“Een merkwaardig misverstand”: Postcolonial reflections on Hoepla

“Um Curioso Mal-entendido”: reflexões pós-coloniais sobre Hoepla

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Abstract: This article is based on a Dutch television event from the 1960s. In a dark humor program, the first nude woman was shown on Dutch television; however, its impact overshadowed the subsequent event, the demonstration of a reality made invisible on Dutch soil: the Moluccans residing in the country. The ignorance and unpreparedness of those involved in the interview, and the surreal nature of the living conditions of Indonesian immigrants after the violent process of Dutch colonization in Indonesia, are discussed. This “event” on the television program Hoepla is developed in the article from the perspective of Ludic Conceptualism, a terminology coined by Dr. Schoenberger and applied to the artistic trend strongly present in the Netherlands between the 1960s and 1970s.
Keywords: Indonesia; ludic; media; post-colonialism.

***Resumo**: O presente artigo tem como base um acontecimento televisivo holandês da década de 1960. Em um programa de humor ácido, a primeira mulher nua foi mostrada na televisão holandesa, contudo, sua repercussão obliterou o seguimento posterior, a demonstração de uma realidade invisibilizada em solo holandês, os Molucanos residentes no país. O desconhecimento e despreparo dos envolvidos na entrevista, o caráter surreal das condições de vida de imigrantes indonésios após o violento processo de colonização holandesa na Indonésia. Tal “acontecimento” no programa televisivo Hoepla é desenvolvido no artigo a partir da perspectiva do Conceitualismo Lúdico, terminologia cunhada pela Dra. Schoenberger e aplicada a vertente artística fortemente presente na Holanda entre as décadas de 1960 e 1970.*
***Palavras-chave**: Indonésia; lúdico; midia; pós-colonialismo.*

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The second episode of *Hoepla*, an experimental cultural television program, aired on October 9, 1967, leading to a public outcry for broadcasting a naked woman—the artist Phil Bloom—on Dutch national television for the first time. The segment immediately following, titled "Een merkwaardig misverstand" (A curious misunderstanding), was an interview with members of the disbanded Dutch colonial army, essentially in exile in the Netherlands. Despite the segment's contentious subject matter, addressing a national failure in the postcolonial period, this part of the show received almost no attention, noteworthy in contrast to the tremendous focus on Bloom.

Hoepla producers ventured into the Dutch countryside to interview former members of the KNIL (*Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger* or Royal Netherlands East Indies Army), an important part of the colonial army who enforced Dutch rule in what is now Indonesia. After the Netherlands recognized an independent Indonesia in 1949, these South Moluccan soldiers were evacuated in 1951 for their safety and then dismissed from service, in effect abandoned by the Dutch government. They were shuttled to enclaves in the Dutch countryside that lacked running water or electricity.[1] Whereas the government considered the KNIL's duty complete, in the 1967 interview the KNIL members still wore their uniforms and believed they worked for the Dutch military, ultimately expecting the Dutch to fulfill their promise of supporting an independent Republic of South Molucca (RMS). This article will explore the KNIL interview and suggest why it has been largely ignored, especially in comparison to the overwhelming response of the broadcast of a naked woman. The "curious misunderstanding" of the interviewer, producers, and audience traces back to deeply embedded sexism, prejudice and ignorance, and, finally, the subtle, indirect critique characterizing artistic production in the Netherlands in the 1960s.

Avant-garde Dutch television programming belongs to the playful experiments in conceptual art, popular in the 1960s, that can best be described as *Ludic Conceptualism*.[2] This refers to works of Conceptual art that are markedly distinct from the examples of Conceptualism associated with the dry tautological practices as seen, for example, in work by Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, and Art & Language. In the Netherlands in the 1960s, playful art flourished, and its source traces back to Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element*

1 Two noteworthy sites initially housing former KNIL members include transit camps in operation during World War II, Camp Vught and Camp Westerbork. Iris van Ooijen and Ilse Raaijmakers, "Competitive or Multidirectional Memory? The Interaction between Postwar and Postcolonial Memory in the Netherlands." *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 3–4 (2012): 463–483; Rami Khalil Isaac and Erdinç Çakmak, "Understanding visitor's motivation at sites of death and disaster: the case of former transit camp Westerbork, the Netherlands" *Current Issues in Tourism* 17, no. 2 (2014): 164–179.
2 I coined this term in my doctoral dissertation. Janna Schoenberger, "Ludic Conceptualism: Art and Play in the Netherlands, 1959–1975" (PhD diss., The Graduate Center, CUNY, 2016).

