milton and Alison Games did. *Calender of State Papers*, letters from Van Speult, Towerson & Coen, *India Office Records*, and trial documents are commonly used sources by several historians. A greater variety of sources has generally shown to result in a more objective point of view.

The above-mentioned sources are then commonly used by a large portion of the historians. However, different interpretations often mean distinct sources. We see this in several cases of this historiography. Bassett used *Commercial Relations between India and England* to make the case that the Massacre did not stop English interest in the region, but merely halted it for a while as he stressed that trading continued until 1682 because of lost profits. Van Rees, Masselman, and Furber agree with this. Others like Coolhaas and Vlekke believe that the EIC's ventures in the East Indies were already in decline before the 1623 and the Massacre was just the final blow. And finally, many argue that the Massacre stopped the English East India Company's efforts in the Moluccas and resulted in an interest in mainland India instead. This idea is not backed up with sources, and might be the subject of correlation vs. causation. So far there lacks evidence to claim that the Massacre caused the English to focus more on India.

The use of secondary literature also increases over time. Likely this is because the amount of works published each year will increase and it gets more common in the field to apply such

literature to the research. Especially the newer works by Games, Anthony Milton, Bassett, Stapel, etc. apply a wide range of literature where it is suitable. Both the articles by Bassett and Stapel are commonly cited by other historians, implying that these have made an impression in the research of the Amboyna Massacre.

One interesting characteristic of the historians citing each other is that Dutch authors often end up referencing other Dutch historians and Dutch-written sources, while British authors also favour their works in own language and/or from their own nationhood. Now this does not apply to all cases mentioned in this thesis, but several choose and/or favour works by historians with the same nationality. It could be the simple fact that historians cannot read the language in question. Yet, this would usually only apply to English authors, as the Dutch writers in academia have a pretty good grasp of the English language. It could also be that one prefers reading one's native language. How does this citing of other historians affect their view on the matter?

Does the use of the same sources and/or literature result in similar or vastly different conclusions? British authors like Macaulay, Hunter, and Milton generally present a similar story of English innocence and Dutch brutality. All three depend on the *True Relation* as a primary source. As stated above the historians commonly prefer sources and secondary literature in their native language. British historians put more faith in the *True Relation*, and Dutch do the same with *A True Declaration*. In some cases, historians rely mostly on the work of others, resulting in very similar conclusions and style of writing. Bernard Vlekke does this with Stapel's article, and Holden Furber relies greatly on Bassett's article, thus ending up as mini versions of the "originals". All this results in a very distinct British/Dutch-focused selection of information. However, this is just a general trend. Games, Anthony Milton, Bassett, Hyma, Coolhaas, Furber and Stapel all use a wide range of material in English, Dutch, French, etc. These authors usually present the matter as more nuanced and seem to adopt a tone that signals that they are open for discussion, rather than the historians who cling to source material from one side and refuse to see the arguments of the other.

The source material applied by these historians are more or less the same, with some variation depending on nationality, type of history, thesis, the historian's purpose, and time as factors. However, this has in principle led to three ways to view the Massacre: 1) The English were plotting to seize the fort and kill the Dutch, 2) The English were innocent, and the Dutch were paranoid (or the Dutch plotted against the English, and finally 3) the whole incident was a series of unfortunate events that got out of hand. Usually works that primarily cite literature from their own nationality defend that said nation. The third way to view the massacre is characterized by source criticism and an aim of objectivity.

