

CHAPTER 2

Tulipomania: Unchanging Gender Relations in Financial Capitalism

Tulipomania is often called the ‘First Financial Crisis’. Therefore, it is appropriate to examine the popular culture discourse of the so-called ‘mother’ of all crises in the first chapter. Current writings, however, cannot agree on a number of things about tulipomania: what motivated the Dutch to trade, who participated in the trade, whether it was a financial bubble, and how the crash impacted the economy and society. In this chapter, I do not aim to find out the *truth* about tulipomania, but will show *how* the ‘truth’ of tulipomania was produced in popular culture. I argue that the ‘truth’ was produced with a gendered orientalist understanding of the economy and scientific knowledge.

Tulip bulb speculation was at a height from 1636 to 1637 in the early Republic of Holland. During the seventeenth century (aka the Dutch Golden Age), the country made significant advancements in science, technology, arts, and commerce. The Dutch keenness for exotic goods took them to the East, where they brought home previously unseen and unknown *objets de curiosité* such as animals, herbs, spices, plants, and flowers. One such ‘oriental’ object that fascinated the Dutch was the tulip from the Ottoman Empire. The flower not only attracted attention from botanists, breeders, and wealthy merchants, but it also made a number of people become traders. What were traded were not the blooming flowers, but the bulbs; not the bulbs of the present, but the bulbs of the future, the ownership of which entitled one to a piece of paper (Cook, 2007). One day in March 1637, the market for title papers cooled down, and title owners found it harder to find buyers. A few days later, trading activities further slowed down; the tulip bulb market was said to have crashed.

The pattern of over-valuation, a drop in liquidity, and eventual market crash characterised many subsequent crashes. The story of tulip speculation may be

How to cite this book chapter:

Lee, M. 2019. *Bubbles and Machines: Gender, Information and Financial Crises*. Pp. 29–53. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/book34.b>. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

like many other speculations, yet it continues to fascinate readers today. It has interested not only economists (the earliest academic paper was written by Posthumus in 1929) and historians (Cook, 2007; Goldgar, 2007; Schama, 1997), but is also a subject of fictional and non-fictional work. A few examples are the novel (Moggach, 1999) and film *Tulip Fever* (dir: Justin Chadwick, 2017) and the non-fictional book (Pollan, 2001) and PBS documentary film *The Botany of Desire* (dir: Michael Schwarz, 2009). More interestingly, tulipomania is used in popular culture to explain characters' action. One reference appears in a major scene from *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*. After villain Gordon Gekko schemes money from a victim, the victim goes to Gekko's empty apartment and finds on a table a print of three tulips and a price chart of the bulbs during the speculation. The print silently informs the victim that he has fallen into a money scheme. It also mocks him that human nature has not changed despite the tulipomania story that Gekko told him earlier in the film. Because the film was made to respond to the 2008–9 housing crisis, the director made a commentary that the foolish men who were ruined in the crisis shared the same traits as those in seventeenth-century Republic of Holland.

In the introductory chapter, I rejected the idea that financial crises can be explained by innate human flaws and a natural economic cycle. I argued that these two reasons in fact obscure capitalist social relations while legitimising capitalism as the *only* political economic system. In other words, capitalist resource allocation is said to work fine, but individual actors—such as greedy men—are sometimes blamed for disrupting the natural economic cycle. In this chapter, I further illustrate the argument by unpacking the embedded ideology in the tulipomania discourse. In order to do so, I adopt a feminist political economic perspective to advance three arguments: first, the discourse relies on the orientalist beliefs that the East stays the same while the West progresses. This discourse is also argued to be gendered: an understanding of the feminine is believed to bring along an understanding of the East. Second, I show that because the tulipomania discourse is by nature citationary (Said, 1979), discourse written from a woman's point of view does not necessarily produce a different kind of knowledge to challenge the orientalist beliefs. Third, technologies of documenting nature not only changed the material reality of bulb trade, but they also exert symbolic control over the Orient and the Woman.

The three arguments lead to a conclusion that the staying power of the tulipomania discourse relies on the binary of *x* vs. *not-x*: the feminine vs. the masculine, the Orient vs. the West, the irrational vs. the rational. Not only does the tulipomania discourse falsely link the feminine to the Orient to the irrational, it also devalues the feminine and the Orient by showing the superiority of the masculine and the West. The binary is so ingrained in the tulipomania discourse that it closes off any possibility of re-imagining social relations. Discourses produced by writers who claimed to pay attention to women's lived experience were given no choice but to build on the seemingly static social relations. Moreover, the tulipomania discourse subjugates the 'knowers' as a unified

male subject who understands nature in a specific way. The social relations between the knowers and the unknown—like the x -non- x binary—remain unchanged in tulipomania discourse. Because capitalism is a social relation, the static social relation implies that the capitalist political economic system cannot be transformed. The spatiotemporal context in which the tulip trade occurred matters little, even though the historical context of the bulb trade gave meanings to the tulip. In other words, the discourse denies the role of history by disguising social relations in a specific spatiotemporal context as a timeless truth.

Post-Colonial Feminist Reading of Orientalism

To advance the critique of the unchanging binary pairs in the tulipomania discourse, to unpack the capitalist ideology in the discourse, and to reveal a unified male subject in knowledge production, I borrow insights from a feminist reading of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) and Nancy Hartsock's feminist standpoint theory (1983a, 1983b). I assert that discourse is not only ideological, but it also has consequences in the material world. ANT will show how technologies—when they are applied to produce discourse—alter the material conditions in which the discourse is produced. The written and visual discourses that I examine range from horticultural books in the seventeenth century to contemporary fictional work.

A postcolonialist reading of the orientalist discourse shows how the West produced a material and ideological understanding of the Other through 'a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles' (Said, 1979, p. 2). Orientalism is an academic discipline, a style of thought, and an ideological control. Scholars, novelists, economists, and colonial administrators make an 'ontological and epistemological distinction' (ibid.) between the West and the East. They produce knowledge about the East and claim authority over the subject matter. In other words, orientalism dominates and restructures the East through writing, ruling, and settling. Said asserted that orientalism is such a powerful discourse that it limits the thought and actions of those who write and act on the East. The discourse is then citationary and self-referential; new writings about the Orient repeat what others have already said. The outcome of an orientalist discourse is not unlike that of a myth (Barthes, 1972/1957). The meaning of a myth is 'already complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions' (p. 117). As a myth, the meaning of a sign (such as the East) 'leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates' (ibid.). As such, a myth is ahistorical and refuses to be locked into a specific space and time.

The meaning of the East is dialectic to that of the West; Orientalists learn about themselves as Western beings by learning about the East. Through studying and writing about the East, the Orient became 'an idea that has a history

and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West' (Said, 1979, p. 5). The idea of the Orient shows power differentiation between the East and the West because the orientalists invest time and energy to produce a system of hegemonic knowledge, thus exerting the power to make the Orient oriental. Despite the dialectical relationship between the West and the East, orientalism does not engage in dialectical thinking. It refuses to explicate the West as a subject position, to acknowledge the interdependence between the East and the West, and to engage in a struggle of inner contradictions. Aouragh (2015) suggests that European science was developed in the context of cultural exchanges between Muslim, Christian and Jew in Arab Andalusia. However, Europeans started to define themselves in secular terms in the sixteenth century, seeing themselves independent of historical past.