in Culture (1938).[3] Huizinga's controversial central thesis is that civilization "arises *in* and *as*play, and never leaves it."[4] Key elements from Huizinga's definition of play, as seen in the work by Ludic Conceptualists, include the voluntary nature of play (the absence of coercion or obligation), a delineated space and time, play's parallel existence to everyday life, purposelessness, the simultaneous occurrence of seriousness and fun, and absurdity. Notably, playful art incorporated social criticism that was oblique: in fact, such art was often impactful due to an open and non-dogmatic questioning that avoided polemicism. For example, the continued presence of bikes on Dutch streets can, in part, be traced to the performative critique in the 1960s of the burgeoning car culture.[5] Finally, Ludic Conceptualism flourished, in part, due to an overwhelming governmental support of artistic endeavors, including prime-time television programs that pushed the boundaries of art and brought the avantgarde directly into millions of homes.[6] *Hoepla* is a key example of Ludic Conceptualism, demonstrating a playful critique of Dutch society. In the broadcast episodes, the makers utilized parody and irony, and they tried to push boundaries with an open and indirect critique that sparked conversations. *Hoepla* also demonstrates that oblique critique leaves the possibility for misunderstanding.

The television series *Hoepla* (1967–1968) is the best-known experiment in avant-garde Dutch television from the 1960s. Only three episodes were aired in 1967: on July 28, October 9, and November 23. A fourth episode, recorded and scheduled to appear on January 8, 1968, was never broadcast because the program had become too directly critical of Dutch culture. That is, the success of the programming was dependent upon the balance of playful art with serious social messaging via indirect critique. In this way, the aired episodes fit firmly within the bounds of Ludic Conceptualism.

Hoepla deployed humor to aim lighthearted gibes at traditional, normative Dutch culture, yet it did not only find fault; each hour-long show also featured contemporary artists and musicians. Topics included pop music, fashion, drugs, sex, and art. Artist Wim T. Schippers, photographer Wim van der Linden, and filmmakers Hans Verhagen and Trino Flothuis produced the episodes. Verhagen spoke about their aims: "We accept no standards, morals, decency, taboos, good taste, those

3 The book first appeared in Dutch as *Homo ludens: Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur*. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), ix.
4 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 173.
5 For more detail, see Schoenberger, "Ludic Conceptualism" and the discussion of Robert Jasper Grootveld's cooperation with the anarchist group Provo.
6 As I argue in my doctoral dissertation, the support of avant-garde art can be traced back to World War II, when art became a public concern. This was, in part, a reaction to the arts policy implemented during the German Occupation. Schoenberger, "Ludic Conceptualism," 200. See also Warna Oosterbaan Martinius, *Schoonheid, welzijn, kwaliteit: Kunstbeleid en verantwoording na 1945* ('s-Gravenhage: Gary Schwartz/SDU, 1990), 49, 10.

are meaningless concepts for us. They are dividing lines, artificially created by the large, bulky middle group, the middle class, the middle-aged, the mediocre.[7] This ironic statement was sincere and characteristic of Ludic Conceptualism.

As a reaction to the rampant change in the Netherlands in the 1950s, which included rapid modernization, secularization, and depillarization, *Hoepla*questioned established social norms and values. The show was subsequently attacked by the press and conservative politicians. Notably, viewers were diverse in terms of background; there was no political or ideological division in the two existing television channels. The first episode was arguably the least offensive and most innocuous, with a focus on pop culture; it included interviews with Eric Clapton, Pete Townsend, and several segments on popular men's fashion (interviews about clothing with a shop owner, a soldier, a politician, and an office worker). Subsequent episodes became increasingly provocative, in response to harsh criticism of the first broadcast, but always featured pop culture. For example, for the third episode, the Jimi Hendrix Experience performed; although, during the set a man dressed as the Dutch figure Sinterklaas walks through the studio and tries to persuade Jimi Hendrix to become "Zwarte Piet" (Black Pete), a racist caricature of a black person who is traditionally one of Sinterklaas's helpers.[8] Despite the diversity of issues covered, all discourse on *Hoepla* recognizes it for airing a naked woman, eclipsing nearly every other topic covered by the show.

