

Slavery & the Dutch State

Dutch
Colonial
Slavery
and Its
Afterlives

EDITED BY:

Rose Mary Allen
Esther Captain
Matthias van Rossum
Urwin Vyent

TRANSLATION:

Mischa Hoyinck
Robert Chesal

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With the assistance of

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The logo which appears on page 3 was designed by Zenzy Blindeling: “Because the Dutch West India Company and Dutch East India Company are so extensively discussed in *Slavery & the Dutch State*, I decided to base the logo on the shape of a compass. The female figure looks to the west, and the male to the east, toward parts of the world where the Dutch state engaged in slavery. They also look backward and forward in time, to the past and future. The central pattern in the logo is a combination of African wax prints that are popular textile designs mainly in West Africa and its diaspora, and Indonesian batik prints. The wavy pattern is a reference to the (forced) displacement of people across seas and wavy waters. It is based on the Javanese Batik Parant, an S-shaped pattern that stands for several virtues including strength and perseverance in difficult times.”

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Preface

As the editors of *Slavery & the Dutch State*, we are happy to write the preface of this book. Originally published in Dutch, on June 15, 2023, this collection is a response to MP Don Ceder's 2021 parliamentary motion calling for an independent investigation of the Dutch history of slavery. The motion's aim was to gain insight into that history, to determine who was involved in slavery, and to acquire a better understanding of its lasting effects. On July 1, 2023, King Willem-Alexander formally apologized for the Dutch role in the slave trade, saying, "I feel the weight of the words in my heart and my soul." We were pleased to see how much public debate the Dutch version of this book, *Staat & Slavernij*, sparked, and to note how well-received it was, particularly in other countries dealing with their own afterlives of slavery. This is why we decided to have the book translated into English and thus make it available to a wider international audience.

Staat & Slavernij resonated strongly in the islands of the Dutch Caribbean and in the former Dutch colony of Suriname. The context, realization and relevance of the book were discussed at conferences at the University of Curaçao, Willemstad, on November 10, 2023, and at Anton de Kom University, Paramaribo, on March 14, 2024.

When the original version of the book was published, a bilingual website was created to provide additional information surrounding the publication:



Following up *Staat & Slavernij*, we developed a research agenda and published it in three languages. The agenda is available via open access:

Esther Captain, Rose-Mary Allen, Matthias van Rossum, Urwin Vyent, *Het Nederlandse koloniale slavernij-verleden en zijn doorwerkingen. Kennisagenda 2025-2035*. Leiden: KITLV, 2024.

Open access:



Esther Captain, Rose-Mary Allen, Matthias van Rossum, Urwin Vyent, *Historia di Sklabitut Kolonial Hulandes i Su Konsekuensianan: Kompilashon di Konosementu 2025-2035*. Leiden: KITLV, 2024.

Open access:



Esther Captain, Rose-Mary Allen, Matthias van Rossum, Urwin Vyent, *Dutch Colonial Slavery and Its Afterlives: Research Agenda 2025-2035*. Leiden: KITLV, 2024.

Open access:



In parallel, Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean islands followed up with these publications, respectively:

Na So Blaka Buba Tan? An exploratory study among Afro-Surinamese people in Suriname to arrive at a research agenda on the slavery past for the period 2023-2033 (2023);

Sailing in Salt Water: Advancing the Dutch Caribbean Reparations Agenda and Establishing an Inter-Island Knowledge and Expertise Network on the Slavery Past and Its Heritage (2024).

PDF available at:



Rose Mary Allen
Esther Captain
Matthias van Rossum
Urwin Vyent

Dutch Colonial Slavery and Its Afterlives: Introduction

*Rose Mary Allen, Esther Captain,
Matthias van Rossum, Urwin Vyent*

When U.S. President Barack Obama visited the Netherlands in 2014, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte proudly showed him an extraordinary document known as the *Plakkaat van Verlatinghe*, which translates as “placard of desertion.” This Act of Abjuration is the official declaration from 1581 in which several Dutch provinces deposed the Spanish king, Philip II, as their ruler. As such, it can be considered the Dutch declaration of independence. Usually, this document is kept in the National Archives of the Netherlands in The Hague, but for this occasion, it was displayed on a cushion in the Great Hall of the Rijksmuseum for Obama to see. Although it “didn’t look very attractive,” as one Dutch TV commentator noted, its significance to the Netherlands is immeasurable. It marks the beginning of the Dutch Republic and served as an inspiration for the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, which is why Rutte so proudly showed it to the U.S. president during his visit.

Although it is unlikely that the two leaders discussed it, there is an inherent paradox in that historic denunciation of the Spanish monarch which continues to reverberate to this day: the Republic of the United Netherlands sprung from resistance to foreign domination that contemporaries, as well as the Act of Abjuration itself, likened to slavery. Yet, soon after achieving independence, the Dutch Republic went on to become one of the world’s largest colonial powers. In so doing, this country, which regarded itself as a haven of freedom, proceeded to impose slavery and other means of colonial domination upon others all over the world. The Netherlands now acknowledges that “slavery is a very painful, important, and until recently underexposed part of our shared history,” as the Dutch government stated in 2023, during the commencement of the Year of Commemoration of

Slavery. Shortly prior to that event, on December 19, 2022, Prime Minister Rutte publicly apologized on behalf of the Dutch government for its role in practices that sustained slavery worldwide.

This insight and the remorse expressed were the culmination of decades of awareness building initiated and promoted by activist communities of memory, a process which had recently gained significant traction. On July 8, 2021, for example, no less than six motions related to slavery were tabled in the Dutch Parliament. The motions included calls for an official apology for slavery and the declaration of a national day of remembrance and celebration on July 1. One of the motions, submitted by Don Ceder and others, called for an independent investigation into the history of Dutch involvement in slavery and the slave trade. The proposed aim was to gain insight into Dutch slavery and its afterlives (“the what”), to identify who had been involved (“who”), and to learn how slavery had affected people and societies (“how”), in order to “arrive at a process that strengthens societal unity within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.” The motion was adopted and this book, *Slavery & the Dutch State: Dutch Colonial Slavery and Its Afterlives*, is the result of the investigation that it proposed. The contributions included in this volume explore how the Dutch state and its predecessors were involved in colonial slavery and reflect on how slavery continues to affect lives in the present.

This book takes stock of and re-evaluates what we already know about slavery and its afterlives. Why do we know so much more about some aspects of slavery and its legacy than others? This book reviews not only what we know but also what informs that knowledge, thereby revealing which follow-up questions and research topics will help us to gain a better understanding of Dutch colonial slavery. *Slavery & the Dutch State* investigates in which geographical regions the Dutch were involved in slavery and the slave trade, not only in the Atlantic region, the Indonesian archipelago, and the Indian Ocean but also in the Netherlands itself. Slavery was imposed in large parts of the Dutch colonial empire for a very long period. By examining all these geographical areas and periods comprehensively, we lay bare their similarities and differences. This approach also reveals geographical connections and exchanges as well as continuities over time. However, this book stops short of providing a research agenda describing the new and fundamental research needed in order to understand various aspects of Dutch colonial slavery and its afterlives. That will take more time. This book does, however, serve as a baseline for further research. *Slavery & the Dutch State* provides a scientifically sound and accessible interpretation of

existing knowledge and contributes to the reflection necessary for further research and for possible forms of redress and healing. Thus, it can serve as a compass for society, politics, and science.

The following questions are central to *Slavery & the Dutch State*:

- In what socio-economic, political, and societal context did the Dutch become involved in slavery, and what were the contemporary and long-term consequences of this involvement, both in the Netherlands and in the societies that the Dutch colonized?
- How have various stakeholders, such as the enslaved, administrators, entrepreneurs, and others in the colonized societies, responded to and dealt with the issue of slavery up to the present day?
- How can we create space for redress and healing with respect to slavery and its continued impact?

