The late seventeenth-century Dutch Republic is famed for its production of printed images. In the course of the second half of the seventeenth-century, a number of Dutch publishers and printmakers started to invest themselves in the production of lavishly illustrated ‘coffee table’ books. For this purpose, they turned unillustrated French, German, and English works into extensively illustrated Dutch translations filled with large and newly designed etchings. They revisited successful works produced earlier in the seventeenth-century, such as martyr books and histories on the Eighty Years’ War, producing new images for old texts. Effectively, the Dutch Republic, and Amsterdam in particular, was one of the most important European production centres of printed images, spewing out an enormous amount of high quality etchings and engravings dealing with all manner of subjects: from biblical histories to world-spanning chronicles, and from medical atlases to fantastical travel journals.

In this wide variety of printed images produced in the Dutch Republic, explicit violence was a prominent and recurring theme. As has been noted by many historians and art historians, violence was central to the work of the two most productive and influential printmakers from the late seventeenth-century: Romeyn de Hooghe and Jan Luyken. At the same time, many of these violent prints remain unstudied. Historians have mostly treated violent images as subsidiaries to religious or political conflict, reading them in the light of contemporary troubles. In the case of Romeyn de Hooghe, most attention has been paid to his works on the Disaster Year of 1672, which focus on the violent behaviour of the invading French troops as well as the gruesome lynching of the brothers De Witt by an Orangist mob. Jan Luyken’s many violent images have been almost completely reduced to a narrow Mennonite religious reading of his 104 prints for the 1685 edition of the Mennonite martyrology *Het bloedig tooneel*, which to this day still serve as the backbone of the global visual culture of Anabaptist martyrdom. However, many of the violent images produced by De Hooghe, Luyken, and other Dutch printmakers of the
late seventeenth century did not concern the contemporary political or religious troubles that beset the Dutch Republic. Instead, they would concern events and themes that were placed at a distance from the contemporary Dutch Republic, dealing with violence that was distant in time, place, or practice. This dissertation is concerned with the many images that framed violence not through its connection to the political and religious polemics of the contemporary Dutch Republic, but instead through its relative distance from lived experience. It asks how violence was approached as a visual theme in its own right, and how printmakers and publishers gave form to violence as a distant phenomenon: something that was found aplenty in the Republic’s past or across the Republic’s borders, made visible through the medium of printed images.

The theme of distance appears in three forms in this dissertation, each connected to a different case study. The first one deals with a distance in time, and concerns the renewed late seventeenth-century production of illustrated folio books on the Eighty Years’ War. The second deals with a distance in practice, analysing the growing production of profane and sacred executions prints produced at a time when the actual practice of capital punishment was in steady decline across the Dutch Republic. The third and final case concerns a distance in place, and analyses the unrivalled production of news prints on the Great Turkish War (1683-1699) by Romeyn de Hooghe. Together, these cases explore the veritable explosion of violent printed images produced in the second half of the seventeenth century.

In the first case study, I explore how the violence embedded in illustrated books on the Eighty Years’ War changed in the course of the seventeenth century. Up to the first half of the seventeenth century, most illustrated histories on the Eighty Years’ War had relied on the copying of sixteenth-century news prints produced by German and Dutch workshops. The first editions of Hooff’s and Grotius’ histories even remained largely unillustrated, including only a frontispiece and author portrait. However, from the 1670’s onwards, a number of Amsterdam publishers started to produce new editions of older works on the Eighty Years’ War, and commissioned new high quality illustrations to accompany these expensive folio books. Whereas textual material was thus largely recycled, the images included in these books drastically changed in their interpretation of violence. Scenes became more personal, far more detailed, and included new stories that had hitherto not been turned into printed images. For example, in Bor’s newly illustrated 1679
edition one could now find an exquisite double folio etching of the hanging of one Don Pedro Pacieco by Dutch Rebels in Vlissingen, showing the Spanish officer dramatically positioned with his head set in the noose and waiting for the ladder to be removed from under his feet. In the case of the infamous Spanish Fury, publishers and printmakers got rid of the tried and tested atrocity propaganda prints and cityscapes from the sixteenth century and turned towards a personal and emotional story of an Antwerp wedding ransacked by Spanish mutineers for new inspiration. As these images were confined to expensive folio books, this new production also underlined a growing divergence between popular and highbrow illustrated histories. Popular histories remained focused on images of anti-Spanish atrocity propaganda from the early seventeenth century, which were also used to blacken the image of the French from 1672 onwards. Yet whereas propaganda thrived on continuity, the expensive history books in question here were made attractive market products by the inclusion of new designs that underlined the wondrous and personal nature of warfare. With a large amount of textual continuity, printed images found in expensive illustrated folio books were thus central in reconfiguring the imagination of violence of the Eighty Years’ War.