In the introductory sequence of the first episode, Bloom—naked but for wreaths of plastic flowers covering her nipples and genitalia—wanders around the set while rock musician Teddy Lee J. performs a song. In the second episode, seven minutes into the show, Bloom appears again, sitting in a chair, naked, reading aloud a newspaper article titled "VPRO Cuts Out Naked Phil" published in the left-wing newspaper *Het Vrije Volk*.[9] The text reports that the newest episode of *Hoepla* had been recorded a week earlier and that VPRO—the broadcasting company—had guaranteed that Phil Bloom would *not* appear naked on screen, and that the show would be taken off the air if nudity occurred. After Bloom finishes the article, she lowers the newspaper to reveal her entire body, this time without a veil of flowers, and remains exposed on screen for thirty-eight seconds (fig. 1). The address to send complaints appears in the final seconds of the segment, superimposed over Bloom's image.[10] This scene became notorious for being

7 Wim Beeren, *Actie, werkelijkheid en fictie in de kunst van de jaren 60 in Nederland* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 1979), 118.
8 Ibid, 119.
9 "VPRO zet schaar in naakt van Phil," *Het Vrije Volk*, September 29, 1967, 1.
10 About two thirds of the written feedback was negative, while a third was positive, although the article does not specify the total number of letters, which was not made known. See "Blote Phil geen VPRO-boodschap," *Het Vrije Volk*, October 17, 1967, 13.

Figure 1. Hoepla #2, 1967, black and white tape recording, 56 min 24 sec. Film still of Phil Bloom's segment. Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

the first time a nude woman was seen on television.[11] Notably, in nearly every reference to *Hoepla*, Bloom's gender is emphasized and there is no discussion about if or when a naked man appeared on television. A website accompanying a 2017 episode of the Dutch history television program *Andere Tijden* reports that *Hoepla 2*received worldwide attention, with articles reporting on the show appearing in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany; an example

11 Ieke van der Huijzen, "Een keuze uit taboedoorbrekende kunst," in *Ludiek sensueel en dynamisch*, ed. André Kocht (Schiedam: Scriptum Art Publishers, 2002), 187.

in the British tabloid the *Daily Mirror* was titled "Such a fuss as a blonde goes on TV in the nude."[12] All attention focused on Bloom's naked body, and the other segments and even entire episodes were essentially ignored. While showing a naked woman on television was provocative, my point here is to underscore that press at the time, as well as publications reflecting on *Hoepla*—in the fifty-plus years after it aired—neglected to address some of the most shocking parts of the program, such as the KNIL interview.

Arguably, Bloom's body was not *Hoepla*'s most controversial moment. In the third episode, drunk Dutch soldiers were interviewed about their mandatory service, responding to prompts that questioned the morality of the soldiers' actions. One solider off-screen said military service was a waste of money (and later, another soldier claimed that 2.5 million guilders spent on training was "nonsense").[13] While Bloom indirectly questioned Dutch values and mores by silently sitting on screen, the soldiers directly criticized governmental policy. This article, however, will address the segment immediately following Bloom's exposed torso. The announcer verbally linked the nude scene to the next, seemingly unrelated (and lesser-known) clip, with the rhyming statement: "And after Phil the KNIL."[14] As I have discussed elsewhere, the inclusion of the KNIL interview—and similarly the interview about conscription—suggests that the *Hoepla* creators were not merely poking fun, but rather indicates that their play was simultaneously lighthearted and serious.[15] The artists who produced *Hoepla* did not only want to make an amusing television show but also aimed to explore social ills and question mainstream culture.