A New Perspective

For decades, Dutch colonial slavery was relegated to the margins of the public domain, despite its deep significance for various descendant communities. Now, however, it is prominently in view. This book builds upon various projects that have brought the issue to the attention of a wider audience as well as the national government, as Nancy Jouwe shows in Chapter 2. Four previously published studies on how the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague were involved in colonial slavery have had a ripple effect, heightening awareness and prompting more municipalities, provinces, museums, castles, and estates to examine their own historical involvement in slavery. Studies on the links of the Dutch central bank (De Nederlandsche Bank; DNB) and ABN AMRO Bank to slavery have prompted families, funds, and academic and financial institutions to commission similar research. And in December 2022, the Dutch royal family announced an independent investigation into the role of the House of Orange-Nassau in colonial and post-colonial history.

These investigations are linked to other issues and developments in Dutch society. They are both a result of, and a contributor to, many ongoing debates. These include the debates about racism and ethnic profiling, Saint Nicholas and his blackfaced helper, *Zwarte Piet*, the Dutch royal Golden Coach adorned with colonial scenes, the rise of *Keti Koti* [broken chains] commemorations marking abolition in Suriname, the Black Lives

Matter movement in the Netherlands, and the childcare benefits scandal (which left more than 25,000 mostly dual-citizen parents in severe financial hardship). It all goes to show that Dutch colonial slavery is not merely a thing of the past. Its legacy is felt today. This is also clear in the Caribbean parts of the Dutch kingdom, where the history of slavery plays a prominent role in the annual Tula commemoration in Curaçao honoring the leader of a historic slave revolt, and in the growing demands for reparations in Curaçao, Aruba, and Saint Martin, as well as in Suriname. This is the outcome of decades of efforts to raise political and societal awareness about slavery and its present-day impact in the current and former parts of the Dutch kingdom. In recent years, individuals with a personal connection to slavery, along with their allies, have worked hard to put these issues on the Dutch state's agenda. On December 19, 2022, the government publicly apologized for how the Dutch state had acted in the past. The apology was posthumously offered to all enslaved individuals worldwide who suffered from the Dutch state's actions, to their daughters and sons, and to all their descendants up to the present day.

The groundwork laid in recent decades remains relevant, and perhaps even more so in this post-apology era, because with the current momentum, we risk overlooking important insights or taking action based on one-sided or superficial ideas. We should, of course, make use of what we already know, but we should not forget that there are great gaps in our knowledge that must be addressed before we can make bold claims.

We hope that *Slavery & the Dutch State* will contribute to creating understanding and awareness, and perhaps even to creating space for redress and healing in every part of the current Kingdom of the Netherlands: Aruba, Curaçao, Saint Martin, Bonaire, Saint Eustatius, Saba, and the Netherlands. Our findings may also be significant for Suriname, Indonesia, and other countries affected by Dutch colonial slavery.

Slavery & the Dutch State focuses on Dutch colonial slavery, that is, the slavery imposed during the Netherlands' colonial past, and its afterlives (such as colonial forced labor). We limited the scope of our inquiry into slavery and the slave trade to the colonial era: none of the book chapters discuss modern slavery. The slavery referred to in this volume can be defined as an extreme form of deprivation of freedom and forced labor in which both the enslaved person and their labor are claimed as property. Slavery has existed in various forms for thousands of years in many places around the world.

In this book, colonial slavery refers to the forms of slavery that arose from European colonial expansion from the fifteenth to the end of the nineteenth century. This led to an unprecedented expansion of the slave trade and slavery, a practice in which Africans, Asians, and others were enslaved and traded as commodities in a legal system organized by European colonial authorities. In the areas colonized by the Dutch state and its predecessors, the local populations were also subjected to large-scale deprivation of freedom, enslavement, and forced labor. The colonial authorities deployed slavery alongside, and in combination with, other forms of forced labor. One important characteristic of colonial slavery was that enslaved people became the property of another human being and could be bought and sold. They could not exercise any rights and had no say over their own bodies and lives. Slavery was a lifelong status that mothers passed on to their children. This type of slavery is known as chattel slavery.

The design, functioning, and consequences of slavery and the slave trade have always been closely linked to the broader structures of colonialism through which the Dutch government exercised power in various parts of the world. Therefore, this book consistently takes that wider context into account when exploring the complicity of the Dutch state and its predecessors in slavery. Likewise, the history of slavery cannot be fully understood in isolation from the afterlives of slavery. The impact of slavery on politics, economies, culture, and society—particularly on enslaved individuals and other stakeholders—began during the enslavement in Africa, was exacerbated during slavery, and continued long after.

Any time this book refers to “the Dutch state,” this also includes its predecessors such as the Dutch Republic and the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. Similarly, any reference to slavery also includes its afterlives.

Slavery & the Dutch State bases itself on two understandings of the term “afterlives”: firstly, as ways in which colonial slavery affected people and societies economically, socially, culturally, and administratively, starting when the slave trade and slavery were legally permitted and continuing into the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Secondly, “afterlives” is understood as present-day approaches to colonial slavery, its long-term consequences, and ongoing effects. In both senses, the legacy of slavery can either be visible on its own or as a part of a larger complex of legacies of colonialism.

The complex interaction between the history of slavery and colonialism and their afterlives is what connects all the contributions in this book. The

deafening silence in the public domain about the ongoing consequences of these histories has finally been broken, thanks to the activism of the descendants of the enslaved and others with ties to the colonial past, as well as the contributions of others, including scholars and intellectuals. Although the public is no longer silent about this topic, it will take time to deepen and broaden our knowledge, awareness, and understanding of slavery and its effects. In many respects, society is just beginning to understand, re-interpret, process, and deal with colonial slavery and its legacy.

Terminology

When studying the colonial past, it is crucial to critically examine perspectives and terminology, such as the distinction between “legality” and “illegality.” Slavery and the slave trade were facilitated by a colonial legal system in which structural inequalities between colonizer and colonized were codified. Colonial law provided the legal basis for a social order in which the enslaved person was denied recognition as a full-fledged human being and the status of person or citizen, but was bought and sold as a chattel. The assumption that slavery—until its legal abolition in 1860 and 1863—was legally permissible and therefore should be judged “in the context of its time” obscures the fact that the colonial legal system was precisely one of the means by which colonial organizations acting on behalf of the Dutch state controlled and disciplined people’s lives. Slavery was the means by which colonial authorities defined who could be reduced to property and who could not. Colonial *corvée* labor and the Cultivation System, two forms of forced labor, enabled the colonizers to determine which colonial subjects could be coerced to work. Even after slavery and the Cultivation System and *corvée* labor were all abolished, colonial law continued to provide the legal basis for racialized inequality between people.

In the violent histories of slavery and colonialism, many of the terms used bore—and when these terms are still used today, bear—a colonial stamp. In other words, the perspective of the colonizer as the wielder of power has often steered how people, regions, languages, and lifestyles were described in both official and informal documents that have survived in colonial archives. This also applies to novels, paintings, music, and other art forms. Such representations do not necessarily reflect reality but might reflect concepts that served the colonial administration. While words like “Negro,” “coolie,” “native,” and “chainganger” may have been common in

a colonial order, from a decolonial perspective, they were and are neither neutral nor unproblematic, but deeply subjective and derogatory.

In this book, efforts have been made to use reparative language, that is, terms that try to steer clear of colonial connotations and that respect the self-naming perspective of individuals, countries, or regions as much as possible. This was done with the full awareness that language is always evolving, that words are closely intertwined with authors' perspectives, and that positions therein are not fixed. To allow for diversity in background and approach, the editors have left the choice of terminology to the authors. Thus, *Slavery & the Dutch State* contains different writing styles and terminological preferences. This diversity allows a wide range of perspectives on the past and its repercussions to shine through, sometimes explicitly and sometimes in a more veiled way. For example, the term "enslaved" is used throughout the book instead of "slave" because it implicitly acknowledges that the coercion to which these individuals were subjected is not a natural position or situation. Although there has been fierce debate about the desire and necessity to use the term "enslaved" rather than "slave," the balance seems to have shifted in favor of the former. However, we do use words like "slavery," "slave trade," "slaveholding," and "slave owners" when referring to the slave economy, and the word "slave" when the author or source in question chose to use that word instead of "enslaved."