Gender difference manifested in binary opposition also shows a refusal to transform and reveal an assumed male subject position in discourse. Feminists (see Frye, 1996) critique the concept binary opposition for setting up a false gender difference between *me* and *not-me*, *x* and *not-x*. Subject and object sets of opposite terms (such as day and night, sun and moon, man and woman) imply that one concept (*not-x*) is the negation of the other (*x*). Consequently the concept *not-x* is only meaningful when it is the negation of the other (*x*). Moreover, the *x* concept sets the norm to which the *not-x* concept is subjugated and with which it is compared. For example, feminist psychoanalytic theories deconstruct the 'man vs. woman' binary opposition as one of 'have (*x*) vs. lack (*not-x*)'. In this binary opposition, the concept of woman is characterised by 'the lack (of a penis)'. Similarly, the West is assumed to be the norm from which the East deviates. When the West is seen as a forward-thinking modernity, the East is rendered backward and static. Technological progress has been used by the West to mediate a sense of progress and modernity (Aouragh, 2015).

An orientalist understanding of the Other is sexual because it simultaneously produces cultural and sexual differences (Yeğenoğlu, 1998). The discourse is produced by a Western masculine subject who sees the Orient and its women as feminine, seductive, and dangerous. Drawing on Bhabha's concept of 'functional overdetermination', Yeğenoğlu (1998) argues that the discourse conflates the concepts of woman and the Orient, therefore 'the nature of femininity and the nature of the Orient are figured as one and the same thing' (p. 56). The veiled woman is not merely a symbol of the Orient, but herself *is* the Orient.

Feminist standpoint theory is also effective at critiquing orientalism as a form of universal knowledge. Hartsock (1983a) examined class and gender dimensions of power relations by asking how a group constructs, legitimises, and reproduces power over other groups. Borrowing Marx's concept of praxis (i.e., human activities determine human consciousness), Hartsock contended that material life constrains and sets limits to an understanding of social relations. Men's participation in economic exchange is said to have created a false

consciousness that distorts social relations. On the other hand, women are less likely to have a distorted sense of reality because they are in continual contact with a world of qualities and change through producing more use value at home and engaging in repetitive production. Therefore, Hartsock believed that women are more capable of unmasking false consciousness because of their productive and reproductive activities.

While critics of orientalism have convincingly pointed out how the East was and is studied, they have paid less attention to how technologies and techniques changed the material reality of both the East and the West. In other words, the presence of the Orient is made real not only through discourse, but also through technologies of measurement and documentation. ANT literature thus fills in this gap by providing insights into how technologies create a reality such as an economic market (Barry and Slater, 2002).

To examine how gender and a capitalist ideology work in the tulipomania discourse, I analyse how the tulip and the speculation are talked about in a range of contemporary popular culture. I argue that different cultural texts constitute a coherent discourse about tulipomania even though they have different purposes and targeted audiences. I do not assume that non-fictional work is more accurate and objective than fictional work because my interest lies in finding out how the tulipomania discourse produces the *truth*. The examined texts are two non-fictional books (*Tulipomania: The Story of the World's Most Coveted Flower and the Extraordinary Passions it Aroused* [Dash, 1999] and *The Tulip: The Story of a Flower That Has Made Men Mad* [Pavord, 1999]), the novel *Tulip Fever* (Moggach, 1999), the Disney animation *The Black Tulip* (1996), and the PBS video and website of *The Botany of Desire* (2009). It should be noted that all three books were published in 1999, but it is unknown what incident led to a concerted interest in tulipomania and whether the three authors were aware of each other's projects (Pavord [1999] and Dash [1999] referenced each other). More interestingly, the dot-com bust took place in 2000, so the three books appeared to be prophetic of the financial collapse. As *The Guardian* wrote, Pavord and Moggach 'had accidentally found the perfect millennial metaphor [the tulip]' (Lawson, 2000, para. 10).

The Ahistorical Discourse

Tulipomania is both a reference and an explanation of subsequent financial crises. Because it is said to be the first financial crisis, the tulipomania discourse has an assumed authority to explain all crises even though the explanations—men's foolishness and their inability to learn from the past—are overly simple. For example, a book reviewer (Frankel, 2000) of Dash's *Tulipomania* explained the root of the dot-com bust with reference to human irrationality throughout history: 'long before anyone ever heard of Qualcomm, CMGI, Cisco Systems, or the other high-tech stocks that have soared during the current bull market,

there was *Semper Augustus* [the rarest and most valued tulip bulb during the speculation]' (para. 1). He continues that: 'as investors have intentionally forgotten everything they learned in Investing 101 in order to load up on unproved, unprofitable dot-com issues, tulipomania has been invoked frequently' (para. 3). Frankel writes about tulipomania with such authority that it necessitates the question: what were those sources on which contemporary writers relied to explain the causes of the trade bulb in seventeenth-century Holland? One common source was *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (Mackay, 1841) that was written to warn the nineteenth-century public in England about shams. Despite Mackay's biased motivation, this source has been treated like an objective account by contemporary writers.

Mackay's three-volume memoir is widely available in public and university libraries as well as online databases. Its accessibility means today's writers can easily use it as the earliest record of tulipomania written in English. Its ready online availability also reflects how technological progress is perceived to transcend truth: that past records retrieved online *must* speak the truth because they transcend history. However, it does not take much work to conclude that Mackay did not aim for an impartial account. He wrote in the preface that he wanted to:

collect the most remarkable instances of those moral epidemics which have been excited, sometimes by one cause and sometimes by another, and to show how easily the masses have been led astray, and how imitative and gregarious men are, even in their infatuations and crimes (Mackay, 1841/1989, p. ix).

Mackay also did not claim that he is writing about history, but 'a miscellany of delusions' (ibid.). Because of his moral aim, tulipomania was grouped together with two other early financial bubbles in the first volume: the Mississippi Bubble scheme and the South Sea Bubble of the eighteenth century. Also collected in this volume are the topics alchemy, prophecy, fortune-telling, medical charlatanry, admiration of great thieves as well as 'the influence of politics and religion on the hair and beard'. Mackay did not intend to write about chemistry, medicine, and economics as reflected from the grouping of financial bubbles along with topics that are now deemed unscientific (such as magnetism as a medical cure). He wanted to tell stories about schemes that have duped the masses at different time periods. As such, Mackay's eight-page account of the tulip bulb trade was a sensational story, not an economic analysis; the account was more tabloid-like, not founded on verified financial sources.

Despite Mackay's purpose, his writing on tulipomania has been seen as instructional about past financial crises. In a foreword written by Templeton (1989), he praises Mackay for 'teach[ing] us some important lessons that apply to investor behaviour today. [...] the 'crowd' may well include money managers and analysts well-schooled in investment theory' (p. i). Templeton lists a number of financial bubbles that confirm Mackay's insights. The foreword makes no mention of medical and religious schemes at all, even though Mackay spent

more pages on them than financial schemes. By singling out financial schemes from the book, contemporary writers treat *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* as a serious study of financial crises and economic behaviours.

Because contemporary works repeat Mackay and take for granted his unattributed claims, it is worthwhile to devote some space to summarise his original words. The eight-page section on tulipomania begins with the tulip's Turkish origin and the long route through which it travelled to the Dutch Republic. Mackay then reports that the wealthy and the learned men were the first to collect the tulip before the flower infatuated 'the middle classes of society and merchants and shopkeepers, men of moderate means' (p. 98). Mackay goes on to explain that the diseased tulips were more beloved than the healthy ones because 'many persons grow *insensibly* attached to that which gives them a great deal of *trouble*, as a mother loves her sick and ever-ailing child better than her more healthy offspring' (p. 99; emphasis added). He claims that the most sought-after bulb *Semper Augustus* could cost 'a new carriage, two grey horses, a complete suit of harness' (p. 100). Mackay also recites the story of a sailor who ate a tulip bulb for breakfast because he did not realise the onion-like bulb was a precious object. Mackay describes the widespread madness in the Republic where 'nobles, citizens, farmers, mechanics, sea-men, footmen, maid-servants, even chimney-sweeps and old-clothes women' (p. 103) suspended their daily lives and sold whatever property and possessions they had in order to trade bulbs. When the market was saturated, the price fell sharply. Many lives were said to have been ruined: 'substantial merchants were reduced almost to beggary, and many a representative of noble line saw the fortunes of his house ruined beyond redemption' (p. 104). Consequently, Mackay concludes that the Dutch economy suffered and took many years to recover.