It is likely that the average citizen was not fully aware of the complexity behind the KNIL members' relocation to the Dutch countryside, nor the details of the colonial history behind their migration. When the 12,500 Moluccans arrived in the Netherlands in 1951, they believed their stay was temporary. As Fridus Steijlen writes, it was only in the mid-1970s that they began to accept that they were not leaving the Netherlands, which influenced their oppositional relationship to the Dutch, culminating in, for example, the 1977 Dutch train hijacking.[16] Steijlen argues that the Moluccans' radicalism in the 1970s traces back to their identity transformation during their initial arrival twenty years earlier, namely that

12 "Een blote Phil Bloom in Hoepla," *Andere Tijden*.
13 Hans Verhagen, Wim T. Schippers, Wim Van der Linden, and Trino Flothuis, "Hoepla 3," VPRO, November 23, 1967.
14 Hans Verhagen, Wim T. Schippers, Wim Van der Linden, and Trino Flothuis, "Hoepla 2," VPRO, October 9, 1967.
15 Janna Schoenberger, "Hoepla: The Power of Ludic Prime Time Television," *Amsterdam, the Magic Center* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam), July 3, 2018, accessed June 16, 2023; Schoenberger, "Ludic Conceptualism."
16 Fridus Steijlen, "Closing the 'KNIL chapter': A key moment in identity formation of Moluccans in the Netherlands" in *Post-Colonial Immigrants and Identity Formations in the Netherlands*, ed. Ulbe Bosma, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 117–134.

of refugee to immigrant. Steijlen points out that, unlike other former colonial nations, the Moluccan community only focused on the responsibilities of the Dutch government as military members; they did not investigate the colonial project and the postcolonial condition at large.[17]

The Moluccan soldiers of the Dutch Royal Army had several options after Indonesia became independent. They could demobilize in Java, transfer to the Indonesian army, or be sent to the Netherlands.[18] The miliary accepted the move abroad; both they and the Dutch government believed the move was provisional. The military members were under the impression that the Dutch would help create the Republic of South Molucca, independent of Indonesia, whereas the Dutch authorities thought the Moluccans would return to Indonesia after a few months.[19] The Moluccans were discharged from the army on arrival in the Netherlands, and their attempts to fight the order failed in court. The Dutch government initially provided the ex-KNIL basic necessities such as housing as well as a subsistence allowance, but the latter was curtailed in 1956; in the same year, central services to the ex-KNIL enclaves ceased.[20] Moluccan leaders admonished the Dutch government for neglecting their obligation in supporting exiles, leading to feelings of betrayal for the government they served during the colonial era.[21]

The KNIL interview begins with a black screen, as the voiceover introduces the segment in a somber tone; a star and the title "Een merkwaardig misverstand" (A curious misunderstanding) appears onscreen as the introduction continues (fig. 2). First, we hear a brief history: nearly twenty years after Indonesia's independence, several "bright orange" Ambonese members of the KNIL have "never been able to stomach the transfer of sovereignty."[22] The description continues, "They have bleak prospects… their pleading letters [to the house and cabinet] are left unanswered," and "they are looked down upon in their current environment," that is, in the countryside city of Wierden in the province Twente, near the German border. They are described as "poor and lonely."[23]

The interviewer appears genuinely interested in his subjects and his questions reflect his naivety as a young, white Dutchman. For example, one of the first questions he asks is why they continue to wear their KNIL uniforms. His questions are directed

17 Steijlen, "Closing the 'KNIL chapter,'" 118.
18 Steijlen writes that there is debate about whether the Moluccan military were given orders to go to the Netherlands. The Moluccans claim orders had been given, while the Dutch government denies this. Steijlen, "Closing the 'KNIL chapter," 123, 134.
19 Steijlen, "Closing the 'KNIL chapter,'" 123.
20 Ibid.
21 Steijlen, "Closing the 'KNIL chapter,'" 123–124.
22 "Bright orange" refers to the Dutch national color, which traces back to the kingdom's origins. As an expression, it suggests that the KNIL members are strong supporters of the Dutch. Verhagen et al., "Hoepla 2."
23 Ibid.

Figure 2. Hoepla #2, 1967, black and white tape recording, 56 min 24 sec. Film still of "Een merkwaardig misverstand" segment. Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

to Alexander Leasa, who struggles to explain in imperfect Dutch that they had to leave Java as members of the Dutch military (fig. 3). The interviewer clarifies that the former KNIL members refuse to accept welfare payments, and live without running water or electricity; his incredulous tone is apparent when he asks, "How… how do you live?" and "Where do you get food?" He immediately follows up by asking how they keep their uniforms in such good shape. Leasa explains that they live through donations from people sympathetic to their cause, and they maintain their clothes as a sign of their military status. They see themselves as soldiers, and would accept payment for those duties, but refuse "civilian" work. A woman described as Leasa's wife interjects that they drink more water than eat food.

