In 1689, the Mennonite writer Barend Joosten Stol published his correspondence with the Amsterdam printmaker and poet Jan Luyken. In the letters, we read that Luyken had refused to create a frontispiece for a book by Stol on the grounds that its contents clashed with Luyken’s religious beliefs. According to Stol, these differences should not have precluded Luyken from providing a frontispiece, since the printmaker readily portrayed themes that supposedly went against his conscience. ‘I see your prints in such books, and concerning such matters’, Stol continued, ‘of which I think, that you hold for them the greatest revulsion in your heart: of murder, strangling, burning and bloodshed [...].’ Violence, as Stol succinctly pointed out, was a central aspect of the enormous number of prints created by the pacifist Luyken. Yet Stol also recognized the persuasiveness of violence in the Dutch publishing

industry at large. These revolting and violent prints, Stol quickly added, were surely only made by Luyken to support himself and his family.³

Violent imagery, it seems, was simply good business in the Dutch Republic. Publishers certainly saw plenty of opportunities in the exploration of violent themes during the printing boom of the late seventeenth-century that was centred on Amsterdam. In the course of the second half of the seventeenth century, publishers invested themselves in the creation of lavishly illustrated martyr books. They commissioned printed images for violent and tragic histories translated from French, German, Italian, and English. And finally, they produced numerous impressions of the non-European world as a distinctly cruel and violent one.⁴

Many scholars have stressed that violent imagery has qualities that make it both fascinating and repelling.⁵ Violent images indeed nurture a particular tension: they bring close something that is intrinsically bodily, while simultaneously keeping it at a safe distance as a form of representation. A famous example of this tension is a night scene that portrays the hanging corpses of the brothers De Witt, two high officials of the Dutch Republic that fell prey to Orangist-Republican animosities during the French invasion of 1672. After being lynched by a vicious mob in The Hague, the brothers’ corpses were severely mutilated and hanged at the ‘Groene Zoodje’, the traditional place of execution. In one particular etching, which uses the same composition as a famous painting on the subject by Jan de Baen (see figure 1.1), two men illuminate the hanging corpses with a torch, only to be repulsed by the horrible sight that they have made visible to themselves. However, whereas these protagonists in the print are reacting to ‘real bodies’, the viewer is looking at images of the bodies. As such, a different problem is posed to anyone looking at the print itself: is one forced to look away from such an explicit image, or does its mediated form allow for a closer inspection of the mangled corpses?

Yet another question is raised by a 1698 print by Jan Luyken concerning the beheading of the French nobleman Henri de Talleyrand-Périgord in 1626. With the execution entrusted to an inexperienced headsman, Talleyrand-Périgord

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3. Stol, Verhandeling van den Christelijken leidsman, 430.
was made to suffer more than 20 hits with sword and hatchet before his head was finally severed from his body (see figure 1.2). In this particular scene, the

executioner is frantically hacking away with a butcher’s hatchet at the mangled neck of the unfortunate nobleman. The onlookers react in shock, treated to a form of violence that goes far beyond the accepted ‘clean’ single-stroke beheading that was the privilege of the highborn. At the same time, this horrible sight made for a spectacular print, a marketable object that allowed for violence to be observed within the safe confines of one’s home as part of an expensive and lavishly illustrated ‘coffee table book’.

The observation that violence played a prominent role in the rich print culture of the Dutch Republic is not a new one. Scholars have long recognized that violence was central to the work of the two most influential and productive printmakers of the late seventeenth century, Jan Luyken and Romeyn de Hooghe. Already in 1926, book historian M.D. Henkel described De Hooghe’s ‘almost sadistic’ obsession with violence as a by-product of a time that was supposedly far
more violent than the modern era. A few decades later, in 1962, book historian Herman de la Fontaine Verwey warned against reducing Luyken to his famed ‘homely scenes’, and to take into account his prints on ‘bloody battles and ghastly representations of the suffering of pious martyrs’. More recently, Hendrik van ’t Veld has echoed this sentiment by noting the distinctly violent characteristics of Luyken’s prints, both profane and religious, across a wide variety of genres. Today, renewed academic interest in De Hooghe’s work again highlights the prominence of violence in print, and historian Henk van Nierop’s recent biography on De Hooghe underlines the artist’s signature use of an ‘extreme and sometimes gruesome realism’.

Such observations on violence have been mostly descriptive or normative in character; they point to the prominence of violence in print culture, but do not seek to explain its broad and persuasive presence. Instead, printed images of violence have mostly been treated as subsidiaries of political, social, and religious conflict. Analyses of violence in late seventeenth-century prints have often approached the material from the narrow scope of propaganda, politics, and polemics, with a strong focus on contemporary political troubles such as the Disaster Year of 1672. Much attention has been paid to De Hooghe’s famously violent anti-French propaganda work, as well as the striking images of the gutted corpses of the brothers De Witt.