The reliability of Mackay's account is questioned by historian Goldgar (2007), who pointed out that Mackay had heavily borrowed from a German work, Johann Beckmann's *A History of Inventions, Discoveries* (1817). Similar to Mackay's book, Beckmann aimed to publicise scams such as 'magnetic cures', 'secret poison', 'speaking-trumpet', 'artichoke', and 'insurance'. In Beckmann (1817, p. 26) and Mackay (1856, p. 143), a Viceroy bulb was said to cost: '2 last of wheat; 4 ditto rye; 4 fat oxen; 3 fat swine; 12 fat sheep; 2 hogsheads of wine; 4 tons of beer; 2 ditto butter; 1000 pounds of cheese; 1 complete bed; a suit of clothes; and a silver beaker'. The same questionable list is reproduced as fact on the book jacket of Dash's *Tulipomania* (1999), the blog 'The Bubble Bubble' by *Forbes* columnist Jesse Colombo (2012), and the 'tulip mania' Wikipedia entry (even though a tiny footnote suggests that the source was dubious).¹ The unattributed quotes show that the tulipomania discourse is self-referential, even though academic sources have disputed the claims made by Mackay and Beckmann.

Historian Goldgar (2007) also questions the impartiality of Beckmann's accounts because he relied on two biased sources: words from one Abraham Munting whose father lost money on tulip speculation, and anonymous

pamphlets produced by propagandists during the mania. Goldgar found no evidence that noblemen, chimney sweepers, and farmers participated in the trade, nor did she find any evidence of large scale bankruptcy that destroyed the Dutch economy. Gebhardt (2015) also points out that trades were done with a gentleman's handshake: the lack of written documents mean the money lost could not be calculated.

Despite Mackay's unattributed and biased accounts, writers—non-fictional and fictional—use his words to fuel imagination. For example, Moggach's *Tulip Fever* has archetypal characters such as the wealthy merchant who displays social status by acquiring the tulip and other rarities; the artisan who abandons his profession to trade tulips in taverns; and the fool who mistakes a valuable bulb for an edible plant. Moggach wrote that the price of a *Semper Augustus* cost 'six fine horses, three oxheads of wine, a dozen sheep, two dozen silver goblets and a seascape by [a famous painter]' (Moggach, 1999, p. 31). When the bubble burst, 'thousands of people are made destitute. They throw themselves into the canals; they deliver themselves up to the mercy of the charitable institutions; in churches throughout the land they bitterly repent their folly' (p. 272).

In a radio interview with *Bookclub*, Moggach (2013) shared her view on tulipomania, which could as well be Mackay's. She suggested that tulipomania was a 'bizarre' event: it illustrates the 'insanity of lust and greed and stupidity' in 'an otherwise very reasonable period, really the middle-class of that period' where 'people from all income brackets saving, stealing to buy these bulbs'. The self-referential nature of the tulipomania discourse makes the story *the truth*. In turn, this truth is used to explain other financial crises. Moggach continued that tulipomania was one of those madnesses that infected every generation: 'dot-com bubbles, property bubbles, South Sea bubbles'. Responding to Moggach's comments, *Bookclub* host James Naughtie said tulipomania was 'the problem when you don't have a central bank.' This comment implies that tulipomania can be understood without a sociohistorical context, that it illustrates every financial woe in any kind of society at any historical period.

First Set Of Binary Opposition: *X* and *Not-X*

The timelessness of the ahistorical tulipomania discourse implies that social relations remain static in all kinds of society. This ahistorical discourse constructs gender and cultural differences through sets of binary opposition. In the first set, the subject (*x*) is seen as the norm to which the object (*not-x*) is subjugated. The two pairs examined here are: the West vs. the East, economic equilibrium vs. financial crisis. From a postcolonial perspective, 'the West' and 'economic equilibrium' are critiqued to be masculine while 'the East' and 'financial crisis' are feminine from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Not only are Western

thoughts the norms in the binary pairs, but the masculine subject also devalues the East as the feminine Other, who is politically and economically inferior.

The West vs. the East

The tulipomania discourse traces the Eastern origin of the flower while showing the East was (still is?) a backward society ruled by lusty and barbaric rulers. The tulip is seen as the *femme fatale* that 'bewitched' the rulers and ruined the kingdom. Gender works through 'The West vs. the East' in two ways: first, the Western masculine subject feminises the East; second, the subject explains socioeconomic mayhem with the 'spell' cast by the flower.

The tulipomania discourse describes the Ottoman Empire as a land ruled by barbaric men. The incompetent rulers are said to have spent too much time tending extravagant gardens and staying at sex harems. Pavord (1999) writes that Sultan Mohmed II (1451–81) built pleasure gardens inside the city's courtyards for tulips. Two hundred years later, Ibrahim 'the Mad' (1640–8) was said to have drowned hundreds of concubines so that replacements could be sought (Dash, 1999). His successor Sultan Ahmed III (1648–87)—according to Pavord—held staged tulip festivals where nightly entertainment took place in the garden where his five wives would make their appearances: 'at the signal from a canon, the doors of the harem were open and the Sultan's mistresses were led out into the garden by eunuchs carrying torches' (p. 50). While the sultans are said to be hypermasculine rulers who exerted power over women and flowers, they were not treated as serious rulers because the authors downplay the rulers' achievements as public men.

The East is also feminised through linking the Eastern origin of the flower to it being a woman. Dash (1999) describes the wild flower found in the Chinese mountain range as a beauty whose rugged charm needs to be refined: '[the original tulip] had neither the stature nor the easy elegance that characterised their descendants. These would come only with time. But even now they were beautiful' (p. 5); further, the beauty of the wild flowers was 'considerably enhanced by the bleak surroundings in which they were usually encountered' and that would have made attractive (p. 6). The 'slender and irresistible' (Pavord, 1999, p. 26) tulip is described as seductive enough to win the title of the most beloved flower in the Ottoman Empire. The Muslim poets are said to see the flower as a symbol of eternity and a token of undying love (Dash, 1999). The flower is also described as 'wildly sexy' (Pavord, 1999, p. 4), thus deserving some 'evocative' (p. 43) Turkish names such as 'those that burn the heart' and 'matchless pearl'. At the same time, the seductive flower was also seen by the Turks to be modest because it bows its head to its admirers (In the next section, I explore how the flower encompasses both the *x* and *not-x* concepts by being the virgin and the whore at the same time).

The East is further feminised when a feminine object is said to have clouded the rulers' judgement and ruined the kingdom. In the tulipomania discourse, the Ottoman Empire failed to progress like a Western society partly because its rulers failed to be reflective and simply followed the paths of their ancestors: the sultans in the seventeenth century would act and behave in a similar way as their ancestors in the fifteenth century. The stagnated progress was explained by Pavord (1999), referencing the sultans' passion for the flower, evidenced by the Turks' keenness for judging the tulip. The Turks are said to prefer a tulip that has a long and strong stem, smooth and firm petals, a blossom unhidden by the leaves, as well as an erect posture (Dash, 1999). Similar description can be found in Pavord (1999): 'the petals themselves had to be of good texture—stiff yet smooth—and of one colour'; 'the flower had to stand erect on its stem, thin and well balanced' (p. 43). The language used to describe the ideal tulip is also used to describe the physique of an ideal woman nowadays: long and straight legs, smooth and firm skin, and erect breasts. The ideal tulip/woman should also be chaste because the flower should not be soiled with its own pollen. Dash (1999) uses sexual language to describe how Turkish gardeners like the flower to be virginal but seductive at the same time: 'her inner leaves [should be ornamented with pleasant rays]; [...] her outer leaves a little open [...]; the white ornamental leaves are absolutely perfect' (p. 203).