Figure 3. Hoepla #2, 1967, black and white tape recording, 56 min 24 sec. Film still of KNIL segment. Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

Some of the questions betray the interviewer's convictions. For example, he asks about the children present and states that drinking water in place of eating is not healthy for the kids. And he hesitantly clarifies that the ex-KNIL will not take a job: "So… you refuse to work?" The question about work comes up again, with the interviewer pushing, "But you don't earn a single cent?" and "How do you make ends meet at the end of the month? How do you get food on the table?".[24] The interviewer shows his alarm not only in the questions he poses, but in the number of times he returns to the same line of inquiry.

Leasa mentions God and the trust he has that they will be able to survive not only through God, but also through the Dutch government, who will

24 Ibid.

Figure 4. Hoepla #2, 1967, black and white tape recording, 56 min 24 sec. Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

remember their promise to help. The interviewer's reply to Leasa's staying true to the "Holy Spirit" displays wonder, with a mix of curiosity and fascination in addition to his doubts: "Are you never disappointed in God?" Leasa reiterates his "gratefulness" and "happiness" in God, and while he is speaking, the camera initially focuses on his wife, who is hunched over and looking toward the ground, then frames the couple, which suggests a stark difference between Leasa's claim of joy and what his wife is projecting. Next, the camera moves to a child who is sitting on the ground and biting her lip, gazing up at Leasa. The camera work is thus consistent with the interviewer's dubious thoughts. Overall, the entire segment is seeped with a combination of curiosity, fascination, and judgement.

Figure 5. Hoepla #2, 1967, black and white tape recording, 56 min 24 sec. Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

The most impactful moment occurs when the interviewer thanks Leasa for the talk. Leasa's reply is revealing: "We hope that with your cooperation we could change our living conditions, to find our way free from these difficulties." The interviewer does not reply, but rather shakes everyone's hand. There is a quick cut to a frame with the text "Koning Boudewijn der Belgen" surrounded by ornate lines (fig. 4). Then the words are supplanted by a photograph of King Baudouin of Belgium, who granted the Congo full independence from Belgium in 1960 (fig. 5). Lighthearted music plays in the background. This sequencing suggests that the makers of *Hoepla* were, at the very least, aware that this episode should be situated within the larger international context of decolonization. Moreover, Baudouin's actions—the direct transfer of power to the Congo—were,

as Elizabeth Buettner has argued, directly related to the Dutch.[25] That is, the Netherlands resisted decolonization, which led to war and the eventual loss of their colony; this influenced Baudouin. The interview's ending and last frames point to the marked differences in the colonial powers' handling of decolonization, and, perhaps, indirectly criticizes the Netherlands' actions.

Why did *Hoepla* conduct this interview? In the most basic sense, the show covered current events and culture. The former KNIL members and their living conditions count as news that would fit under the show's purview. In line with *Hoepla*'s counterculture aims, the interview breaks a taboo by exposing a concealed part of Dutch society and history. The former KNIL members had been shuttled to the remote countryside, and to give them a platform on national prime-time television literally displays them in one of the most public forums, unlike their peripheral living conditions. The plea Leasa makes at the end of the segment insinuates that the ex-KNIL members felt they could have also benefitted from the broadcast; perhaps the producers wanted to help.

In 1968, *Hoepla* creator Hans Verhagen published a book about the show, addressing each episode in depth; he also included a transcription of the KNIL interview.[26] Verhagen reports that after the twelve-minute segment aired there was a "rush" of calls, with viewers wanting to know how to donate money or goods, which eventually reached Leasa and his family.[27] While charity will not create systemic change, it indicates that viewers, the Dutch public, were quite moved by what they saw. Indeed, the interview is hard to watch: seeing the former KNIL members (and their children playing and dogs barking in the background) struggling to survive without basic amenities is shocking and poignant. Moreover, their difficulty in speaking Dutch underlines their attempt to persevere in this foreign country, one in which they were essentially forced to settle. Standing in stark contrast to the attention received by Bloom's segment, Verhagen writes that not a single newspaper article reported the interview, revealing his own shock at the lack of regard for the former KNIL members, their situation, and plight. In the seemingly countless articles on *Hoepla*, I only found three that mention the KNIL. Two reported on the sympathy garnered, indicating that the segment was informative and the audience sought ways to help the Moluccans.[28] The most telling article was published in *Het Vrije Volk,*"Outstandingly Hip Hoepla," which