In keeping with the current journalistic and academic conventions in the United States, we write "Black" with a capitalized letter "B" when referring to a racial, ethnic, or cultural entity, based on a shared sense of history, identity, and community among people who identify as Black, including those in the African diaspora and inhabitants of Africa. We use "black" with a lowercase "b" to refer to the color, not to people.

Similarly, we have included various preferences for designations, geographical and otherwise, whose roots can be traced back to the colonial past. Examples of this are the use of "the East" and "East Indies" for Indonesia, and "the West" and "West Indies" for Suriname, Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, Saint Eustatius, Saba, and Saint Martin. Some authors deliberately avoid these terms because they are "Netherlands-centric." And while some authors use the term "local population," others prefer "original population" and still others "indigenous people." The use of terms requires careful consideration. While "indigenous" or "native" might be problematic for some because these words imply a colonial perspective, others deliberately use them with the activist aim of promoting certain population groups' visibil-

ity. The decision whether to use a particular term is often context-specific. For example, the use of the term “genocide” outside the context of the victims of the Nazi regime is sensitive. At the same time, it is undeniable that the arrival of European and Dutch colonizers in North and South America and Asia was accompanied by land conquests, the displacement of local inhabitants, and systematic depopulation for the production of colonial goods. Therefore, some authors use the term “genocide” when describing the 1621 massacre led by Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen that practically wiped out the population of the Banda Islands in the Moluccas.

Reading Guide

The scope and complexity of Dutch colonial slavery and its afterlives require an approach that factors in multiperspectivity and multivocality. The design, deployment, and effects of slavery in the societies that the Netherlands colonized and in the home country itself, were not only political, administrative, and economic but also legal, religious, social, cultural, psychological, and even physical. The contributions included in *Slavery & the Dutch State* attempt to identify these different aspects of the topic and connect them where possible. The texts not only bring together historical knowledge about Dutch colonial slavery, but also relevant knowledge from other disciplines and from experts outside academia.

Slavery & the Dutch State contains contributions from authors from various disciplines and expertise based on their knowledge and innovative ideas and insights. Their backgrounds range widely; some are established scholars, others young researchers and non-academic experts. They come from the Netherlands and elsewhere. We made specific efforts to include authors in this book who originate from, reside in, work in, or have previously worked in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, in Suriname, and in Indonesia. We succeeded only partly in this goal.

Slavery & the Dutch State does not take a “traditional” chronological approach to the history of Dutch colonial slavery. The book’s point of departure, dealt with in Section 1, are the issues we are currently facing. In Section 2, the book outlines the changes and repercussions stemming from the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. Section 3 focuses on how the basis for these repercussions was laid by the impact of Dutch colonial slavery on societies in Africa, Asia, and North and South America. Section 4 looks at the role of early colonialism and slavery in this process. Each sec-

tion is preceded by artwork produced by Iris Kensmil, patricia kaersenhout, Theo Frids Hutabarat, and Brian Elstak, respectively. The editors invited these artists to create a work that reflected on the topic of a particular section. Kensmil, Hutabarat, and Elstak created a new piece of art for this; kaersenhout asked us to include one of her pre-existing works. We decided to ask for artistic contributions because we realized that while words are of great importance, they may also fall short—especially when it comes to a sensitive topic like colonial slavery. Where words fail, art may be able to present different perspectives on the history of slavery. Each artwork is accompanied by a brief artist's statement.

The book contains twenty-nine chapters on important subfields that deal with the history of Dutch colonial slavery and its legacy. These academic subfields are not equally well developed. In some, where a lot of research has been done, we need to take a critical look at the state of this knowledge in terms of certainty, perspectives taken, possible blind spots, and underdeveloped subtopics. For subfields where little research has been done, it can be more important to discuss why this area has remained underdeveloped, what assumptions are made about certain topics, what insights can be derived from the research that is available, and what questions, (new) sources, and methods might be important for future research.

The chapters are interspersed with short texts that highlight particular aspects of this book's subject matter. These informative interludes address topics that have not been sufficiently researched and deserve more attention. For example, they address the role of taxes in slavery and colonialism, the debate about the ceremonial use of the Golden Coach by the Dutch royals, and the early presence of enslaved individuals in the Netherlands. Some of these texts also discuss how methods such as oral history and digital technology can provide new insights and broaden perspectives on Dutch colonial history. An interview series with prominent experts explores present-day tensions and views. This firmly positions the book in the current zeitgeist, amidst rapidly shifting social and political stances toward the past, after the Dutch government's apologies but before whatever comes next. After all, in that historic apology speech in late 2022, the Dutch prime minister did acknowledge that the final word had not been said on the subject when he declared, "So, with this apology, we are writing not a full stop, but a comma." In response, the authors of *Slavery & the Dutch State* have taken a pause following that comma to look back, and to look around.





Section I

Current Issues

Iris Kensmil

"I chose to portray a Black Lives Matter demonstration because these demonstrations and the earlier Zwarte Piet protests created space and understanding for my work on Blackness. Before these events occurred, my work was tacitly dismissed. Recently, a more active and institutionalized community has emerged in which I feel at home."

Op de Dam 1 juni 2020
[On Dam Square June 1, 2020](2023)

gouache, watercolor, 35.5 x 29.7 cm
Photography: Gert-Jan van Rooij

Abstract

Until the 1980s, the Dutch had a Netherlands-centric, Atlantic-centric view of slavery. This view was widened by critical anthropologists, foreign researchers, and researchers of color, and by the “homecoming” of slavery, driven by migrants from the former colonies. Dutch government attitudes toward the history of slavery and its contemporary effects vary from national to provincial and local level. The government has an influence on slavery’s visibility and the attention it receives in education, research, heritage institutions, and public commemorations. This chapter argues for an exploration of slavery’s contemporary impact to establish what actions should be taken toward reparatory justice. CARICOM’s demands to that effect have not been adopted by the Dutch government, despite the prime minister’s recent apologies for slavery.

Keywords: science; education; government; slavery; afterlives; Netherlands; Dutch

Dutch Academia and Government on Slavery and Its Afterlives

Alex van Stipriaan

In 1934, Anton de Kom published his now famous book *Wij slaven van Suriname*, published in an English translation as *We Slaves of Surinam* in 1987. Shortly before its original publication, De Kom had been briefly imprisoned in Suriname and then banished to the Netherlands. There, he faced continued obstruction from the authorities and ended up so traumatized that he had to be admitted to a psychiatric ward for a time. Approximately three generations later, in 2020, De Kom was inducted into the national historical Canon of the Netherlands. The canon is set by a government-appointed committee and guides schools in which aspects of history they are to teach. Hence, with the inclusion of De Kom, it seems the government is developing a new, more inclusive attitude toward the history of slavery.

However, the path leading up to this point was twisted and treacherous. The changes in the Dutch government's attitude toward slavery and its legacies could also be characterized as unreliable, oblivious, disengaged, and strongly influenced by political winds. A prime example of this was the strained process that led to the Dutch government's apologies for slavery in December 2022 and the paternalistic stance that the government adopted when the decision to apologize was finally made.

We should consider the fact that governments also take their cues from what academia has to say about slavery and its history. However, academia is not a monolith. Scholarly insights are continually evolving and subject to debate. Therefore, describing how academia and the government in the Netherlands have approached the history of slavery in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is no straightforward task, but one which requires nuance, definition, and delineation.

Historiography

Dutch involvement in slavery unfolded in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Netherlands. It was an integrated system, but varied significantly from place to place. Historians writing about slavery have not paid equal attention to the different regions where it took place, while the focus of their research has also shifted substantially over time.