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7. M.D. Henkel, ‘Romeyn de Hooghe als Illustrator’, *Maanblad Voor Beeldende Kunsten* 3 (1926), 261-272: 272. Such a remark, made 8 years after the end of the bloody First World War, could perhaps only be made by someone from the neutral Netherlands.


Similarly, the violent prints created in service of the Glorious Revolution and William III’s rivalry with Louis XIV have all received a fair amount of attention. Yet such political explanations only cover a very small part of the violent Dutch imagination of the late seventeenth century. Arguably, many of the violent prints produced during this period did not relate directly to the contemporary politics of the Dutch Republic and its associated violence. For instance, as an example of Luyken’s violent works, Stol did not mention works on contemporary politics of any sort. Instead, he referred to the prints that Luyken made for a Dutch translation of a recent history work on the Crusades by the French Jesuit Louis Maimbourg.

Besides the politically charged prints that worked by means of immediacy, there was an enormous number of printed images that framed violence instead through its relative distance from the contemporary Dutch Republic. Such a distinction can be illustrated with the aforementioned prints on the brothers De Witt and Talleyrand-Périgord. The first is an iconic image of violence close to the heart of the contemporary Dutch Republic. It connects to countless other polemical prints of that singular dramatic sight: the gutted, castrated, and altogether mutilated corpses of some of the most influential officials of the Dutch Republic. On the other hand, the equally bloody image of the half-beheaded Henri de Talleyrand-Périgord functioned *despite* its lack of a direct and deep relation to contemporary Dutch politics. After all, this 1698 print concerned the fate of a foreign nobleman that had died some 70 years earlier. Instead of working as a singular image, this explicit print spoke to a broader horizon of violent images. It was included in an expensive folio book series that included no fewer than 1,000 prints — many of them dealing

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with violence of some sort. Such prints often framed violence through a thematic distance from the contemporary Dutch Republic, imagining violence as something that happened elsewhere, either in time, place, or both. By referring to the past or faraway places, these prints approached particular forms of violence first and foremost through their distance from lived realities in the late seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. In a way, many spectacular forms of violence existed and circulated primarily, or even exclusively, in the form of printed images. Execution by burning, quartering, or drowning: all of these forms of capital punishment were far more readily found in printed format in Amsterdam book shops than on the Dam square on justice days.

The goal of this study is to analyse this particular violent Dutch imagination as a topic in its own right. Why was there a veritable explosion of violent printed images in the second half of the seventeenth century? And how was violence given form by printmakers and publishers at a time when the subject of violence increasingly moved into and propelled a visually oriented print culture? In order to answer these questions, I have chosen three cases in which printed images were central to the imagination of ‘distant’ forms of violence. In each case, I will ask in what ways printed images thematised, categorized, and evaluated the violence that they so readily portrayed. Such an approach will not only help in engaging with a diverse corpus of images that has rarely been studied before, but will also allow me to make broader thematic connections between the different strains of violence that proliferated in Dutch print culture. Most importantly, these connections will

enable me to discuss how printed images actively helped to create a new collective imagination of violence in the Dutch Republic.

By focusing various forms of distance, I aim to gauge how violence was thematised outside the scope of political or religious polemics, and to approach violent imagery instead as a broader cultural phenomenon. At the same time, each of the cases is firmly rooted in the history of the Dutch printing and publishing industry at large. They all represent strands of production that are specific to this particular period, which saw the establishment of a growing market for expensive illustrated books. During the second half of the seventeenth century, market incentives motivated publishers to furnish books with new and original illustrations even when textual material was often recycled. Enterprising publishers produced new illustrated editions of older works, as well as illustrated translations based on unillustrated French, German, and English originals. For example, a work like Gottfried Arnold’s Die Erste Liebe Der Gemeinen Jesu Christi (The First Love of the Christian Community), did not include any images beyond a frontispiece in its original 1696 German edition, yet its Dutch translation, published only four years later, included no fewer than 93 high-quality (and extremely violent) prints. Such choices underline the importance of newly created printed images for the publishing market and print culture at large. Within this context, it might be apt to position the Dutch Republic, and Amsterdam in particular, as a place where text was turned into image and where image brought forth text. This view of the Dutch Republic is closely related to the argument made by art historian Svetlana Alpers, who designated Dutch seventeenth-century culture as a ‘visual culture’, that is, ‘a culture in which images, as distinguished from texts, were central to the representation [...] of the world’. Such a statement certainly works for the late

seventeenth-century Dutch print industry, where new and original images often adorned recycled and translated texts.