25 Elizabeth Buettner, Europe after Empire: Decolonization, Society, and Culture (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 179.
26 Verhagen, *De gekke wereld van Hoepla: Opkomst en ondergang van een televisieprogramma*(Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1968), 92–95.
27 Verhagen ends his blurb on the interview by noting that Leasa and his "associates" were arrested for assault a couple of months after the show's airing. Verhagen, *De gekke wereld*, 92.
28 "Geen Reacties van publiek op blote Phil in 'Hoepla,'" *Het Parool*, October 10, 1967, 3; "Phil Bloom kost VPRO nog een lid," *Algemeen Dagblad*, October 11, 1967, 13.

praises the show.[29] It lists the "daring" interviews with Mick Jagger, a cancer patient, and more, concluding with a mention of "the KNIL military who did not want to work."[30] This article implies the KNIL are lazy rather than principled. Of all the responses the show could have evoked, this report suggests that even among the left-leaning Dutch population at the time, who could conceivably be sympathetic to the ex-KNIL, there was still misunderstanding of their predicament.

Why was *Hoepla*'s KNIL interview overlooked by nearly every publication, past and present? The interview with former KNIL members was ignored due to a *misverstand*, or misunderstanding. While the segment's title includes this term, it is much more apt than the *Hoepla* creators intended. There was a failure of communication. On the surface, it is likely the misunderstanding was a reference to the ex-KNIL members' predicament. Namely, the Moluccan soldiers had a different of opinion about their status in the military. But the *misverstand* comes from every side, every constituent component at the time, relating to sexism, colonial history, and the show's artistic choices.

The Netherlands projects an image of gender equality, however, this was not the case at the time (and arguably still today).[31] Until the mid-1950s, for example, female civil servants were fired once they were married; only in 1956 were women recognized as "competent" and granted full ownership and legal rights.[32] In 1960, sixteen percent of women worked, which was about half of the average of industrialized Europe.[33] Thus, the strong patriarchal and sexist history of the country influenced *Hoepla*'s skewed reception, namely, a hard focus on Bloom while overlooking the rest of the show.

As mentioned above, Bloom was barely covered by the plastic flowers in the first episode. That already garnered a lot of attention in the media, and the discussion of whether or not Bloom would return—as well as her state of (un) dress—was the subject of many articles, including the one Bloom was reading when she appeared fully naked. The buildup certainly accounts for part of enormous attention she received. In addition, a reaction to Bloom did not require much on the viewer's side, especially in comparison to the KNIL interview. The audience only had to respond to what they saw (no need to listen closely or

29 Ale van Dijk, "Uitstekende hippe Hoepla," *Het Vrije Volk*, October 10, 1967, 14.
30 Ibid.
31 While addressing gender inequality in Dutch society is not the aim of this article, I will provide one recent statistic here. In January 2023 the news organization *NU.nl* surveyed the top fifty companies in the Netherlands to find that 47 are headed by men. Only two, PostNL and Wolters Kluwer, have a women as CEO, and one has joint CEOs. "Top Nederlandse beursbedrijven is nog steeds een mannenbolwerk," *NU.nl*, January 20, 2023, accessed June 13, 2023.
32 James Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig*, trans. Simone KennedyDoornbos (Amsterdam: Boom, 1997), 106. Women were legally recognized as fully independent of men in 1956 when the "Wet handelingsonbekwaamheid" (Incapacity Act) was abolished.
33 Ibid., 107.

analyze content); and *Hoepla* made it hard to ignore by fixating a camera on Bloom's exposed body for thirty-eight seconds.

While the title "Een merkwaardig misverstand" points to the confusion, it would be generous to use that term for the Dutch government: their actions could be interpreted as willful deception. If the Dutch were afraid of a bloodbath had the Moluccan military stayed behind in Java, why did they not consider longer-term solutions, outside a few months' stay in the Dutch countryside?[34] When comparing the interview with historical documentation, several inconsistencies arise. As for the lack of the Moluccans' financial resources, Leasa explains that they refused to work as average civilians due to their military status and they refused welfare payments for the same reason. As Steijlen writes, the Dutch had already cut off (or drastically reduced) allowances due to the fact that many Moluccans had found work within a few years of arriving in the Netherlands.[35] Additionally, the government initially provided utilities to the camps, which ceased after about five years. While the details of the narratives are complex and do not encompass every individual Moluccan's experience, the principle remains: the colonial nation's choices resulted in the colonized left behind in the Netherlands with few options.