Until the 1970s, Dutch historiography always linked slavery to the West India Company (WIC) and sometimes to the Dutch East India Company (VOC). The slave trade was a core activity of the WIC for a long time. Colonies under WIC control were entirely based on slave labor and enslaved people comprised the majority of the population. As a result, slavery and the slave trade have gone down in the history books as primarily associated with the Atlantic region. In the historiography of the VOC, slavery remained more of a footnote in an otherwise glorified narrative of “how a small country can achieve great things.” Moreover, it was long believed that slavery in the colonized Asian societies mostly involved the local population. Slave labor was only discussed in the context of the Indonesian Banda Islands.

Within the transatlantic triangle (the trade between Europe, America, and Africa), Dutch historians have devoted most attention to slavery in Suriname. Some examined the brief Dutch presence in northeastern Brazil, but hardly any studied slavery in the Dutch Caribbean, New Netherland (the Dutch colony in North America, centered in New York), and Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo (present-day Guyana). West Africa was only mentioned as the point from which the enslaved were shipped off. In this narrative, the Netherlands figures merely as the administrative headquarters of the WIC and VOC, and as a staple market for tropical products.

Until the 1980s, historiography mainly analyzed the slave trade as an economic and therefore geopolitical activity and viewed it from an exclusively Netherlands-centric perspective. Slavery and the colonies only came up where relevant to the history of the (colonial) elite. Enslaved people were reduced to an amorphous, faceless, economic and political category. The abolition of slavery, the only other related topic that Dutch historians sporadically published about from the 1950s on, was also generally discussed from an exclusively Netherlands-centric perspective. Two very early exceptions to this were the work of Surinamese authors: Anton de Kom’s *We Slaves of Surinam* from the 1930s and a dissertation written by Rudolf

van Lier in 1949. But a more typical example is the work of historian Johan Hartog, who lived in the Caribbean for nearly forty years and wrote hefty histories of the region. Of the 640 pages he wrote on the history of Curaçao until 1863, less than 8 percent were devoted to slavery and the slave trade. As was often the case in older historiography, even that 8 percent was mainly written from an economic perspective, focusing on how slavery and the slave trade were organized. The bigger picture was absent altogether; not a single historian wrote about slavery and the slave trade in West Africa, South Africa, or the Indian Ocean.

Academic Emancipation

In the 1970s and 1980s, historians began to shake off the predominantly Eurocentric and nationalist narrative of “great white men and their wars.” Various universities started offering the option of studying non-Western history in addition to existing courses on colonial history. A steadily growing stream of publications critically examined the WIC and VOC and their role in slavery. Slavery was no longer studied solely in terms of its impact on the Netherlands itself but also on its colonial territories, which now also included South Africa and Indonesia. However, these histories were still primarily socioeconomic narratives that shed little light on the lived experiences of the enslaved.

Gradually, non-Dutch researchers gained influence, and scholars from outside the field of history, such as anthropologists, began to study the history of slavery. To a great extent, it was non-Dutch scholars who initiated the research into slavery in Indonesia and the Cape Colony in South Africa. The study of slave resistance and marronage in Suriname also received a significant boost from international scholarship and anthropology. One of the changes this brought about was that historians now traveled to the *locus delicti*, the countries where the crimes against humanity had occurred. Another change was that some scholars of color entered the field of historical research and began focusing on the topic of slavery, a trend resulting partly from immigration to the Netherlands.

All of these shifts culminated in the recognition of slave resistance and revolt as an important new theme that highlights the agency of the enslaved. This did not replace the more traditional approach to research through the study of the VOC and WIC, but it did make room for new perspectives. The new researchers abandoned the colonial perspective and

stepped into the historical arena of the (former) colonies to study slavery from there. Archives were increasingly critically examined and read against the grain. Moreover, from the 1990s onwards, the search for new, non-colonial sources took off as researchers drew knowledge from oral history, musical culture, and material culture, a process catalyzed by anthropologists and historians of color.

At the same time, historiography continued to emancipate itself by putting culture—particularly folk culture and popular culture—front and center. Concepts such as sense-making, representation, creolization, and so on became key methodological concepts in historical research and also made their way into the historiography of slavery. Purely descriptive history, which certainly has its biases, has given way to a more analytical and critical approach. This process is still ongoing and has gained momentum from the movement to decolonize academia. This movement entails not only a critical stance toward the colonial dimensions, perspectives, and assumptions still present in the current narrative about slavery, but also questions the research methods used and the researchers themselves. The new history of slavery is not just about what happened up until the abolition in 1863/1873, but also about the processes, legacies, and repercussions resulting from that history that are still felt today, both in the colonized societies and in the Netherlands. Researchers and organizations of color play a key role in these changes.

Contemporary research on Dutch slavery, which allows for cultural and decolonial research methods, is still primarily focused on Suriname. The historiography of Dutch slavery in Asia still mainly deals with social and economic history. Although enslaved individuals are part of the picture, their culture is not (yet) the focal point.

A recent development is this history's "homecoming," i.e., a reckoning with slavery in the Netherlands itself. This started in the early twenty-first century with the creation of the National Slavery Monument and with various exhibitions and audiovisual productions in which historians played a part. The homecoming gained momentum with studies that resulted in the 2013–2014 Mapping Slavery project, which identifies the links between specific locations in the Netherlands and slavery. Since 2018, several city and provincial government bodies have decided to investigate their ties to slavery and colonialism. Within just a few years, these efforts have yielded several new, accessibly written books about the complicity of the Netherlands as a whole in slavery, raising questions about its continued impact on

the present. In short, both the research and the researchers are becoming more diverse.

It is therefore important to begin a large-scale study of the culture of slavery in the Indian Ocean, including South Africa, and its impact both there and in the Netherlands. Moreover, it is time to conduct a large-scale study into the impact of the Dutch slave trade in West Africa. In addition, Dutch funds should be used to support research and researchers in the former Caribbean and South American colonies, especially in the geographical areas about whose history little is known.

Dutch Government

Several government ministries have been involved, in one way or another, in efforts to explore the history of Dutch complicity in slavery. Their pace, choice of words, and engagement have varied. At the national level, this includes the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW), a heterogeneous entity that deals with education, research, heritage, and monuments related to this topic; the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW), which is responsible for the Dutch implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent;¹ the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK), which initiated research into this topic and is often reminded of the history of slavery in the Caribbean Islands when dealing with ties within the Dutch kingdom; and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BuZa), which established an Anton de Kom Chair with the University of Suriname and the Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam and was involved in the Durban Declaration in 2001, where Roger van Boxtel, then Minister for Major Cities and Integration Policy, expressed “deep remorse about the enslavement and slave trade” on behalf of the Netherlands.

Various ministries were also involved in the Elmina Heritage Project in and around the city of Elmina in present-day Ghana, the former WIC headquarters of the Dutch slave trade. The Dutch government wanted to show its responsibility for the shared past by helping to restore the slave fort and parts of the surrounding city. It was at the start of this project in 2002 that then Crown Prince Willem-Alexander, speaking on behalf of the Dutch government, said: “We now look back on that dark era of human relations with remorse and remember the victims of that inhuman trade.”



On December 19, 2022, at the National Archives, Prime Minister Mark Rutte offered an official apology for slavery.

Until recently, government at the provincial level paid little attention to the history of slavery. This is not entirely surprising given Dutch provincial administration's relatively limited scope, which does not include education and only rarely touches upon cultural heritage. However, an increasing number of provinces are currently reflecting on how to deal with the slavery issue, and South Holland has already started research into its role in the history of slavery and colonialism. The province of North Holland had previously commissioned two exhibitions and a research publication and formally apologized for slavery in 2022. The States Provincial of Holland (now divided into North and South Holland) was found to have had direct ties to, and investments in, slavery.

Developments are more rapid at the municipal level, where we see a flurry of activity among the 344 cities and towns in the Netherlands. The four largest cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague) have instituted active policies regarding the history of slavery and have made formal apologies. Many other municipalities, including Middelburg, Arnhem, Haarlem, Gouda, Groningen, Tilburg, Nijmegen, Dordrecht, Delft, and Hoorn have taken steps including conducting their own research, fa-

cilitating annual Ketu Ketu celebrations and similar events, and initiating discussions on removing controversial monuments and changing street names.