The first case study articulates a **distance in time** and concerns the renewed late seventeenth-century production of illustrated folio books about the Dutch Revolt. Illustrations had long been central to the history of the Revolt, yet most books published before 1670 had either remained unillustrated or had relied on the reproduction of (lower-quality) late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century news prints. This visual stalemate was broken in the course of the second half of the seventeenth century with the growing supply of newly produced and expensive illustrated books. From the 1670s onwards, reissues of histories on the Revolt were characterized by the inclusion of new large folio etchings. This new production was initiated largely by a select collective of Amsterdam publishers: the widow of Joannes van Someren, Abraham Wolfgangh, Hendrick and Dirck Boom. In 1677 they republished P.C. Hooft’s *Historien*, for the first time in illustrated format; between 1679 and 1684 they produced a new edition of Pieter Christiaensz Bor’s famous work on the Revolt, lavishly adorned with new double-folio etchings; and in 1681 they brought to the market the first illustrated Dutch translation of Hugo Grotius’s Latin history of the Eighty Years’ War. As the publishers themselves asserted, new and original prints were central to the publication of these older texts. In the address to the reader from the 1679 edition of Bor’s history, the publishers boldly stated that one of the improvements over the previous 1621 edition was that they had gotten rid of ‘the old bad, artless prints’.

What, then, did these new, supposedly ‘good’ and ‘artful’ prints, do with the violence that had been a central aspect to the imagination of the Dutch Revolt ever since its inception? How did printmakers and publishers reinvent this violence through the creation of new illustrations for old texts? And how did a distance in time allow the printmakers to give new forms to the violence that had been central to the creation of the Dutch Republic?

The second case study is that of the execution print, and it concerns a growing **distance between practice and print**. In the second half of the seventeenth

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INTRODUCTION

During the 17th century, printed images of capital punishment became an increasingly prominent theme in the Dutch publishing industry. Publishers and printmakers revisited old, often unillustrated martyrlogies and turned them into lavishly illustrated books full of explicit executions, as happened with the Reformed martyr book of Adriaen van Haemstede in 1657 and with the Mennonite martyr book of Tielemans van Braght in 1685. At the same time, publishers and writers explored new genres through the creation of extensive compendia concerning ‘tragic histories’: foreign language texts about (political) crime and punishment that were translated and illustrated for a Dutch reading public. This trend in book illustration also took root among more general histories, which were increasingly fitted with the same type of execution prints found in martyr books and the so-called ‘tragic histories’. However, this particular violent boom in the printing industry contrasted sharply with the actual practice of judicial violence. Whereas the execution in print became a successful theme in the second half of the seventeenth century, execution in the flesh was temporarily in decline. Between 1650 and 1700, the city of Amsterdam — at the time the third largest city in Europe — would see a drastic reduction in the number of executions. This drop was not only measurable in absolute numbers, but also in terms of diversity. Most people would now ‘simply’ be hanged or beheaded. Only four times was someone broken on the wheel in Amsterdam between 1650 and 1700.

In this sense, the newly produced printed images of executions were more about reflection and imagination than they were about documentation or news. Jan Luyken’s many prints of executions, for instance, have often been approached


22. This process, however, was not a linear one. In Amsterdam, the number of executions and their severity rose in the first half of the eighteenth century. For instance, for the four convicts broken on the wheel between 1650-1700, there were 36 victims of this execution method in the years 1700-1750. See: Pieter Spierenburg, The Spectacle of Suffering. Executions and the Evolution of Repression. From a Preindustrial Metropolis to the European Experience (Cambridge, 1984), 74. On the decline of executions in seventeenth-century Europe and its rise in the first half of the eighteenth-century, see: Richard Ward, ‘Introduction: A Global History of Execution and the Criminal Corpse’, in: Richard Ward (ed.), A Global History of Execution and the Criminal Corpse (Basingstoke, 2015), 1–36: 4.
as unproblematic documentary evidence of contemporary judicial violence,\textsuperscript{23} even when many of the early modern execution methods shown in his prints were in fact not practised during Luyken’s lifetime. A deeper analysis of this apparent disconnect will tell us how capital punishment became something imagined through the use of prints and how particular acts of violence moved from the domain of lived realities to that of the printed image. At the same time, the material at stake here raises questions concerning the broader thematization of judicial violence. Why did an interest in lavishly illustrated martyr books appear relatively late — after the end of the Eighty Years’ War? How did the execution print negotiate between the secular and the sacred through its presence both in martyr books and profane histories? And in what ways did a distance between practice and print influence the form given to execution prints?