Another purpose of describing the Ottoman rulers' private lives is to satisfy the fantasy and desire that the Western masculine subject has about the East (Yeğenoğlu, 1998). In particular, the harem stirs the Western imagination of a sexually deviant place that could not be found in the West. Mernissi (2001) writes that Western men always imagine the harem to be a sex haven where scantily clad slaves offer sexual services to the male captors. In both the accounts of Dash and Pavord, the tulips in the garden are said to be like the women in the harem who were kept by powerful men for private pleasure and viewing. In the tulipomania account, the flower acts as a substitute for the oriental women in the harem; its physique is described in sexualised language to satisfy erotic desire.

As Yeğenoğlu (1998) stated, colonial discourse is constructed from sexual and cultural differences, and the tulip, as both a woman and the East, was used in the tulipomania discourse to confirm the differences. By showing the peculiarity of the East, as Said (1979) explained, orientalism 'tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground itself' (p. 3). In the tulipomania discourse, the Turks were not described as particularly scientific and entrepreneurial about the flower: little space was spent on describing the sociohistorical context of tulip cultivation in the East, such as brief mentions of how the sultans classified the tulips (Dash, 1999) and price speculation in Istanbul (Pavord, 1999). It remains unknown what the economy of the Ottoman Empire was like

in those 300 years, and what knowledge the Turks gained about nature through studying the flower for centuries before Europeans were aware of the existence of tulips. In contrast, both Dash (1999) and Pavord (1999) devoted more space to detailing the three years of bulb trade in the Dutch Republic, thus implicitly praising the West for its financial sophistication and scientific advancement. The contrast between the East and the West reinforces the notion that the Orient was unchanged whilst the West transformed in merely three years. Scientific knowledge production was implied to relate to capitalism: a non-capitalist society was assumed to be scientifically backward; scientific progress was only possible in a capitalist society.

Economic Equilibrium vs. Financial Chaos

Financial chaos is often said to be a hysteria—a feminine moment in an otherwise orderly and sound masculine market. Historically hysteria was seen as a woman's disease related to the womb, menstruation, and unfulfilled sexual desire. A hysterical woman is said to bring disorder and mayhem to an otherwise calm situation. In the tulipomania discourse, the tulip is the woman who disrupts a social equilibrium by robbing rationality from men. The man who lost his sensibility can be found in the Disney animation *The Black Tulip* (loosely adapted from Dumas *père's* book of the same title) and the PBS documentary *The Botany of Desire* (adapted from the popular science book of the same title).

The story of Disney's *The Black Tulip* takes place in 1672 in an unnamed European town. The town holds a contest for the most beautiful black tulip. Cornelius, a horticulturist, devotes his time to cultivate the impossible tulip. Cornelius' out-of-town godfather arrives asking him to keep a box in secret. Later Cornelius receives a letter from the godfather but is too preoccupied with the bulbs to read it. Meanwhile his wicked neighbour eyes the black tulip to make a potion. The state police raids Cornelius' place, finds the box, and arrests him for treason. The tulip is said to bewitch Cornelius and blind him from fulfilling a godson's duties during a political turmoil. He is like the sultans who are said to be too preoccupied with the tulip to care more about the state's political affairs.

The Black Tulip shares more similarities with other Disney animations than the tulipomania discourse. Recurring themes found in *The Black Tulip* include Disney staples such as the contrast between good and bad, sexual awakening of the young lovers, and human-animal friendship. The perfect Disney world is disrupted when vulnerable humans are tempted by worldly objects, such as the apple in *Snow White*, the glass slippers in *Cinderella*, and the tulip in *The Black Tulip*. To the young audience who probably have not heard of tulipomania, the meaning of the tulip may be established through other temptation symbols in Disney animations. Yet when *The Black Tulip* is examined as part of

the tulipomania discourse, the meaning of it being a *femme fatale* still applies. It can thus be argued that the meaning of the tulip has become independent of the historical context that has given it meaning; that is, the meaning of the tulip being a temptress remains static in a wide range of discourse.

The tulip-as-temptress is also reinforced in the NSF-funded PBS documentary *The Botany of Desire*. Popular science writer Michael Pollan states that the tulipomania was ‘completely illogical, [it] can’t [be] explain[ed] in any logical scheme. The entire society went nuts.’ He adds that it was ‘a pure, speculative financial bubble. And it is about a flower. I mean, how amazing is that?’ There is then a cut to an older Dutch man surveying his garden. He says: ‘you get the tulip fever and that becomes worse, worse, worse.’ The offscreen narrator then adds: ‘the flower bewitched one of the most powerful men in the world: the Sultans of the Ottoman Empire’. Back to the present days, Pollan says: ‘the breeders of today are sex-crazy’. The scene changes to a Dutch tulip breeder surveying beds of tulips, picking up one of them who tells the camera: ‘this one is my favourite, I give it a good future. When you see this one, your heart goes “chi chi chi” and that’s the difference.’ Even though this older Dutch man lives in a different time and place from Ottoman sultans, he is used in the documentary to represent all men who are/were infatuated with the flower. In this way, social relations between the flower and the man are already determined by the static meanings of the flower.

The East and financial chaos upset an equilibrium maintained by the West. The West needs to use a remedy to suspend feminine hysteria and resume normalcy. In the past, female hysteria was believed to be cured by pregnancy, blood drain, hypnosis, and psychoanalysis. Remedies to today’s hysterical financial market include tougher regulation and increased liquidity. I will show in the following that textual remedies are also used to resume the normalcy and equilibrium of gender relations.

Second Set of Binary Opposition: The Hidden Subject and Two Objects

The second set of binary opposition consists of two objects and a hidden subject. The woman simultaneously embodies the two objects *x* and *not-x*. She does not have a sense of agency to choose her role because the hidden male subject assigns her a meaning. In this second set of binary opposites, there is no norm to which the feminine object is compared because all the concepts are feminine: virgin vs. whore; nature vs. a cosmetic world; and woman vs. the tulip. The hidden male subject flexibly uses the *x* and *not-x* binary in order to restore the disequilibrium caused by the East and financial chaos. The problem is resolved by constructing ‘Orientalism 2.0 discourse’ (Aouragh, 2105) through ‘a politics of representation in which the spectator (or researcher) is an object that has no agency’ (p. 273).

Virgin vs. Whore

The hidden subject sees the tulip as both a virgin and a whore. She is a symbol of modesty in the Ottoman Empire, yet is said to be seductive enough to earn names such as ‘burn the heart’ and ‘matchless pearl’ (Pavord, 1999). In the Disney animation *The Black Tulip*, the black tulip and Rosa—the heroine—are unspoiled exotic objects. The tulip is a token of virginity but is also a temptress who makes the main character, Cornelius, lose his mind. While Cornelius is busy cultivating the tulip, his wicked neighbour is eyeing the flower to make a potion by acquiring ‘a maiden with a pure heart’ (i.e. virgin) and ‘a black flower without imperfection’ (i.e. whore). When Cornelius is imprisoned, he grows one tulip in his cell and gives the other to the warden’s daughter Rosa. The villain steals the Warden’s keys to Cornelius’ cell so that he can take hold of ‘a black flower without imperfection’. He also bribes the warden for his daughter’s hands for ‘a maiden with a pure heart’. When the villain sets Rosa and the black tulip on fire, a flame with an evil face creeps up to swallow both. Meanwhile, Cornelius’ animal friends help him escape so that he can save Rosa, who is tied to a pole ready to be scarified to the male rapist represented by the fire. In an expected Disney ending, Cornelius marries Rosa and his tulip is crowned the most beautiful in the town.