Altogether, government at all levels determines to a great extent whether there is space for recognizing, commemorating, and processing the history of slavery and dealing with its present-day repercussions. For example, any cultural or cultural heritage institution that has links to the history of slavery or wants to highlight these links, is to some degree dependent on the various levels of government for their funding. The collections of national museums are the direct property of the state. Also noteworthy is the societal initiative to establish a national Trans-Atlantic Slavery Museum. This plan has been adopted by the municipality of Amsterdam and embraced by the national government. The opening of the National Slavery Museum in the former port of Amsterdam is expected around 2030.

Meanwhile, the national government has come to realize that there is also a history of Dutch slavery in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago and has commissioned research on this.

Afterlives

Very little fundamental research has been done on the impact or afterlives of slavery in contemporary Dutch society. Nevertheless, there are a few elements that consistently come up in the debate on (Atlantic) slavery and that can be used to create an operational definition of “afterlives” or “repercussions”:

1. During and after slavery and colonialism, a cultural archive took shape among—or to put it differently, a mental legacy was produced by—white Dutch people and descendants of the enslaved, that created a culture in which these groups internalized feelings of assumed superiority and assumed inferiority, respectively.²
2. As a consequence, there is anti-Black racism in all layers of Dutch society, as part of, but not synonymous with institutional racism.
3. The descendants of enslaved individuals may experience intergenerational trauma that impedes (self-)development. Following the American example, this is also referred to as Post-Traumatic Slavery Syndrome, a psychological/psychiatric disorder acquired during slavery and thereafter.

What constitutes “afterlives” can also be derived from the ten-point plan formulated by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in 2013.

They demanded that the former slave nations in Europe offer: 1) full formal apologies; 2) repatriation to Africa if desired; 3) an Indigenous Peoples Development Program; 4) assistance with the establishment of cultural institutions to educate the inhabitants of the Caribbean on crimes against humanity committed by Europeans; 5) assistance in alleviating the African-descended population’s public health crisis; 6) assistance with the eradication of illiteracy; 7) assistance with an African knowledge program; 8) assistance with psychological rehabilitation; 9) technology transfer and sharing of scientific knowledge; 10) debt cancelation.³

In January 2016, the CARICOM chairman approached then Prime Minister Rutte with the ten-point plan and asked what the Netherlands intended to do about it. Almost a year later, the prime minister responded with a list of activities, including (support for) the annual *Keti Koti* commemoration, the Black Achievement Month, a website, and an essay competition for children. In his letter, he acknowledged the concerns and deep feelings of the Caribbean countries, including the territories of the Dutch kingdom, about the impact of slavery. The prime minister expressed a need for his country to do everything it could to ensure that the horrors of slavery are not forgotten or repeated. Therefore, he stressed, the Netherlands would need to focus on building a shared future and seek ways to cooperate and continue a dialogue with the Caribbean countries through CARICOM.

However hopeful the initiatives and intentions expressed by the prime minister might seem, they fall far short of the profound and structural changes demanded by CARICOM. If the prime minister’s initiatives do not explicitly acknowledge the links between slavery in the past and contemporary anti-Black racism, they will prove to have been hollow words. At the same time, however, it is noteworthy that the Netherlands is one of the few European countries to have adopted the United Nations’ Decade for People of African Descent.

Not everyone likes the term “repercussions.” Some descendants prefer to speak of the “legacies” of slavery. They emphasize their ancestors’ resilience, their ability to survive and struggle for freedom, as well as the cultural and socioeconomic contributions that they have made to the Netherlands.⁴ Among the legacies of slavery are the Afro-cultures that evolved, comprising languages, spirituality, music, a system of norms and values, and more, which are increasingly expressed and visible, in the Netherlands and else-

where. Sometimes, these cultures rise to prominence spontaneously, as in the case of the strong influence of Sranan Tongo and Papiamentu—the former creole languages from Suriname and some of the Caribbean Islands—on contemporary Dutch slang.

“Black achievers” are a source of pride in Dutch society, but the prevailing feeling is that Afro-Dutch people are still underrepresented in many sectors. The only places where this group is substantially and visibly represented are in the national and international arenas of sports and entertainment. This is a typical imbalance in many former slave-holding nations, incidentally. All of this leads me to recommend that encouragement and support be given to large-scale, fundamental research into slavery’s legacies and repercussions that are still affecting people today.

Slavery and the Dutch Government

It is by now undeniable that the Dutch authorities at all levels have been complicit in, and have benefited and profited from, slavery and the slave trade. However, this has only recently dawned on the authorities, and their subsequent actions vary widely.

The Dutch government determines the content of the schools’ curricula by specifying the learning outcomes everyone must achieve by the end of primary and secondary school. It does so by setting core objectives in primary education and final attainment targets in secondary education (see Chapter 3 by Tom van der Geugten). Since 2006, these have also been reflected in the Dutch Canon, another national government initiative. This provides a guideline for teachers, especially in history and citizenship education. Logically, textbook publishers follow suit and also focus on the canon, with varying results. The government does not monitor how teachers use these textbooks in the classroom. In terms of academic research, it is not just the universities that determine the topics and direction of research. These are also influenced by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), both of which are largely government-funded. They develop many of the major research programs in the Netherlands. So far, they have not initiated a comprehensive, multidisciplinary research program on Dutch slavery and its afterlives. However, they have subsidized various substudies or subprograms, such as *Church and Slavery in the Dutch Empire: History, Theology and Heritage*, a recent NWO project.



On Keti Koti day in 2021, people demanded apologies from King Willem-Alexander.

Following a campaign by the (Afro-)Dutch community, the Dutch Parliament instructed the government in 1998/1999 to study the options for a national slavery monument and to possibly erect such a monument. This resolution in parliament came during the second cabinet led by Prime Minister Wim Kok (1998–2002), a coalition of Social Democrats and two Liberal parties, when there was clearly political support for this initiative. With the support of several ministers, the Prince Claus Fund (an NGO supporting arts and culture in countries where cultural expression is under pressure), set about publishing two volumes of essays on the topic of how best to commemorate slavery, written by various national and international white and Black stakeholders. Significantly, this collection of essays was presented to the government in the then freshly renovated Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament.⁵

The government had made it clear that it only wanted to discuss the erection of a monument with a single representative stakeholder party. Therefore, almost all advocates had united in one platform. Apparently, the government was wary of its own policy and tried to establish a buffer between this platform and itself by creating a group of “ambassadors” that was made up in large part of Dutch celebrities known to hold moderate political views. Although many stakeholders, and the platform in particu-

lar, grew suspicious of the government's motives following the creation of this unexpected additional buffer, the process in which they engaged did lead to the dedication of the Dutch National Slavery Monument in Amsterdam's Oosterpark in 2002. The following year saw the opening of the monument's dynamic dimension, the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and Its Legacy (NiNsee).

Every year on July 1, the National Slavery Monument hosts the commemoration of *Keti Koti*, the day in 1863 on which the Netherlands abolished slavery in the Atlantic region. Government representatives attend the ceremony annually and express their grief and regret about slavery. It took until December 19, 2022, however—rather than July 1, *Keti Koti* day—for the prime minister to offer apologies for slavery on behalf of the state and to promise that the state's engagement on this issue would not end with these apologies. The term “afterlives” was repeatedly mentioned in connection with the apologies, which hopefully will lead to the establishment of a concrete program to address these afterlives. Even after Minister Van Boxtel expressed “deep remorse” at the UN Racism Conference in Durban in 2001, it took all of twenty-one years for the government to make real apologies. It is a slow process.

In 2012, ten years after NiNsee was established, the national government, due to budget cuts, pulled the financial plug on this institute. Many stakeholders saw this as another stab in the back and new evidence of the state's unreliability. Thanks to continued support from the municipal government of Amsterdam, NiNsee was able to survive. However, they did have to rehouse the institute, shut down the successful slavery exhibition that schools frequented, and lay off part of their staff.