This also applies to the effect of the English spice trade after the Amboyna Massacre. D.K. Bassett, as stated earlier, emphasized that the consensus among historians is that the Massacre ended the English spice trade in the Moluccas. Interestingly my selected works in this historiography show that only five agree with this opinion, and four of them are British historians: Macaulay, St. John, Boulger, and G. Milton. None of the Dutch believe this notion, and Stapel does not comment on this. The Dutch usually remark that English trade in the region was in decline before the Massacre, and that the EIC made the decision to withdraw but the news did not arrive in time. Others like Basset and Games (who draws on Basset's research) however, use sources to argue against the claims that they fully withdrew from the Moluccas. So many aspects of the Massacre cause discussion and it seems like there are only a few things that are largely agreed upon: Hytesio's questions caused suspicion, the Japanese and English were tortured and questioned, they confessed under torture, they were executed, this caused an outcry in England and the spread of pamphlets from both parties, it was one of the reasons for England and the Netherlands going to war. Aside from those, everything else about this incident has been debated. Above I clarified that most historians in this historiography makes use of very similar sources, but it results in such varying results. Is this a result of sloppy research, different interpretations, or bias?

Historians can and will have bias in multiple ways, just like all in science and research. In their introduction to *Social Science History*, Kris Inwood, and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart argue that there exists selection bias in historical sources.³⁰² Their argument is that historians might err in the degree of representativeness for the rest of the data material, and how accurately they represent the "historical realities". They believe that such a bias is difficult to eliminate, if not impossible. We see this in multiple ways throughout the history writing on the Amboyna Massacre. Using just one of the East India Companies' pamphlets as a main source is often associated with similar opinions and style. Similarly, this is observable with historians primarily using either English or Dutch sources/literature. On the other hand, historians such as Alison Games, Albert Hyma, and Fredrik Stapel who use a wider variety of sources show more nuanced views and examinations of the event. D.K. Bassett's use of primarily one source containing shipping records makes him confident in stating that the Massacre did not stop EIC ventures in the Moluccas. One such source is enough "to transform an historian's thinking" writes Inwood & Maxwell-Stewart.³⁰³ What can one do with these biases?

³⁰² Kris Inwood and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "Selection Bias and Social Science History," *Soc. sci. hist* 44, no. 3 (2020): 411-12, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ssh.2020.18>.

³⁰³ Inwood and Maxwell-Stewart, "Selection Bias and Social Science History," 412.

A predicament with writing history is that prejudice is likely impossible to prevent. All the historians examined here have chosen to write about the Amboyna Massacre for some reason. Perhaps they found the tale fascinating, they deemed it necessary to include, they believed that the research on the Massacre has been lacklustre, they have developed new opinions, unearthed new sources, etc. Herbert Butterfield in his book *Christianity and History* writes: “Amongst historians, as in other fields, the blindest of the blind are those who are unable to examine their own presuppositions and blithely imagine therefore that they do not possess any.”³⁰⁴ This shred of wisdom by Butterfield I find valuable. Eliminating historical bias will perhaps never be possible, but historians and readers can adopt a mindset of accepting this bias while trying to minimize it. This change is present in the historiography as the later professional historians engage with the available source material. They are not as fixed and inflexible when they write history. They seem aware of these challenges and see history writing as a development. Or, as J. Harry Cotton puts it: “We see through our own eyes.”³⁰⁵ However, early historians such as Macaulay, St. John, and Boulger who are clearly biased without much to back up their claims, might be fully aware of this and that it is part of their intention. Stapel, Coolhaas, Vlekke, and Hyma being all Dutch might be biased as well in having a presupposition for wanting to believe the English were guilty. As with many historical events, but certainly with the Amboyna Massacre, a selection of sources can prove or disprove any presupposition one might have, which account for the different interpretations of the Massacre.

One of the most crucial abilities of a historian is this ability to understand how we as humans are affected by expectations of our time, environment, culture, etc. This historical awareness is present in the works of the earliest analysed historians, but usually only towards the merchants of their own nationality. St. John is a great English example of this as he would have defended Towerson and his men even if they were guilty. Stapel and Coolhaas has great research articles but also a clear bias towards favoring the Dutch merchants. They go in quite a lot of detail concerning the struggles of the daily life of Ambon and how paranoid they must have felt considering rumours and similar attacks which occurred previously. There is not much of that insight when they regard the English. Bassett and Games are historians who master this ability regarding both sides, trying to make sense of either party and their thoughts. This suggests that modern historians value this historical technique towards both parts of a conflict more than earlier historians. This ability is also linked to their language and style which will be discussed below.