Rosa is drawn like a gypsy woman. She wears gold hoop earrings, has dark skin complexion, and speaks in a foreign accent. The tulip is a token of Rosa’s virginity and her name is that of a rose. Cornelius entrusts Rosa with a valuable bulb, asking her to look after the flower as well as her virginity. The villain does not directly soil the woman and the flower, but he ignites a flame—which is likened to be a rapist—to take both away. Because Cornelius is seen as the rightful owner of both the flower and the woman, Rosa appropriately tells him that ‘you have asked me to keep it safe, and I have done it’. While ‘it’ refers to the tulip, it may as well be her virginity. As mentioned earlier, the black tulip, like the glass slipper in *Cinderella* and the Prince’s kiss in *The Sleeping Beauty*, helps identify the chaste women who are associated with the tokens which aid the heroes to identify them.

Unlike the tulip in Disney animation, the tulip in both contemporary and historical account is more often a cunning and manipulative prostitute than a chaste virgin. Propagandists associated the tulip with the fallen woman in satirical work during the height of the speculation. Engraver Crispijn van de Passe jr. and painter Hendrik Gerritszoon (also known as Hendrick Gerritsz Pot) were commissioned to create work that poked fun at the speculators. In van de Passe’s *Flora’s Mallewagen* (*Flora’s Wagon of Fools*, 1637) and Gerritszoon’s painting of the same title (1637), Flora—the goddess of flowers and the protector of prostitutes (Dash, 1999)—sits in the fools’ wagon carrying nine flowers, including a *Semper Augustus* in her left hand. Accompanying the goddess are two other women named ‘Collect All’ and ‘Vain Hope’. Lying on the ground underneath the wagon are tulips of different species. Following the

wagon is a mob of men and women extending their arms hoping to sail along with the entourage who will blindly drown themselves in the sea. In written pamphlets during the height of the speculation, Flora was said to be a faithless companion who offered herself to the highest bidder (Dash, 1999). The contemporary fictional work *Tulip Fever* also likened the tulip to an expensive and unfaithful prostitute. The protagonist's lover is described as a 'virgin' (p. 160) trader. The flower is said to flirt with him and any man who could afford her: 'tulipomania has claimed him too, and what a mistress she is! She flirts with other men; she leads them on. In the end, however, just when he thinks he might lose her, she surrenders to him' (p. 160). The education documentary *The Botany of Desire* does not call out the flower as a prostitute but it describes nature as highly manipulative because it is wise enough to '[keep humans] engaged every generation'. The tulip's choice of weapon is said to be beauty. Quite appropriately, the tulip story begins with an extreme close-up of a bee busying itself on a flower, implying the sexual nature of the tulip.

Nature vs. a Cosmetic World

The hidden subject asks nature and the cosmetic world to be judged from a male subject position. *The Botany of Desire* uses an online interactive game to ask school children to judge beauty based on four criteria: symmetry, health, vibrancy, and complexity. Students are asked to compare nature with a cosmetic world by selecting the most beautiful image among three. In one set, the images are a forest scene, a parking lot scene, and a beach scene. The forest and beach scenes—both represent nature—received more votes than the parking lot scene that represents a human-made world. The nature vs. human-made world dichotomy illustrates that of female-male: while women *appear* like nature, men *act* on the nature to make it useful. More curiously, another set consists of three photoshopped images of a woman's headshot. It is impossible to tell if the original image was included but it can be assumed that the manipulated image has the most symmetrical face. Nature, as represented by the asymmetrical face, received the fewest votes. A cosmetic improvement of nature—through photoshopping—is necessary to make the woman's face easier on the eyes.

What is troubling about the supposedly educational nature of the game is that it asks students to look and judge in a particular way. It does not ask them to judge the beauty of any human, but the face of a young, pale-skinned, heavily-made up Caucasian woman who represents all humans. It also asks students to judge this woman against natural objects (such as flowers) and manipulated images of herself. The fact that the game is lost on few (as evident by the number of votes) means that students have learned to take up a particular subject position to judge women's appearance. As John Berger's (1972) famous quote illuminates:

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between

men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight (p. 47).

The above quote illustrates that the students who voted on the image had already understood the relationship between the viewers and the viewed. If the student is a girl, then she ought to know that her face is rated by others as well. Moreover, her face is never pretty enough when compared to a digital image manipulated by an invisible hand.

The above quote applies to women as much as the tulip. *The Botany of Desire* says nature has agency—the tulip *knowingly* uses its beauty to attract humans' (or men's?) attention. By asking herself to be looked at, the tulip is said to turn herself into an object of sight. To look at a tulip, a male subjective way of looking is desired.

Woman vs. the Tulip

In the fictional work *Tulip Fever*, men first see the tulip as a woman, then any woman becomes a tulip, later the woman is just a part of the tulip. This pair of binary opposites objectifies and fragments women by conflating the woman and the tulip into one concept. At the beginning of *Tulip Fever*, Sophia is likened to an expensive flower in the collection of her old, wealthy husband. Her beauty and vulnerability are immortalised by a painter, Jan. Referring to a vase of tulips that was asked to be included in the couple's portrait, the husband asks the painter: 'do they not remind us of the transitory nature of beauty, how that which is lovely must one day die?' (Moggach, 1999, p. 29). To the painter, what is lovely is not the flower, but the woman. However, 'she has perished, long ago. Only the painting remains' (p. 35). As Jan paints Sophia, he sexualises the flower as a woman. His imagination strips off her clothing piece by piece: 'a petal drops, like a shed skirt, from one of the tulips' (p. 31); 'another petal falls; it reveals the firm knob of the stigma' (p. 34).

Sophia and Jan begin an affair, Sophia becomes a tulip to Jan. Sophia sees herself as a tulip from a male perspective. Being a nude model, Sophia sees herself as an object of gaze (Berger, 1972). She narrates that, 'I disrobe myself, peeling off my clothes like an onion skin' (p. 124). Later, in Jan's dream, Sophia's 'petals fall, revealing a naked stalk' (p. 157). Not only does the painter see the woman as a tulip, but a dumbfounded grower sees women in the street as tulip bulbs as well: 'comely women are tulips; their skirts are petals, swinging around the pollen-dusted stigmas of their legs' (p. 146).

Later, when Jan is completely obsessed with bulb trading, the love between him and Sophia is displaced by a love of money. Commodities have displaced social relations and become the most valuable thing. The lovers have forgotten about lovemaking altogether. The desire for each other has been subsumed by the desire to trade the rarest bulb. Sophia becomes only a petal—a flower

part—to Jan. At the end of the story, when Jan loses the ultimate game of trading a *Semper Augustus*, he loses the bulb and the lover altogether, the woman and the tulip are one and the same.

Manifest and Latent Ideologies

The second set of binary oppositions (i.e. the virgin vs. the whore, nature vs. a cosmetic world, woman vs. tulip) works in an intriguing way because it contains both manifest and latent ideologies. On the surface, the virgin is not the whore, nature is not a cosmetic world, and the woman is not the flower. But the manifest level of ideology obscures a latent level in which the subject—a male—is positioned behind the discourse to compare and judge women. This hidden subject is like the ‘invisible hand’ in Adam Smith’s understanding of the market. Like an unobservable market force that maintains market equilibrium, the hidden male subject restores the hysterical state to an economic equilibrium *at the textual level*. To do this, gender is made flexible depends on the need of the narrative; therefore the woman can be the virgin or the whore. For example, in *Black Tulip*, Cornelius achieves a state of harmony by marrying the virgin woman and winning the competition. In *Tulip Fever*, the woman and the tulip both tempt a virgin painter to sin; his tactic to resist the temptation is to objectify the woman by seeing her as nothing but a petal. After the plan falls through, the painter finds peace by immortalising the most mundane objects such as an onion. In both narratives, the male protagonist resolves the disequilibrium (such as losing a trading commodity, being in jail) by seeing the woman as either a virgin or a whore. Making gender flexible is also a tactic to manage capitalist crises. Fraser (2016) shows that in the nineteenth century, a liberal competitive capitalist society asked women to be responsible for the private social reproductive duties. In the era of financialised capitalism, social reproductive duties have become an industry that is commodified and privatised.