Now, another decade later, the national government is co-funding NiNsee projects, employees are invited to advise the government, the national government co-finances Black Achievement Month, initially a NiNsee initiative, and the city of Amsterdam and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science are helping to pay for the establishment of a National Slavery Museum in Amsterdam. Again, this initiative originated in the stakeholder community, was adopted by the Amsterdam city council, and then found its way into the national coalition agreement. It seems that the government has now earmarked a substantial amount of money for the establishment of this museum. And apparently, there is also going to be a fund, initially of 200 million euros, intended in part for education. That is valuable, but reparation it is not.

Additionally, the Dutch government, through Prime Minister Rutte, has admitted to understanding that Black people may feel discriminated against by Zwarte Piet, the character in blackface who plays a prominent role in Saint Nicholas Day celebrations. This was a significant shift from the prime minister's earlier stance that Zwarte Piet is "simply black," a shift that had a lot to do with the wave of Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020. However, this change in attitude has not yet led to a ban on public parades featuring people in blackface dressed up as Zwarte Piet, or to an urgent appeal to municipal mayors not to receive Zwarte Piet figures in public gatherings.

In short, the attitude of "the" Dutch government toward "slavery"—to the extent that the government speaks with a single voice and that slavery can be seen as a single history—is mixed and diffuse, although there seems to be an increasing awareness of slavery's serious and continuing impact. Many people perceived the prime minister's carefully chosen words in the nation's apologies on December 19, 2022, and the stronger statement in which the Dutch king asked for "forgiveness" during the commemoration on July 1, 2023, as valuable and historic. Now, it will be essential to further promote and solidify this process of awareness raising, processing, restoration, and healing.

Clearly, such processes, resulting from the Dutch state's 250 years of active complicity in what is now recognized as a crime against humanity, followed by its 150-year-long active silence, cannot be settled in a short time. This may take decades, maybe even several generations. Every government initiative must therefore be geared toward, and guaranteed for, the long term. This will also foster trust. Short-term projects and one-time financial contributions do not resolve the structural inequalities that descendants of enslaved individuals experience in social, economic, cultural, medical, and other societal domains. Redressing these inequalities is a continuous process that must be continuously sustained.

Notes

- 1 This Decade, proclaimed by the United Nations, calls on member states to take action against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and other types of intolerance (based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin) in order to protect and promote the fundamental rights and freedoms of people of African descent. The Decade focuses on three themes: recognition, justice, and development.
- 2 See Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Combined Academic Publishers, 2016) and Alex van Stipriaan, "Caribisch erfgoed in de Nederlandse Black Atlantic," *OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis* 35 (2016): 11–38.
- 3 CARICOM, "CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice – CARICOM," CARICOM, July 10, 2020: caricom.org/caricom-ten-point-plan-for-reparatory-justice.
- 4 Nationaal TransAtlantisch Slavernijmuseum, *Met de kracht van de voorouders* (Amsterdam: Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021).
- 5 Gert Oostindie, ed., *Het verleden onder ogen: Herdenking van de slavernij* (Amsterdam: Arena, 1999); Gert Oostindie, *Facing up to the Past: Perspectives on the Commemoration of Slavery from Africa, the Americas and Europe* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001).

Abstract

In 2021 and 2022, the mayors of the four biggest municipalities in the Netherlands—Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague—offered apologies for their cities' historical complicity in slavery. This chapter describes the developments that gave rise to these gestures: studies commissioned by the municipal authorities, preceded by the concerted efforts of local activists, politicians, and organizations. The pressure they applied set in motion a mostly reactive administrative process that resulted in apologies and the erection of monuments. This process has yet to run its course.

Keywords: apologies; recognition; local politics; local initiators; afterlives

A Crime Against Humanity: Local Dutch Politicians and Mayors

Nancy Jouwe

On November 20, 2022, The Hague Mayor Jan van Zanen formally apologized for his city's involvement in slavery. Following the example set by Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Utrecht, this now meant that the four biggest cities in the Netherlands had offered apologies for their part in slavery, after historical research had established their role in the practice.

On February 23 of that same year, Utrecht Mayor Sharon Dijksma had offered an apology on behalf of the College of Mayor and Aldermen for Utrecht city council's role in the colonial slave trade, the oppression of enslaved people, and the scars that this left behind. She began her speech in the Utrecht Janskerk—a site chosen because the square outside is a focal point for direct links to colonial slavery—as follows:

Today we reflect on our city's ties to the history of slavery and look to the future to learn lessons from it. I find this immensely important because what we are talking about is nothing less than a crime against humanity. For more than 250 years, a great injustice took place in which the city of Utrecht also played a role. I will illustrate this with the story of a thirteen-year-old boy named "Koenjapen." On July 3, 1774, VOC employee and Utrecht resident Jan Lambertus van Spall bought this boy. From the bill of sale, we know that Koenjapen came from a community of farm laborers and palm wine sellers. He likely would have succeeded his father within a few years, started a family, and taken on an important role within his community. But with a single stroke of a pen, all this was struck through, and his future was determined by

someone else. The employee who recorded the sale wrote down the boy's new name: "Utrecht." And he was not the only one, as we know from the Dutch national archives. Dozens of enslaved people were renamed "Utrecht."¹

Mayor Femke Halsema of Amsterdam had preceded Dijkema on July 1, 2021, the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the Dutch Caribbean (July 1, 1863), while Rotterdam Mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb had offered apologies on December 10, 2021, international human rights day. Van Zanen and Dijkema both chose dates with no previous symbolic significance. Dijkema's choice of February 23, 2022 created a more generic and open moment, one that was appropriately distanced from the date on which the Utrecht research was published (June 30, 2021), yet not too far removed from it. This meant that the moment could be dedicated entirely to the apologies without having to compete with any other symbolic meaning, which made it all the more special. Likewise, the research on Amsterdam's role in colonial slavery, published on September 30, 2020, had no connection with any pre-existing dates of historical significance. It received heavy media coverage, even making it onto the main evening news on Dutch national TV.

Sometimes choosing a symbolic date is preferred, as we can see from the many negative reactions sparked by the date chosen for Prime Minister Rutte's national apologies (December 19, 2022 instead of July 1, 2023). However, a symbolic date can also overshadow the apology, as we saw when North Holland became the first Dutch provincial government to apologize for slavery. The province did this on July 1, 2021, the very same day that the city of Amsterdam made its own apologies, but the province's gesture went practically unnoticed.

As we see from Dijkema's apologies for Utrecht's role in slavery, it is not only the date that is important, but the process leading up to the apologies, too. As the mayor's apology speech was being prepared, drafted, and refined, she engaged in a series of conversations with stakeholder residents in the city. The event was staged with the help of local migrant communities who were part of the production team, which helped it to gain wide support.

How did it come about that the four major cities in the Netherlands all offered formal apologies for their role in slavery in the span of less than eighteen months? How have Dutch cities and other authorities recently approached the history of slavery and its afterlives? And what role did several key individuals play in this process?

From Remorse to Apologies

On September 2, 2001, Roger van Boxtel, then Dutch minister of Major Cities and Integration Policy, expressed “deep remorse” for the Dutch involvement in slavery. He used these words during an anti-racism conference in Durban, South Africa. Although it was not an apology for his country’s role in slavery, it was a first step. The conference itself was plagued by major conflicts between several nations and was subsequently overshadowed by the September 11 attacks and largely forgotten. Nonetheless, the Durban conference was a historically significant moment. Despite resistance from EU members, its final declaration called slavery “a crime against humanity.” This was partly due to the lobbying efforts of Helen Felter, a feminist activist who was at the conference as a representative of the European Women’s Lobby (the largest coalition of women’s associations in the EU at that time).