³⁰⁴ Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 46.

³⁰⁵ J. Harry Cotton, "The Historian's Bias," *Indiana magazine of history* 52, no. 3 (1956): 269.

The field of history is as discussed somewhere in between humanities and social science. It has a double role of academic principle and providing cultural heritage. As expected, as time progressed the research on a topic such as the Amboyna Massacre further developed. The more a historical event is written, the more secondary literature becomes available to future historians who can either use their research to further advance their own or learn from their “mistakes”. One example of this is how the various Dutch authors often cite Stapel’s article and consider it a useful and well-written article exploring several parts concerning the Massacre. The point is that as both the field of history advances and the more is written on a subject, it will result in an advantage for later historians. It is important, though, to remember that newer does not automatically mean better, as evidenced by G. Milton and Masselman. When looking at the works analysed in this historiography there is an overall obvious positive shift in the use of sources and secondary literature, as well as source criticism and openness the further one advances.

4.3 Language & style

The language and style criterion is the where the most noticeable changes throughout the historiography are visible and where we can easily see differences between British and Dutch authors in terms of how they frame the narrative. I want to highlight these changes by noting how style in history writing has evolved by examining the earliest and the latest works. Then I will underline what sort of differences there are between the separate nationalities to judge if nationhood affects this part of their writing.

On the development throughout the historiography one can gather that early historians wrote with much more feelings and had no problems with blaming and identifying the other nation as the villains. This holds true for several earlier historians.³⁰⁶ It is also clearly represented in the examined literature, but it also gradually declines when we reach modern times. D.K. Bassett, Anthony Milton and Alison Games illustrate this progression. They adopt more nuanced terminology and try to remain as objective as possible. This I believe is not just a trait of history writing on the Amboyna Massacre, but on the development of history as a whole.

Bassett stress the major style difference between Dutch and British authors – namely the naming of the episode: “The Dutch would refer to it as the Ambon incident, but the English bluntly called it the Amboyna massacre”.³⁰⁷ The examined English historians mostly name it a massacre and pair it with adjectives seeking to highlight the cruelty towards the English merchants. In contrast,

³⁰⁶ For more examples see: George Edmundson, *History of Holland*, ed. Sir G. W. Prothero, Cambridge Historical Series, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 163-64 & 220.; Hume, *The History of England*, V, 428 & 47.; T. Keightley, *The History of England: From the Earliest Period to 1839*, 5 vols., vol. 4 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), 196-97.; John Wynne Jeurwine, *Studies in Empire and Trade* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1923), 279-84.

³⁰⁷ Masselman, *Cradle of colonialism*, 429.

Dutch writers either prefer to call it the “Ambon incident” or criticize the term *massacre* by placing it in quotations or dubbing it the “so-called Massacre”. In contrast, Hyma labels it as a massacre and Van Rees writes “Ambonsche moord” – which translates to “The Ambon Murder”. Stapel’s article in Dutch also label it “Ambonsche moord”. Some like Bassett instead classify it as a tragedy which imply a more neutral take on the events that transpired at Ambon. How they decided to label the event is a tell-tale sign of their stance on the Massacre and it coincides with their historical techniques, especially regarding sources as I have commented upon.

The findings reveal that throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries most historians examined here, embrace a sympathetic tone for members of their own nationality and a blameful one against the other. While I have encountered works in this era where this is not the case, as previously alluded to, the majority advocates for earlier historians wanting to defend their own nationality when handling the incident at Ambon. The works I have selected are chosen because I believed they represented these tendencies. Authors like Games, Bassett and several others have taken note of this in their writing as well. It is then a known fact that there is a split between nationalities. It cannot be a coincidence. Both the criteria of language and style, and historical techniques highlight this inclination that historians used to have. Closer to the twenty-first century authors adopt more similar approaches to who was to blame for the Massacre in the style of Games, Bassett and Anthony Milton – they believe that available material is not decisive enough and the tense relations perhaps escalated too quickly.³⁰⁸ History writing seems to have developed away from stating their subjective opinions on an event, and rather with a goal of trying to remain objective – letting the historical material judge their conclusion.