The second case study revolves around the proliferation of execution prints in illustrated books produced from 1650 onwards. Whereas actual executions were increasingly rare and mostly standardized to either hanging or beheading, wealthy customers could buy extensively illustrated books that showcased all manner of gruesome execution methods from distant times and places. As such, this case study articulates the particularities of a growing divergence between practice and print. In the second half of the seventeenth century, execution prints could be found across a wide variety of books both of a sacred and profane nature. The sacred is most clearly represented in the new production of illustrated martyr books in the second half of the seventeenth century, specifically Van Haemstede’s Reformed martyrology of 1657 and the Van Braght’s Mennonite martyrology of 1685. Filled with all manner of inventive and explicit execution prints, these successful books were copied and reprinted well into the eighteenth century. However, images strikingly similar to these martyr prints could also be found across a wide variety of profane works, including local histories, world-spanning chronicles, as well as the so-called ‘tragic histories’. Jan Luyken was an especially important printmaker in this regard,
producing numerous martyr prints as well as a large number of execution prints for profane histories.

In the overlap between sacred and profane, it becomes clear that visually, violence was not a subsidiary of religion or politics, but rather a theme in its own right. Regardless of the political or religious meaning ascribed to sacred and profane execution prints, these images all showed a strong interest in the diversity and physicality of judicial violence – exploring ‘exotic’ and ‘old-fashioned’ execution methods that either had fallen into disuse, or simply had never been practiced in the Dutch Republic. Essentially, many of these execution prints thus showed types of violence that existed only, or primarily, in print. In doing so, they positioned judicial violence as something distant that could be explored through the medium of the printed image. In addition, as was the case with illustrated histories on the Eighty Years’ War, these inventive printed images of violence were found primarily in expensive illustrated books. Violent images could thus hardly be classified as ‘cheap pulp’, and were in fact marketed mainly towards a wealthy clientele that essentially paid for the privilege of beholding images of violence within the safe confines of their own houses. The preferred format of the book illustration for execution prints also marked a departure from the broadsheet format that was favoured in the first half of the seventeenth-century. Whereas broadsheets often stressed the topical nature of executions, the serial nature of book illustrations favoured a reading that underlined above all a thematic approach to judicial violence.

The third and final case study takes on the printed output concerning the Great Turkish War by Romeyn de Hooghe and articulates a distance in place. The Great Turkish War, starting with the famous Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683, enthralled men and women far beyond the borders of the warring states. In fact, many high quality news prints were produced in the neutral Dutch Republic, with the workshop of Romeyn de Hooghe in Haarlem as the main centre of production. While De Hooghe’s images often presented the victories of the Holy League (the name given to the Austrian anti-Ottoman coalition) as victories for Christendom at large, they also portrayed the Southeast European front as a distant and ‘exotic’ place where all the different warring parties, in particular the Christian ones, succumbed to gruesome violent behaviour. In several prints, De Hooghe transplants tropes of violence traditionally associated with the ‘Turkish Terror’ one on one to the victorious Christian forces, which he portrays as standing victorious amongst
the beheaded, dismembered, and cooked remains of their Ottoman enemies. The Turkish head especially served as a focus for De Hooghe’s imagination of a violent European borderland, alternately functioning as a symbol of Christian victory and non-European barbarism. In this particular portrayal of the Great Turkish War, De Hooghe often went beyond the textual sources at his disposal, and thus actively created a collective visual imagination of violence: one that placed violence outside the bounds of the Dutch Republic and projected it upon the vaguely defined borderlands of Europe. If the Ottoman forces, the imported Christian soldiers, as well the local ‘warrior peoples’ of Southeast Europe were all portrayed as excessively violent, it was also implied that such gruesome violence was alien to the workings of the Dutch Republic. Violence then, was framed as something spatially distant through the collective imagination fuelled by the prints produced in De Hooghe’s Haarlem workshop.

Together, the three case studies support a number of findings. First of all, the many different violent images discussed in this dissertation were not the product of violence in Dutch society. In all case studies, the images were invested in showing how violence was something ‘distant’, taking place in distant times and places. Secondly, while most images did not preclude a topical reading in the light of political and religious polemics, they strongly positioned violence as a theme in and of itself. Images would show gratuitous violence regardless of the political or religious sympathies of perpetrator or victim. What mattered visually was the exploration of violence as such: its impact on human bodies, emotions, its technical particularities, and the gruesome results of violence that had spun out of control. In short: the relationship between violence and the printed image went beyond both the presence of actual violence, as well as its more narrow instrumental polemical employment.

Thirdly and finally, this dissertation underlines the place of the Dutch Republic as a place where text was turned into image. Many of the images discussed here adorned old or translated texts, showing how images rather than textual material were central to a new imagination of violence in the second half of the seventeenth century. At the same time, this imagination was always a restricted one, as most of the prints discussed here were confined to expensive illustrated books. The detailed and high quality prints characteristic for this period show that violent images were aimed at a wealthy clientele. In turn, the focus on distant
forms of violence suggests that this intended public would have been interested in violence that went beyond their possible lived experiences and instead connected to an imagination that safely positioned violence as a distinctly foreign or purely historical phenomenon.

In conclusion, the violent prints so characteristic of the production of the Dutch Republic in the second half of the seventeenth century did not reflect, but actively worked on a collective imagination of violence. In all case studies, this distance allowed for violence to become a theme in its own right: a theme that did not always necessarily supersede, but most certainly co-existed with partisan, religious, and political discourses on violence. In the Dutch Republic of the second half of the seventeenth century, violence became imaginable as a distinctly visual and printed phenomenon.