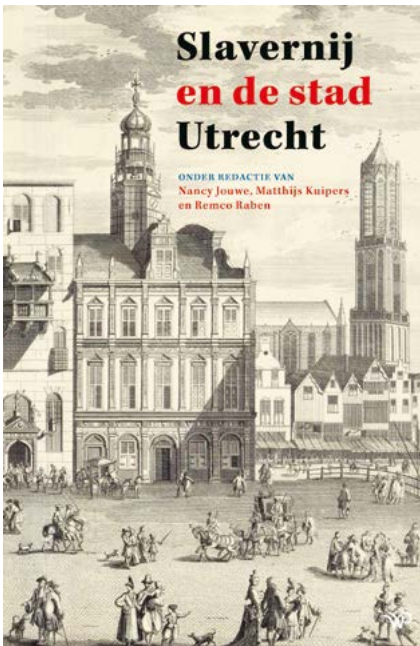
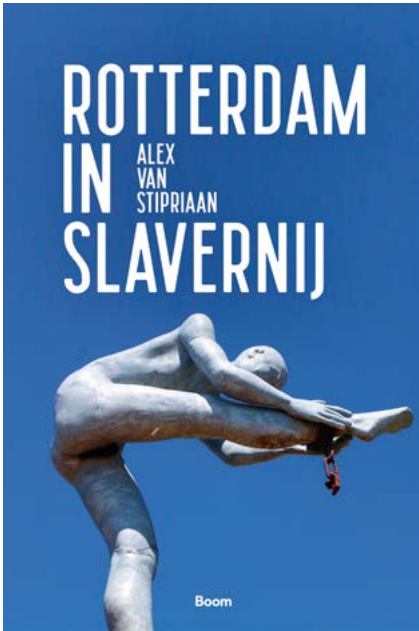
Branding slavery a crime was in line with a broader zeitgeist that the Netherlands could not circumvent. In 2000, then Prime Minister Wim Kok had, albeit reluctantly, apologized to the Jewish, Indonesian, Sinti, and Roma communities for the Dutch government’s role during and after World War II. That same year, Elazar Barkan published his influential *Guilt of Nations* (2000), in which he called for a dialogue between parties (mostly nations) pitted in significant historical conflicts, and appealed to Western nations to address historical injustices. Nine years later, Michael Rothberg published the much-cited work *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009). Rothberg claimed that different groups fighting against historical injustice (whether from WWII or colonialism) actually mutually influence each other. In the process, he also showed that the idea of a limited space in which these groups should jockey for attention is counterproductive. This key insight could be a valuable lesson for the Netherlands today given the difficulties experienced in the slavery debate.² Instead of using competition and strict delineation between different historical injustices as guiding principles, we should be focusing

more on the fluid processes of mutual influence within a slowly evolving culture of remembrance surrounding slavery.

Two recent examples of such competition for public recognition were the debates on whether the National Slavery Museum and the Utrecht Slavery Monument should focus primarily on transatlantic slavery instead of Dutch colonial slavery. In these debates, it was one or the other: a focus on the history of transatlantic slavery and a focus on Dutch slavery in the Indian Ocean were treated as mutually exclusive. There was no room to view Dutch slavery as a global phenomenon, in which the VOC used slavery in the Moluccan Banda Islands as early as 1621. Recognizing this does not take away from the fact that it has been predominantly Afro-Caribbean and especially Afro-Surinamese advocates who worked to establish a Dutch culture of remembrance around slavery.

Since the late 1990s, various groups, such as the women's collective Sophiedela, activist Barryl Biekman, and writer Frank Martinus Arion, have been advocating for more recognition of the history of Dutch slavery and for the establishment of a national slavery monument. When this monument was dedicated in Amsterdam on July 1, 2002, which followed the founding of the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and Its Legacy (NiNsee) on June 24 of the same year, it seemed the history of Dutch slavery was finally being taken more seriously. It was therefore particularly painful when national funding for NiNsee was cut, all the more so because that happened in 2013, on the 150th anniversary of the formal abolition of slavery in the Dutch Caribbean (in parts of the Dutch East Indies, slavery had ended three years earlier, in 1860).

During the Ketu Koti commemoration on July 1, 2013, in Amsterdam, which was attended by King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima, then Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher expressed regret and remorse on behalf of the cabinet for the Dutch role in slavery. Asscher's words were partly a response to pressure from organizations such as Collectief Broki. However, he still did not use the word "apology." A year earlier, Prime Minister Rutte had stated that slavery was "dehumanizing," but took no further action as a result of this acknowledgment.



The four major Dutch cities—Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague—each commissioned research into their own role in slavery.

Rotterdam Mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb, whose own perspective had changed after reading about research into his city's history, called for apologies during his Ketu Koti speech at the Rotterdam Slavery Monument in 2018. "Asscher expressed deep remorse," Aboutaleb said. "That was a fine gesture that matched the spirit of the times. The next step is to offer apologies. I call on the cabinet to do so."³ Mayor Jan Hamming of Zaanstad supported this appeal in a speech of his own.⁴ Shortly after the 2020 Black Lives Matter demonstrations, Dutch parliamentary party leaders Rob Jetten (D66) and Jesse Klaver (GroenLinks), both of whom are of Indonesian descent, submitted a motion for national apologies. Their motion received sixty-nine votes, seven votes short of a majority. Apparently, it was still too early.

In 2022, the mayors of Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Middelburg jointly called for national apologies. Meanwhile, something seemed to be budging at the national level. A research group had been established, roundtable discussions with stakeholder groups organized, and it appeared that additional financial resources might be made available. Could it be happening at last?

Local Pressure

The mayors of the four major Dutch cities performed their roles with gusto, publicly making apologies in substantial and meaningful speeches. By doing so, they proved to be a crucial cog in a machine set in motion by other players. Often, it was local activists and politicians who played a key role in putting the issue of slavery on the local agenda. This created greater societal pressure and, in some cases, a response from the local authorities which ultimately led to apologies.

Below, I will quote a few local initiators, such as the Rotterdam trailblazer Peggy Wijntuin. She was a journalist at regional broadcasting company RTV Rijnmond, and then served on the Rotterdam City Council for the PvdA, the Dutch Labor Party, from 2006 to 2018. During her term on the council, she noted that there was a need for a place of remembrance:

Commemoration usually took place in churches, such as the Moravian church where many Surinamese people gathered, and the Catholic church. People said it would be nice if there was a dedicated place to gather. In 2008, I was given the honorary title of Patroness of Ketu Koti. I wanted to infuse that title with the knowledge I had about the need for a memorial place. I used my

position as Patroness to start lobbying for a monument, which was unveiled in 2013. And even though I was on the council at the time, I did this as a citizen, not as a council member. I kept politics out of it; I didn't want it to be a polarized forum, which the council was at that time. I didn't want there to be divisive discussions about something that was meant to bring people together. I worked on it for four years, and during that time, I was asked questions like "Who says we need such a monument in Rotterdam?" I faced racist abuse due to my black skin. And even a few death threats. It triggered people.⁵

The racism she encountered and her fellow city folk's ignorance made Wijntuin realize that Rotterdam was unaware of its own history of slavery. She felt that the city needed to investigate its past.

On November 14, 2017, the Wijntuin motion was adopted. It called for research into the history of colonialism and slavery in Rotterdam and for sharing this knowledge in schools and with the "man in the street." For Wijntuin, it was about showing "why Rotterdam is the city it is." Unlike Amsterdam, there were very few studies on Rotterdam's ties to slavery. The city had some catching up to do, and the research that took place from 2018 to 2020 resulted in three substantial publications.

The importance of the momentum in Rotterdam was not lost on Amsterdam politicians. But in their city, something else happened first. In December 2017, the council unanimously adopted a proposal to establish a national slavery museum. The initiator was Simion Blom, former city councilor in Amsterdam for GroenLinks, a progressive political party, and like Wijntuin, of Afro-Surinamese descent. Research into local ties to slavery and apologies to the descendants of the enslaved were also on the agenda, but the politicians in power moved slowly. It took until June 2019 for a proposal to be submitted in Amsterdam, eighteen months after Rotterdam had adopted Wijntuin's motion.