4.4 The purpose of history

Every one of these authors has decided to include the Massacre at Ambon for one or more reasons. As commented upon in *4.1 Type of History* there are different types of histories represented here. Type and intended audience might affect the purpose of including an event. Here I will detail how these different historians have contemplated the consequences of the Ambon episode. There are mainly two outcomes: 1) The Massacre caused the English to cease its ambitions in the Spice Island and focus on mainland India and 2) It was one of the causes of the first Anglo-Dutch War. Let us examine these one by one.

³⁰⁸ For a selection of British Authors in the late twentieth century, not analysed in this thesis, who agree with these notions see: Hall, *history of South-East Asia*, 334.; John Phillips Cooper, *The decline of Spain and the Thirty Years War, 1609-48/49* vol. IV, ed. J.P. Cooper, *The New Cambridge Modern History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 650-52.; and John C. Appleby, *War, Politics, and Colonization*, ed. Nicholas Canny and Alaine Low, V vols., vol. I, ed. William Roger Louis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Origins of Empire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 75-77.

Five of the analysed authors agree that the Massacre ended EIC's interest in the Moluccas. Others, mainly Dutch, argue that their trade ventures were already diminishing before 1623 and that the Treaty of Defence of 1619 brought them back into the spice trade. Interestingly Otto van Rees was the first of the analysed to suggest that the English remained in the region until 1682, which of course Bassett's much later article defends. Even though Furber and Games both cite Bassett and defends this idea, many still disagrees.³⁰⁹ Based on the data that Bassett provides it seems that trade continued in the region until the pepper stopped being profitable in the 1680's. The evidence provided by other historians does seem to suggest that the EIC was losing ground in the early seventeenth century and the EIC had already decided to shut down the factory at Ambon. This indicates that the Massacre did not affect the EIC's decision in the Spice Archipelago as they were already reducing their efforts, and trade still maintained decades later. Whether or not it caused England to seek its fortune in India is unlikely.

The first Anglo-Dutch War was a naval battle between the two nations from 1652 to 1654. The outbreak is described as such by Christian Koot: "When treaty negotiations that had initially held the potential of creating a union between the two Protestant powers broke down after the United Provinces refused to give the English trade concessions, enmity increased further and soon the two countries' commercial rivalry erupted into the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652– 54)."³¹⁰ The political ties and commercial competition between these two former allies grew so tense that war broke out. Of the sixteen works researched here, ten directly agree that the Massacre was a cause for war: St. John, Van Rees, Hunter, Stapel, Coolhaas, Masselman, Furber, G. Milton, A. Milton, and Games. There are variations here in the degree of its effect. Some outright identify the Massacre as a cause for war, while others see it as part of a complex process in which Anglo-Dutch relations during the seventeenth century developed. However, the six others mostly do not claim that the Massacre did not affect the war. Many of them do not even comment on the Anglo-Dutch wars, especially all the histories concerned with India/Indian/East Indian Archipelago. It makes sense that they do not devote much time to the wars in Europe. I think it is quite difficult to disagree that the Massacre and the resulting propaganda strained the relations between the two Protestant nations, which affected the decision to go to war. There is no obvious disagreement between modern or past, English or Dutch authors. See the table below.

³⁰⁹ See Appleby, *War, Politics, and Colonization*, I, 76.; Brian Harrison, *South-East Asia; a short history*, 3 ed. (London: Macmillan, 1968), 102-03. George Raudzens, *Empires: Europe and globalization 1492-1788* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 72.; Cooper, *The decline of Spain*, IV, 650-51.