On the one hand, a portion of viewers saw the interview as a cry for help; on the other, there were also many that ignored or misunderstood the passage. The clearest example of miscomprehension is from the left-wing publication *Het Vrije Volk*, describing the ex-KNIL as not interested in working and further loosely quoting them as saying "our food comes from God, and if it doesn't come then we drink water."[36] The article points to at least a portion of the population who did not fully understand how the ex-KNIL arrived in the Netherlands and why they stayed. Further, the absence of a strong public response suggests that the interview did not resonate, which may have been due to a lack of awareness of the political and historical context.

Hoepla producers—as well as the interviewer speaking with Leasa—seemed generally curious about the ex-KNIL's status in the Dutch countryside, why they were there, and what they expected from the colonial nation. Based on their questions and the tone of the interview, the "misunderstanding" inadvertently describes *Hoepla*'s position. There is no recognition of the Moluccan's colonial history, their service to the Dutch, and no direct blame placed on the government to account for the dismal state in which the Moluccans were abandoned. But the interview itself at least opened a door for a view on what was happening in the countryside, allowing a glimpse of this social ill. Did the program itself obscure an understanding of the postcolonial condition?

34 Steijlen, "Closing the 'KNIL chapter,'" 123.
35 Steijlen used the word "curtailed" to describe the change in allowance provided to the Moluccans. Steijlen, "Closing the 'KNIL chapter,'" 123–124.
36 Van Dijk, "Uitstekende hippe Hoepla," 14.

Ludic Conceptualism, this playful art form, as seen on television programs, performances, exhibitions and more, is critical but indirectly so, which paved the way for social change because it opened a conversation rather than leading with a confrontational, polemic position.[37] The problem with this approach is that an implicit, playful, and often humorous critique risks being misunderstood. In this interview, whether due to ignorance or conscious neglect, no direct blame is explicitly placed on the Dutch government. The closest moment that could resemble critique is when Leasa says, "The government has forgotten our jobs [as military]."[38] The interviewer even implies the Moluccans are to blame by asking more than once why they refuse to work and how they are able to survive without food. Finally, while the interview with the former KNIL members itself was serious and even quite dark, it was sandwiched by lighthearted segments that may have influenced any critical tone that could have been read by a viewer. Ludic Conceptualism thus has its strengths, but also its vulnerability in its characteristic indirectness.

*Hoepla*creators should receive credit for giving space to the former KNIL members to demonstrate their resistance concerning their dismissal and make bare their abominable living conditions, a direct result of the colonial past. In this interview, the entire country was able to peer inside the camps that otherwise kept the Moluccans hidden. This segment spoke to Dutch audiences to the extent that it sparked letters and calls, as well as money and food sent to support the Moluccans. The episode, however, was tied up in too many "misunderstandings" stemming from a sexist society and ignorance of the colonial relationship, to an oblique critique which never placed blame on the Dutch government. Showing does not equate to understanding: the KNIL's abhorrent treatment could not be perceived by a blind eye.

Janna Schoenberger

She is a core faculty member at Amsterdam University College, where she teaches modern and contemporary art. Dr. Schoenberger completed her PhD in Art History at the Graduate Center, The City University of New York. Her doctoral dissertation, *Ludic Conceptualism: Art and Play in the Netherlands, 1959 to 1975*, is the first extensive study of art in the Netherlands in the 1960s and '70s. Dr. Schoenberger has held fellowships at the Rijksmuseum and Yale University's Beinecke Library. Her book on Robert Jasper Grootveld, *Waiting for the Witchdoctor: Robert Jasper Grootveld's Scrapbook and the Dutch Counterculture*, was published in 2020. Dr. Schoenberger's writing on instances of Dutch institutional critique appeared in the 2024 book *Humor in Global Contemporary Art*.

37 Schoenberger, "Ludic Conceptualism."
38 Verhagen et al., "Hoepla 2."