I have shown in this section that the tulipomania discourse is self-referential. Despite the questionable credibility of the earliest record written in the English language, fictional and non-fictional writers have relied on it to make claims and re-imagine fictional scenes. The static discourse means that unchanged social relations are constituted by two sets of binary opposites. In this static discourse, the meaning of the tulip was not made in relation to characters and events; its meaning becomes independent of the historical context that had given it meaning. Tulipomania discourse can be considered a myth that ‘gives [the world] in return [...] a *natural* image of this reality’ (Barthes, 1972/1957, p. 142). As a myth, the tulipomania discourse neither deceives nor denies: ‘its function is to talk about [things] [...] it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact’ (p. 143). To unveil the unnaturalness of the discourse, a marginalised voice belonging to a woman may effect the critique.

Women's Production of Knowledge

Can women produce knowledge that disrupts the apparent naturalness of the tulipomania discourse? Hartsock (1983a, 1983b) believes that they can. She proposes that feminist standpoint theory can deconstruct ideologies embedded in class and gender bias. She believes that working-class women occupy a position from which they can unveil a capitalist patriarchal ideology. She states that because women produce more use value at home and engage in more repetitive and mundane tasks, therefore they are less likely to see the world as one of exchange. Borrowing insights from Hartsock, I argue that a feminist standpoint will show the knowledge about tulip speculation was more fragmented and contradictory than the universal and coherent knowledge created by a unified male subject. However, not all discourses produced by women are necessarily written from a feminist standpoint perspective. *Tulip Fever*—a novel written by a woman for women readers—reinforces the class bias that is inherent in the male subject.

Little information exists to show how Dutch women and the working-class fared during the tulip speculation, because they produced few documents. (Schama, 1997). Existing knowledge was produced by the ruling class of wealthy merchants and learned men. They passed on their culture as the national one. Nonetheless, historical accounts (as discussed in Schama, 1997) reveal women's economic status during the Golden Age. Accounts show that young women from the province and other parts of Europe were employed as servants; some widows continued their husbands' trade; and at least one woman was known to have made a living as a painter (Cook, 2007). Historical accounts also show that Dutch women in the seventeenth century enjoyed more legal protection, economic advancement, and social freedom than their counterparts in England and France. Yet the current discourse has little to say about how women coped with the financial bubble aftermath and whether the crisis transformed gender relations in the household and society.

Women's Discourse and a Re-Imagination of the Tulip?

Historical fiction is a genre through which contemporary writers can re-imagine women's place. Wallace (n/a) believes that historical fictions allow women to reclaim their unrecorded past, and '[this past] was given renewed vigour by feminism' (para. 11). A historical fiction based on tulipomania is Deborah Moggach's previously mentioned *Tulip Fever* (1999). Moggach adopts the story from a woman's point of view by focusing on women's everyday lives rather than the macro environment that enabled tulip speculation. To Wallace (n/a), 'the historical novel has always offered a way of writing about subjects—politics, economics—which [women writers] have found it difficult to write about in other forms' (para. 48). However, a woman's discourse is not

necessarily a feminist one. I argue in the following that *Tulip Fever* (1999) reinforces the binary opposition of social relations (as discussed in the previous section) and validates the subject as a unified male. Therefore, it fails to adopt a feminist standpoint that could critique knowledge from the margin.

Tulip Fever's protagonist, Sophia, is married to a wealthy but ageing merchant, Cornelis Sandvoort. He is anxious to have an heir but she is bored to be with him. The husband commissions an artisan, Jan, to paint a portrait of the couple. Sophia and Jan fall in love and begin an affair. Meanwhile, the maid Maria is pregnant but her lover Willem is nowhere to be found. Sophia comes up with a scheme: she will pretend to be pregnant and the maid will hand over the newborn to pass as Cornelis' child. Sophia will then pretend to die during childbirth. After Jan raises money in bulb trades, the lovers would then flee to the East Indies. The plan falls through because Jan's servant thinks the bulb is an onion and eats it. At the end Sophia becomes a nun, Jan becomes a still life painter, Cornelis tries to find Sophia in the East Indies, and the maid inherits Cornelis' mansion where she lives with the baby and husband who reappears after a misunderstanding is clarified.

Tulip Fever breaks through one convention in the tulipomania discourse: that it is not a moral story about men, but women. The writer has suggested that she used a first-person perspective because Sophia has done something bad to the husband (Moggach, 2013). The writer wants the readers to be sympathetic with Sophia, whose bad deeds are rooted in presumed female vices such as lust and deception, not male sins such as pride and greed. Unlike men, Sophia only sees the bulb as a commodity for exchange in *Tulip Fever*, not a temptress who seduces men. However, the difference between the tulipomania discourse and *Tulip Fever* stops here because the fiction is yet another citationary work that builds social relations on the two sets of binary opposites: the whore vs. the virgin; the woman vs. the tulip.

Mistress and Servant: Class Relations

What did working-class women do during the speculation? Were they aware of it? How did they cope after the bubble burst? Mackay (1856) suggested that men and women of all classes participated in trading bulbs but his claim was rejected by historian Goldgar (2007), who found no evidence that the working-class participated in the trade. Lacking historical evidence, contemporary writers can only imagine what working-class women did during the bulb trade. *Tulip Fever* then offers a glimpse of the past through the maidservant character.

Maidservants were described with a misogynist attitude in Dutch Golden Age accounts (Schama, 1997). They were seen as the most dangerous household members who were capable of doing mischief because they were custodians of feminine secrets. They were said to be abusive towards their masters, insubordinate, lazy, and sensually indulgent. Maria—Sophia's maidservant—is

typecast to fit this misogynist profile. First, she is the confidante of the socially isolated mistress. The servant and the mistress know of each other's secrets: Maria knows about Sophia's affairs and Sophia knows about Maria's pregnancy. Second, the servant helps the mistress to hide secrets from the master; Sophia comes up with a scheme and Maria becomes the accomplice.

Even though Maria and Sophia are partners in crime, power and class relations differentiate them. Moggach marks the difference between the two women by using different reasons to explain their illicit sexual relations. The upper-middle-class woman is said to engage in an affair to assuage her frustration in a loveless marriage. On the other hand, the working-class woman is pregnant because she indulges in sensual pleasure. This reinforces a working-class woman stereotype: that they have less control over lust and appetite (see also Ch. 3 about why women are not trusted as credible borrowers). Consequently, when Sophia has to stuff pillows inside clothing to fake a pregnancy, the maid is described as naturally flabby so her rising belly is unnoticeable. Once again, the author reinforces the stereotype of working-class women being overweight. Lastly, Sophia has control over her fate while the maid does not. Once the mistress finds out about the maid's pregnancy, she decides to dismiss her. The maid is only kept because the foetus becomes convenient for Sophia's scheme (see also Ch. 5 for a discussion of the foetus as a commodity of exchange).