³¹⁰ Christian J. Koot, *Empire at the Periphery: British Colonists, Anglo-Dutch Trade, and the Development of the British Atlantic, 1621-1713*, vol. 1 (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 47.

The Amboyna Massacre was one of the causes for at least The First Anglo-Dutch War			
	Dutch	English	American
Agree	Van Rees, Stapel, Coolhaas, Masselman	St. John, Hunter, Furber, G. Milton.	Furber, Games.
Disagree/No comment	Vlekke, Hyma	Macaulay, Boulger, Bassett, A. Milton	Shorto.

Throughout this historiography I have commented upon how the various authors depict the Japanese's role in the Massacre and how many were executed. Most barely mention them, and it is only Coolhaas and Games' that write extensively about them. The number of Japanese men executed is claimed to be anywhere from eight to 10 in these works. Clulow comments upon this error in various works on the Massacre.³¹¹ Most Dutch claim nine executed, which we can attain that they reference each other. Most English claim ten, or do not bother mentioning how many there were. Purpose of history can affect aspects of a historical incident as many do not bother writing on the Japanese. Coolhaas, Games, and Clulow's referenced article show that there is substantial info on them and that they were an important part of the incident.

It seems that the purpose of history has evolved, especially regarding the intended audience. The histories written by Macaulay, St. John, Van Rees seems to have been written for a broader audience. They present a narrative and there is less focus on research. Especially during the twentieth century there is a shift in the amount of historical techniques utilized by the historians. Particularly the various historical articles are written with the goal of furthering the research on the Massacre and to be read by academics. This development also affects language and style, as the modern historians minimalizes expressive writing. It is common for older works to blame the individuals/nations of the past at Ambon. That impacts the way they express themselves. From the middle of the twentieth century there is a clear move towards seeking to understand the past, rather than judge it. The purpose of history appears to have been an important element in this as especially G. Milton judges the past and writes in a similar style to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians. I am not seeking to criticize G. Milton for this, as his book is, like the earlier works, intended to be read by the public and be a bestseller. Shorto's *The Island at the Centre of the World* is in the same camp. Histories filled with proper techniques, research, arguments, understanding of the past, sources, etc. are usually not on the bestseller-list. Purpose

³¹¹ Clulow, "Unjust, Cruel and Barbarous Proceedings," 23.

then seems to not really be influenced by nationhood. Purpose, however, can create a bias in the history writing on the Ambon incident.

4.5 The historian's impact on historiography

As stated in the methodology this criterion is not of substantial significance as Warren's criteria are specified to inspect historians over thousands of years and looking to unearth if they have inspired unique approaches, and schools of history. We can however use this to inspect if specific authors have influenced the historiography of the Massacre in some ways and how the research of the Massacre has developed.

I went through this in quite detail in *4.2 What historical techniques are being employed*, so I will briefly comment on which historians have affected the research brief. Stapel has been an important source of information for all the following Dutch historians analysed here. Bassett's article is used by both Furber and Games, marks a change in how they view English trade in the East Indies. These two have therefore had quite an impact. Other historians who are cited throughout are: J.K.J. De Jonge, G. Edmundson, H.T. Colenbrander, D.G.E. Hall, and M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs. These have had an impact on the research on the Massacre. It is likely that Games' book and Clulow's article and book will have a similar influence.

4.6 Is nationality a factor?

Having now analysed the criterion in sixteen different historic works with three nationalities represented, seven British, six Dutch, and three American, what are the findings? Does there exist any evidence that British view the incident in one way and the Dutch in another? Is this based on just nationhood, or a range of other factors? Let us briefly summarize the findings.

The British literature suggests that at least early historians were more inclined to defend their own nation, focusing on the *True Relation* as a major source and repeating many of the same arguments. Most British also see the Massacre as stopping the EIC's trade in the East Indies. However, Bassett and A. Milton as well other examples mentioned above in *4.3 Language & Style*, shows that modern British writers are not attempting to defend the English merchants because of their common nationality. Therefore at least for the Brits it seems that nationality affecting their presuppositions is more of a thing of the past as academia has evolved.