The third and final case concerns a \textit{distance in place} and focuses on the Dutch output concerning the ‘Great Turkish War’ (1683-1699), which was fought between the Ottoman Empire and the Holy League. This conflict, which started with the famous Ottoman siege of Vienna of 1683, kept Europe enthralled throughout the last years of the seventeenth century and sparked the imagination of men and women far beyond the borders of the countries committed to the Holy League. In fact, many broadsheets and book illustrations of the conflict would be produced by artists and publishers based in the Dutch Republic, a neutral party with regard to the Great Turkish War and a mediator in the final peace negotiations of 1699.\textsuperscript{24} Such images were as much about ‘news’ as they were about the consolidation and formation of broader tropes concerning violence in Europe’s borderlands. Romeyn de Hooghe’s broadsheets of the war’s sieges and pitched battles especially stood out for their theatrical and spectacular sights rather than their precise military information. At a time when the Dutch printing industry was heavily invested in the theme of the ‘exotic world’, invariably portrayed as a violent one,\textsuperscript{25} the wars in Europe’s borderlands provided another channel for Dutch printmakers to explore violence from a safe distance. How, then, did the political and spatial distance


\textsuperscript{24} Bas de Boer, \textit{Jacob Colyer: Mediating between the European and the Ottoman World} (Dutch Embassy Belgrade, 2015).

\textsuperscript{25} Schmidt, \textit{Inventing Exoticism}. 
from the Southeast European front shape the imagination of violence in the case of the Great Turkish War? What did printmakers make of the violent sacks of Buda and Belgrade by the Holy League, and what did they do with the old established tropes of ‘Turkish cruelty’? And, finally, how did they re-imagine violence when the traditional stereotyped roles of Christian victims and Muslim perpetrators shifted in the course of the war?

Each case thus seeks to widen the scope of violent imagery beyond the strictly political by addressing different forms of distance. This focus on distance, however, is not a claim that acts of violence, in all their forms, had disappeared from the Dutch Republic, or that the Republic itself was not ready to use violence as a political instrument. The Dutch Republic was an early modern anomaly in many ways, but it was also home to many of the social inequalities and the associated violence that plagued neighbouring countries.26 Internationally, the Republic was, as historian Judith Pollmann has recently argued, ‘an aggressive superstate’, which readily brought violence to all corners of the earth.27 Through the Dutch East India Company and the West India Company, its elites were deeply involved in both slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Yet perhaps tellingly, the violence that was intimately connected to the workings of the Dutch Republic did not easily find its way into printed images. As much as it is true that the Dutch Republic cultivated a rich visual culture, it was ultimately one that was given form through inclusion as much as through exclusion. In this sense, the late seventeenth-century thematic distance in printed images of violence was essential to the creation of a Dutch self-image. It was a self that was supposedly adverse to warfare and its glorification, but at war throughout most of the seventeenth century; it was an imagined self born out of victimhood and Habsburg oppression, yet ready to aggressively pursue trade interests through force of arms; it was an imagined self free from the tyranny of absolutism, yet closely involved with the institution of slavery. Such paradoxes are inherent to cultural products like printed images, which always entail implicit and

explicit choices in subject matter. The dissection of such choices, and what they entailed in cultural-historical terms, will inform all three cases. Collectively, they will shine a light on the particularities of violence and the printed image in the Dutch Republic between 1650 and 1700 and the consequences these prints had for a collective imagination of violence.

In this study, then, I will investigate how various forms of distant violence became imaginable in new ways through the printed images produced in the Dutch Republic during the second half of the seventeenth century. Specifically, I will ask how the rising importance of printed images — book illustrations in particular — influenced the changing representation of violence and will discuss how the printed image itself increasingly became the preferred medium to explore, imagine, and thematise distant forms of violence.

The body of this dissertation will be structured as follows. Chapter 2 deals with a number of theoretical and methodological issues central to the study of early modern printed images. In this chapter, I will first introduce the concepts at stake in this study. The second section deals with the theoretical implications in using ‘violence’ as an analytical term in historical research. Drawing upon historical and social scientific approaches to violence, this section will provide a working definition of violence and a broad overview of the landscape of historical studies on violence. The third section will further specify the role of violence in relation to images and imagination, and its use in printed images in particular. The fourth section of chapter 2 will deal with the distinct art, book, and cultural-historical approaches to printed images. Here, I will introduce my own approach to the source material at stake, and explain my choices in limiting this study to a particular set of primary sources. Finally, section 5 briefly discusses the context of printmaking in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will each deal with one of the different case studies introduced here. Chapter 3, on a distance in time, discusses the returning interest in illustrated histories on the Eighty Years’ War. Chapter 4 deals with a distance between practice and print, and describes the rise of the execution in several genres of illustrated books. Finally, chapter 5 will deal with a distance in place, focusing on printed images concerning the Great Turkish War produced in the Dutch Republic. Together, these cases will show how a revitalized and competitive printing industry paved the way for a new violent Dutch imagination.