Class difference also marks the two women's relationship with the material world: Sophia sees the world as one of exchange – she privileges exchange value over use value. On the other hand, the maid is said to privilege use value. Sophia belongs to the ruling class through marriage; she knows that in order to improve the maternal family's finances, she needs to marry a rich man. She also understands that in order to earn freedom, she needs to have plenty of money for investment. To comfort a frightened Maria when Sophia plans to steal a bulb, she consoles the maid by saying: 'We will get enough money, don't worry. [...] We'll get the bulbs and then we will make a lot more' (Moggach, 1999, p. 152). A feminist standpoint critiques Sophia for adopting a male subjectivity to see the world. As such, her view of the material world is partial because she neither engages in productive work (such as household duties) nor reproductive work. Yet she is hardly equal to a man of the ruling class: she is denied access to a public life in the patriarchal world. Being secluded in a private space, her understanding of the world of exchange is filtered through men: she only hears about the bulb trade through the husband and she trades bulbs through the lover.

In contrast to Sophia, feminist standpoint theory argues that the maidservant Maria would have an impartial view of the material world. The theory states that working-class women arguably are more able to unify mind and body, thus are more capable of pointing out the false dualism in patriarchal capitalism *Tulip Fever*, however, offers little hints at what Maria *thinks* about the tulip and financial speculation. Her thoughts matter little to the mistress and the story. One of the few glimpses is Maria's observation of the flowers in the

garden: 'Maria gazes at the single flowerbed. Shoots have pushed through the soil; how hopeful they are' (p. 57). She associates the bulb with life rather than with money. Her simplicity and lack of sophisticated thinking is mocked by the mistress and the author. Maria is said to be 'sensible' and 'practical'. Sophia does not understand why Maria is not keen on stealing a bulb to raise funds. To an upper-middle class woman, the 'practical' way to think about the bulb is to treat it as a commodity. To a working-class woman, the 'practical' way to live is through reproductive duties. In Maria's case, she wants to get married and have five children. Once again the author reinforces the working-class women stereotype: marrying early, having many children, and lacking financial and professional ambitions.

The final resolution of *Tulip Fever* may appear to be a critique of false consciousness among the middle-class characters. At the end of the story, all the characters see through the untruth imposed by capitalism and opt to live a life without material temptation: Sophia becomes a nun; Jan the lover only paints mundane objects such as an onion; Cornelis gives up his business and moves to the East Indies to find Sophia. The only winner in the story is the maid. However, the final resolution cannot be mistaken as the triumph of the working-class women: instead it reinforces a gender/class ideology that a woman's place is at home. The simple-minded maid is not punished because she is the one who dutifully performs womanly and motherly roles (cooking, cleaning, giving birth, breastfeeding baby) and is consequently materially rewarded. The maid does not attempt to cross the class and gender boundaries; her happy confinement to a private sphere makes her a stabilising force in a patriarchal capitalist society. On the other hand, Sophia—the femme fatale—brings a disruptive force to the society and economy because she violates gender boundaries. She tries to cross over to the masculine side by being the dominant partner in the affair, the mastermind of a scheme that involves theft and deception and—worst of all—a participant in the public life through the bulb trade. Because of her boundary-crossing, the bad woman is punished not so much because of her sins, but because of her attempts to ignore prescribed gender relations.

I have shown in this section that a woman-written historical novel does not necessarily produce an alternative account of the tulipomania discourse. Written from the point of view of an upper-middle-class woman during the Dutch Golden Age, *Tulip Fever* privileges exchange value over use value. The voice of a working-class woman is heard through her mistress, and she is stereotyped to be simple-minded and nurturing.

Technologies of Difference

In this section, I show how technologies of describing nature—such as writing, documenting, drawing, and printing—were instrumental at creating a sociocultural context that enabled bulb trading. These technologies had both

material and symbolic consequences for the Dutch society and the tulipomania discourse. ANT would argue that technologies made real a market of commodity trading (Callon, 2007a) because they differentiated the tulip into different varieties and thus prices. A post-colonial feminist perspective would argue that technologies exert symbolic control via the tulip over two unknowns: the Orient and women. As delineated in an earlier section, the flower serves as a proxy for the unknown because the tulip symbolises and feminises the East and the tulip is sometimes seen as a woman (as illustrated in the last section). Technologies of difference then served as tools for the male subject to materially and symbolically control the East and the feminine.

The Men Who Used Technologies to Tame Nature

Cook (2007) has convincingly described the sociocultural context under which the Dutch promoted trading and commerce during the Dutch Golden Age. He suggests that the Dutch wished to search for wisdom beyond religious reasoning and settled for sensory-based knowledge. Objective knowledge could be gained through ‘the bodily senses, information from which can be exchanged’ (p. 17); to know is to see with one’s eyes and to touch with one’s hands. Therefore, knowledge about nature could be gained from acquiring *objets de curiosité* from abroad. Another way to know nature is through meticulous description that is essential to comparison, alteration, and use for ‘material betterment’ (p. 6). Yet another way to know nature is to produce and consume ‘realistic’ arts such as illustration that satisfies the insatiable Dutch appetite for knowledge.

Knowledge production was done by different groups of professional men who diffused knowledge through describing and assessing the tulip. Cook (2007) writes that: ‘tasteful objectivity began with descriptive facts, the credibility of which was guaranteed by personal credit, the sharing of information, and collective decision-making on plain and precise language’ (p. 40). Masculinity was essential to the network of professional men; it made the network appear natural (Gebhardt, 2015). One man who paid particular attention to the tulip was the botanist Carolus Clusius. In his monumental *Rariourum Plantrum Historia* (1601), Clusius spared thirteen pages to describe, catalogue, and understand tulips in the horticultural encyclopaedia. He classified the tulip first by petal shape, then by colour. After the botanist wrote about the flower, the cultivators bred new species and the connoisseurs set the trend of making the tulip a symbol of status, wealth, and good taste. Later, commercial artists were commissioned to illustrate tulips as products that were numbered and annotated with names, weights, and prices (Pavord, 1999). Lastly, the printer mass-produced the illustrations for traders to consult the commodity. Cook (2007) argues that the precise description created a political economy of natural knowledge on which commerce depended.

Describing, documenting, and illustrating the tulip effected and conditioned the bulb trade because it created differences among the tulips. The breeders created new groups and species (Dash, 1999), which were then ranked by fanciers and dealers. The most prized flowers were those that were entirely white or yellow but adorned with thin-striped flames in the centre and by the edge of the petal. Dash (1999) writes that ‘Dutch tulipophiles used the subtle variations of these flames and flares of colour to grade their flowers according to a strict set of criteria’ (p. 59). Among all the species, *Semper Augustus* was the rarest and could command a lot of money. Only twelve bulbs were known to exist in 1624 (Pavord, 1999) and it was almost never traded (Dash, 1999).

The technologies to document the tulip may explain why the Dutch created an economy of the tulip but the Turks had not. I argue that the difference was not rooted in economic backwardness, as the tulipomania discourse implies, but a difference in understanding nature. Turkish arts singled out neither one tulip species among all nor the tulip among all flowers, and emphasised sameness more than difference. Turkish ceramic arts showed the tulips together with carnations, hyacinths, and roses (Petsopoulos, 1982); the four kinds of flower existed harmoniously with each other. Moreover, Turkish vessels and tiles favoured the tulip more as a symbol than a pictorial representation. For example, the tulip on a ceramic surface was two-dimensional and painted blue. The emphasis on sameness did not give the tulip a trading value.

In contrast, Dutch arts favoured a realistic representation of individual tulips, thus the emphasis was on the differences between species which gave the tulip a trading value. The ANT concept of ‘framing’ effectively explains how economics gave a value to the tulip (Slater, 2011). The framing process separates and individualises objects into discrete transactable entities, thus allows for trading (Barry and Slater, 2002). After the framing process, the tulip no longer belonged to nature, but was a commodity for the market. The framing process also created individualisation and singularisation, which established the properties of the products, such as petal shape and colour (Callon and Muniesa, 2005).