The Dutch analysed here all agree that the English were justly punished, though many agree that the legal procedure could have been better. Unfortunately, due to language restrictions the analysed Dutch do not have the same range as the English works, with all but one published between the 1940s and 1960s. Van Rees' work suggests that there is a similar development as in the British literature. While Stapel and Coolhaas' articles are thoroughly researched and show great

nuance, with hints of jabbing towards the English merchants and the later historians. Masselman however is an odd one out that writes in a style similar to that of the first British – which I believe is just a characteristic of him as a historian. Without having included any works published after 1963, it makes it difficult to conclude anything, but there is nothing to suggest that Dutch authors have not followed a similar development as the British. I base this upon the increasing neutrality they have exemplified throughout the historiography observed by the English and American authors.

The American viewpoint is included as a baseline to assess the other two. Furber and Games both write in a more objective and neutral tone, not really seeking to blame either party. Shorto believes that the Dutch killed the English as payback for destroying their ships earlier in the East Indies competition, though he lacks any sources to back up his claims, and generally has the same flaws as G. Milton. This thesis lacks any works written by an American before 1976. However, the work *Ledger and Sword* written by the Canadian Beckles Wilson is in much of the same style as earlier British works and he portrays a similar contempt for the Dutch: “Throughout the whole of the bloody transaction ow to be carried out [...] and which must stand forever a monument to the crafty and bloodthirsty policy of the Dutch in their conquest of the islands” and other gems such as: “Upon Sunday, the 16th of February, 1623, the Dutch, with that peculiar piety which distinguishes them to this day, said prayers at the castle.³¹² Canada was technically under British rule in 1903, so it would be likely that Wilson had similar sympathies towards the traders, as the British historians did. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the historical academia has evolved globally towards improving their historical techniques and ridding their style of writing to contain such subjective opinions.

To do this topic of research justice fully, it would require a larger selection of works that appropriately covers the span of time since the Massacre and up to modern times. It would also have been better to have been able to comprehend the Dutch language as to unlock a greater variety in the texts analysed. The same goes for the one regret I have for this thesis, which is the lack of a Japanese work. The Japanese mercenaries are an important part of the Ambon incident, and it would have been fascinating to read something written by a Japanese historian. Yet, this proved difficult. As, not only am I not proficient in Dutch, but not Japanese either. I tried to get a hold of Iwao Seiichi’s *Zoku Nanyō Nihon machi no kenkyū: Nanyō tōsho chiiki bunsan Nihonjin imin no seikatsu to katsudō* (*Continued Study of Japanese Towns in the South Seas: The Life and Activities of Japanese Immigrants in the Dispersed Territories of the South Seas Governance*)³¹³

³¹² Beckles Wilson, *Ledger and Sword*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1903), 161 & 63.

³¹³ This translation was generated with digital translation tools.

in the hopes of using translation tools to read some of it, but I was not able to obtain it. Even though it would have improved this thesis to acquire more texts, the intended range from 1763 to 2020 has revealed interesting developments that would not be prevalent if I simply analysed twentieth-century literature.

It is difficult to conclude outright that nationality affects a historian's views on the Massacre as there exists so many factors that could be affected by their nationhood. Though it seems that the narrative of the Massacre has evolved from a strictly English vs. Dutch scenario, into the notion that either the English were plotting, or it was a mistake due to the tense relations of living together on a remote island far away from home which caused paranoia. Also, the portrayal of the Dutch as nothing but cruel and barbarous has been minimized in modern literature. This suggests that a national bias was more frequent in early history writing.