Symbolic Control of Describing Nature

The technologies of describing nature not only altered the material world through the commodification of nature, but they also exerted symbolic power on social relations. These technologies soothe the male subject’s anxiety about the unknowns, objectify knowledge by disembedding it from the source, and create knowledge that interpolates the readers to assume a unified male position for meaning-making. Consequently, technologies created power relations between the unified male subject and the unknown objects.

The Dutch appetite for exotic objects and for knowing them can be understood as a desire to tame the unknown through scientific and technological means. I have shown how professional men have tamed the tulip—a ‘stranger

from the East' (Dash, 1999)—from an exotic unknown to a knowable object. The tulipomania discourse shows that professional men exercised objective judgement. Dash (1999) and Pavord (1999) have availed to readers the names of key Dutch botanists, horticulturists, growers, painters, illustrators, traders, and government officers. The names imply that these men were knowledgeable public figures. Consequently, contemporary writers have not pried into their private lives because those tidbits were seen to have no bearing on a *scientific* understanding of the tulip. In contrast, the private lives of Turkish sultans, as shown, have been described at length. The leaders from the East are implied to be unprofessional and unscientific because they more spent time and money indulging in luxury than in advancing scientific knowledge.

Printing technologies diffused natural knowledge from a few to many. Mass production of prints decoupled knowledge from the origin of the source. Consequently readers who did not have the opportunity to visit the private garden of Carolus Clusius were still able to learn about the tulip. The disassociation of knowledge from the source made it *appear* objective. Similarly, prints carried the assumed objective knowledge from the seventeenth century to contemporary times. Many books, pamphlets, and catalogues printed in the seventeenth century still survive (for example, I was able to consult Clusius' *Rariourum Plantrum Historia* in a private library in Boston). Surviving information about the tulip has thus created an apparent universal knowledge about the flower and tulipomania, giving an impression that the truth transcends time. It gives an impression that everyone in the Republic shared the same knowledge at the speculation. As I alluded in the previous section, local information may actually be more fragmented than surviving information suggests because it is almost impossible to know how working-class women thought about the flower.

In addition to decoupling the knowledge from the source, printing has also enabled a specific epistemological and ontological arrangement and created a new kind of power relation between a unified male knower position and the unknown object (Hartsock, 1983b). For example, one surviving document is an illustrated book, *The Florilegium*, produced by Emanuel Sweerts in 1612. On one page, Sweerts drew eight flower heads, one of which is attached to the stem, leaves, and the bulb. On the same page, there is also a cross section of a flower that reveals the pistil; next to the cross section view are three seeds.² As the knowers, the readers have to adopt a male gaze in order to understand that nature is something to be examined and closely scrutinised. This understanding of the flower is different from a religious understanding preferred by the Turks in the period between the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, who demanded the viewers read into the symbolic meaning in order to understand the divine.

From a post-colonial feminist perspective, the universal body of knowledge positions the subject as a unified male who exerts symbolic control over the East and women. The tulip serves as the proxy for both the East and women because the Orientalist discourse conflates the Orient and the woman into one concept (Yeğenoğlu, 1998). The Dutch attempt to understand the tulip was similar to the

French attempt to understand Egypt. Said (1979) wrote that under Napoleon, the French ‘[rendered Egypt] completely open, [made] it totally accessible to European scrutiny. From being a land of obscurity and a part of the Orient hitherto known at second hand through the exploits of earlier travellers, scholars, and conquerors Egypt was to become a department of French learning’ (p. 83). By deploying a learned army of chemists, historians, biologists, archaeologists, surgeons, and antiquarians, Napoleon hoped to ‘put Egypt into modern French’ (p. 84). Drawing insights from Said, I argue that the tulip was not merely an import from the East to the West, but a tangible piece of the East that the Dutch could hold, touch, smell, and cultivate. Dissecting the flower through scientific means rendered the flower/the woman/the East open, showing all its parts. In a way, the tulip that reveals its ovary, seed, and petal in the illustrations is like an oriental woman being unveiled. Yeğenoğlu (1998) writes that colonial French men were obsessed with the Algerian women’s veil because they believed that women hide secrets behind the piece of cloth. Like the women, the Orient was believed to be more than it appears, that it bears a veil and is in disguise. The colonialists’ desire to learn about the Orient was reflected by their desire to lift the women’s veil. Similarly, Dutch drawing, documenting, and writing about the tulip was a symbolic act to know the East and the feminine. These technologies aimed to unveil the unknown by exerting power over it.

Technologies continue to exert symbolic control from a unified male subject on an unknown object. The camera has replaced the paint brush to depict the object of desire. An illustrative example is found in the education documentary *The Botany of Desire*, in which viewers are asked to identify with a male position/the camera by adopting an active role in looking at the flower from different angles. The technique of using a high-angle camera position to film still life is pervasively used on the female body—particularly one found in pornography—that renders it passive and powerless. The pornographic camera closely and slowly scrutinises the tulip by slowly panning from the stem to the petals before positioning itself above the flower to show its sexual organs—the stamen and the pistil. The close up of the flower is like those in Dutch illustrations and Sophia’s view of her naked body in *Tulip Fever*. The flower and the woman are scrutinised in the same way across different discourses in different historical periods.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated two themes: ‘gender ideology is used to legitimise an unequal distribution of resources among women and men, and between developed and developing economies’ and ‘the production, distribution, and consumption of financial information—be it analogue or digital—rely on machines’. The tulipomania discourse gives a foundation to explain contemporary financial crises because it obscures the political economic context in which crises took

place. Instead, the discourse explains crises with gender and cultural differences by linking the feminine to the Orient to the tulip. By conflating the feminine, the Orient, and the tulip into one single concept, the unified male point of view tries to control all things irrational by exerting symbolic control over it. One way to exercise the control is by closing off the discourse and foreclosing an alternative reading. Another way to exercise the control is to deploy technologies to manage the unknown through observation, documentation, and classification.

Tulipomania is often said to be the first financial speculation and is cited as a reference for subsequent crises. I have shown in this chapter that not only has tulipomania fascinated academics, but it is also the subject of popular culture. I argue that tulipomania is a myth, an ahistorical tale about history. This myth is timeless because it promotes unchanged social relations, implying that a capitalist political economy cannot be transformed. I critique the timeless myth of tulipomania by adopting a feminist political economic perspective to advance three arguments. First, by drawing on Yeğenoğlu's feminist reading (1998) of Said's *Orientalism* (1979), the tulipomania discourse is argued to rely on two beliefs: the East stays the same while the West progresses; the East can be understood through an understanding of the feminine. Popular culture paints the East as a place ruled by barbaric men who had no financial sense and political ambitions. In contrast, the Dutch Republic was hailed as a capitalist society that progressed through trading. The tulip is said to be a dangerous female stranger from the East who needs to be tamed in order to become a trading object for the Dutch. The second argument advanced in this chapter is that the tulipomania discourse is by nature citationary (Said, 1979); therefore discourse written from a woman's point of view does not necessarily produce a different kind of knowledge to challenge the orientalist beliefs. Drawing on Hartsock's (1983a, 1983b) feminist standpoint theory, I argue that historical fiction written from a middle-class woman's point of view reinforces a capitalist logic by privileging exchange value over use value. The third argument advanced in this chapter is that technologies that documented nature created a material reality of the bulb trade. Nature is first observed, described, and documented before it becomes a commodity. Technologies of documentation also exert symbolic control over the East and the Woman. Illustrations and photographs of the tulip employ a voyeuristic gaze at the flower, thus rendering the tulip as an object to be known.

Notes

- ¹ Tulip mania. *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tulip_mania. Last accessed: 31 August 2017.
- ² See: EmanuelSweerts:Florilegium. *VirtualExhibitions*. University of Glasgow. <http://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/specialcollections/virtualexhibitions/birdsbeesandblooms/blooms/emanuelsweertsflorilegium/> Last accessed: 31 August 2017.