5.0 Conclusion

Using five historiographical criteria by John Warren, my aim has been to extract whether nationhood affects the writing of history. These five were: what type of history is being written, what historical techniques are being employed, language and style, the purpose of history, and the historian's impact on historiography. The Amboyna Massacre was a useful historical event to research this phenomenon as it has a record of an English vs. Dutch stance in the literature and its use as a propaganda tool throughout the Anglo-Dutch Wars.

The type of history being written affects the degree of how much the Massacre and its effects are detailed. It has been used by historians to detail the effect on the EIC's spice trade, how it affected state politics, show Dutch brutality, tell the history of the East Indies Archipelago, explain English interest in the Americas, and how it was used as a propaganda. It has served a multitude of purposes ever since that fateful day four hundred years ago. Overall, the type of history being written does not seem to have a major effect on whether or not the authors are pro-English or pro-Dutch.

Researching the historical techniques of the sixteen works has revealed that there is a trend of development as the field progresses. This is visible in the use of sources, source criticism, historical awareness, structure of arguments, aim of remaining neutral, etc. This is not a linear progression however, as some early historians show great insight, like Van Rees, while more modern authors like Masselman and G. Milton severely lacks in historical techniques. Newer does not automatically mean better. It has also uncovered how past historians, but also modern, often end up referencing mostly works by those of the same nationality. Whether this is because of a bias towards only seeking out works by their fellow members of the nation, or a language preference is unclear and difficult to conclude.

On the language and style from 1763 to 2020 the analysed works show that historians used to insert a lot of emotion and subjectiveness into their language when they write of the Massacre. British authors often comment on the cruelty of the Dutch, while Dutch writers critique the English merchants' character and the grudge that England held. This is also a feature in some works in the twentieth century, such as by Coolhaas, Masselman, and G. Milton, though others released around the 1940-50's and the newest literature by A. Milton and Games imply differently. As with the other criteria a biased language & style seems predominant in the older works. This criteria suggests that there used to be a national bias.

How does the author's views on the purpose of history affect them? This has proved difficult to measure, though we can assume that as academia has evolved so have the historians and what

their intended purpose in writing history is. From the collection I have scanned, history has evolved from telling a narrative story about the nation's past, to a field of research in the academic world that has developed in tow with the other fields. History is now viewed as a way to explore and understand the past, while seeking to interpret historical events and trying to unravel the truth, as I have discussed throughout this thesis. The purpose of history then seems to affect the writing more than nationality.

Warren's final criterion, the historian's impact on historiography, has not played a major role in this thesis and was never intended to. Nevertheless, I have applied it to seek how authors have changed the research field on the Amboyna Massacre. Stapel and Coolhaas' articles are major works that applied a range of historical techniques and an extensive list of sources, especially new ones such as the manuscripts, to defend the Dutch decision to judge the English at Ambon. Stapel and Coolhaas were the first to analyse these manuscripts. Stapel especially can be seen as an important source of information for other Dutch writers. D.K. Bassett's article sought to debunk the idea that the Massacre ceased the EIC's further ventures in the region by examining several trade documents, and has been cited by both Furber and Games. Alison Games' newly published book is a work that I believe will further develop research on the Amboyna Massacre due to the astounding amount of research she has poured into it. Adam Clulow's *Amboina, 1623* and *Unjust, Cruel and Barbarous Proceedings*, which are not reviewed according to the criteria, are works that have shone a much-needed light upon the Japanese and their role in this historical event as they have been largely neglected.

Whether nations are imagined, born out of modernity, or a necessity of the human race, they are part of modern life. The analysed historians in this historiography of the Amboyna Massacre have shown that for centuries they have associated themselves and had sympathies with the merchants of the two East Indian companies. The listed material has shown this national bias as highly prevalent up to 1907 and appearing even later. On the other hand, the findings of this master thesis imply that as the field of history has developed, historians have tried to minimize their own bias, not just in regard to nationality, and let the research speak for itself. Some level of bias will, however, likely forever taint every field of academia. This study highlights the improvements made in history writing not only in the last centuries, but also the last few decades.

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