Mahmut Sungur lives in Utrecht and is a member of the city council for DENK, a party with a minority-rights platform. In July 2019, he and Rachel Streefland, councilwoman for the Christian Union party, made a motion for the city to investigate its involvement in slavery. In an interview, he explains why.

I more or less grew up in Lombok [an Utrecht neighborhood where the streets are named after Indonesian islands and key figures in Dutch colonial history] because my grandparents lived there. By then, the neighborhood housed a large number of immigrants [mainly with a Turkish background]. I grew up with those street names. When I was young, they didn't mean much to me, but when I entered politics, I became much more aware of them.... I saw that when parties negotiated, the interests of migrants were the first to be sacrificed. But I also saw that a lot was happening and that changes were made much faster than fifty years ago. The Zwarte Piet debate, for example. I submitted a motion against people wearing blackface. Why would you continue to spread racism over time? If something is racist, then it should not be tolerated. Period. The motion was adopted. That's where my fight for the Black community began.⁶

The quote shows that Sungur, of Turkish descent, found it important to embrace the connections between different migrant communities and the issues that they faced. He had often heard that the history of slavery was just a thing from the distant past. The Black community in Amsterdam was an inspiration for him: "They're a strong presence. They are well organized and often the drivers in this area." When he heard that the city of Amsterdam was going to commission research into its connections to slavery, he wanted Utrecht to do the same, because little was known about it and "Utrecht had a small Black community." The motion was based on the findings of the research and work carried out in an earlier project called "Traces of Slavery in Utrecht." Sungur was surprised by its findings and called them "pretty intense."

Because the province of Utrecht was also mentioned in the research report about the city, the provincial government organized a few sessions with the researchers and other scholars. The idea was to bring the provincial administrators and politicians up to speed about the topic and help them take a position. The fact that the province was involved in slavery must have come as a total surprise to them.

In smaller cities like Vlissingen and Delft, (former) city councilors also lobbied to get similar research projects off the ground, such as Angelique Duijndam and Cheraldine Osepa. This did not come easy; these cities turned out to be tough nuts to crack. Osepa did find allies in Delft, but

was unable to rally a majority until the fall of 2022, when suddenly a motion was passed requesting a study. No doubt the momentum created by national developments and the upcoming anniversary of abolition in 2023 helped cities like Delft over the hump. Other cities like Zaanstad, Hoorn, Leiden, Zwolle, Tilburg, and Eindhoven followed suit and adopted motions or started projects that showed their interest in the history of slavery and its impact.

Whose History?

Conversations with the three (former) local politicians, Wijntuin, Blom, and Sungur, reveal a clear common denominator: their own family history or experiences with migration and racial discrimination strongly influenced their ideas about what needed to be put on the political agenda. They linked the history of slavery to contemporary societal issues, including racism, partly because the conclusions of the studies about their cities' past pointed out these links.

Blom and Sungur were surprised by the amount of information that the studies unearthed. Based on these initial findings, several cities want to fund follow-up research projects, sometimes in response to motions and proposals from city councilors. These kinds of processes may appear to be very well organized and sequential, with all kinds of feedback loops, but the reality often turns out to be more disjointed. This disjointedness is also apparent in the initiatives taken by various institutions in these cities. In Rotterdam, the World Museum put the spotlight on slavery in 2023; the University of Utrecht released an advisory report in February 2022 led by James Kennedy. And the Utrecht Central Museum is in the midst of tracing the provenance of its permanent collection to check for connections to Utrecht administrators with ties to colonialism.

All these different initiatives—investigating the past for evidence of complicity in slavery; erecting a monument as a tangible reference point in a remembrance culture; making official apologies to take responsibility for involvement in slavery—are crucial steps in a lengthy process that instigates and solidifies greater awareness and understanding of the history of the Dutch nation. This history was long ignored because of the complicity that it implied, but also out of a lack of understanding, knowledge, and empathy regarding the ways that this history resonates in contemporary cultural and social practices. Commemorating and investigating the history

of Dutch slavery also sparks resistance and even polarization, according to Prime Minister Rutte. But as political philosopher Chantal Mouffe advised us: there is nothing to fear in polarization. Holding space for political opponents is what allows society to grow and develop.

Studies into the local and national history of slavery make it harder to argue its insignificance with the usual arguments, such as “it was all so long ago; the state didn’t profit that much from slavery; you have to see it in its historical context; why focus on slavery, and not on present-day injustices?” and so on. Such studies counteract trivializing claims about the historical and contemporary impact of slavery. Mayors who make apologies show moral and political leadership and thereby lend weight to the subject. Monuments are focal points on which stakeholders can center activities and project emotions to generate a tangible remembrance of their history.

The combination of research, monuments, and apologies creates leverage—especially if these processes go hand in hand. Rotterdam and Amsterdam are good examples. Utrecht unveiled its slavery monument on June 30, 2023. Unfortunately, the monument does not reflect the insights from the study on the city’s ties to slavery. Its focus is on transatlantic slavery while the research laid bare the global reach of Utrecht’s colonial past and involvement in slavery, as the mayor also said in her speech. The Hague decided on a location for its slavery monument in 2023 and in the spring of 2024 selected a South African artist to create the monument commemorating transatlantic slavery.

In Conclusion

Dutch local politicians and mayors have shown political courage in taking responsibility for historical injustices. They could only do so thanks to the work of activists and researchers who lobbied and provided the necessary knowledge for this. It is safe to say that pressure from local politicians and officials has had an impact on national politics. And the change in attitude at the national level has in turn led more local politicians to follow suit.

It is crucial that more historical and interdisciplinary research be conducted into the history of slavery. We should look into the role of big institutions like the church and academia, for example, but also study the impact of slavery on every part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The local politicians I interviewed about their active and catalytic role were not only motivated by personal experience, such as discrimination and racism,

but also by silences in the mainstream. From an intellectual perspective, it is interesting that Amsterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague all characterized colonial slavery as a global rather than a transatlantic phenomenon. The mayors of these cities explicitly apologized not only for transatlantic slavery and the slave trade, but also for slavery's global colonial aspect, linking it to the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the West India Company (WIC). This is an important development, which is far from complete. The South African researchers, artists, and activists I interviewed in November 2022 deplored the fact that the Netherlands has not fully included the history of the VOC and the Cape Colony in its reckoning with Dutch involvement in slavery. There is more work to be done in that area as well.

Notes

- 1 Sharon Dijksma, speech Janskerk, Utrecht, February 23, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nj1ifo405ls>.
- 2 Nancy Jouwe, "Van wie is de Nederlandse slavernijgeschiedenis?" in *De slavernij in Oost en West: Het Amsterdam onderzoek*, ed. Pepijn Brandon et al. (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2020), 373–81.
- 3 "Aboutaleb: kabinet moet excuses aanbieden voor slavernijverleden" NOS, June 30, 2018, nos.nl/artikel/2239224aboutaleb-kabinetmoetexcusesaanbiedenvoor-slavernijverleden.
- 4 "Burgemeester Zaanstad roept kabinet op tot 'excuses' voor slavernijverleden," *NH Nieuws*, July 1, 2018: <https://www.nhnieuws.nl/nieuws/227253/burgemeester-zaanstad-roept-kabinet-op-tot-excuses-voor-slavernijverleden>.
- 5 Peggy Wijntuin, interview with the author, November 4, 2022.
- 6 Mahmut Sungur, interview with the author, November 17, 2022.

Research Method: Digital Humanities

The study of slavery and its afterlives is benefiting greatly from the use of digital resources and methods. It is now much easier for researchers to effectively trace the people affected by slavery, their locations, interrelationships, organizational structures, and movements. The first big steps in this field were taken fifteen to twenty years ago when comprehensive digitization projects started to make existing registers of the people who were enslaved and traded accessible for desktop research. Some of the best-known projects are: **mappingslavery.nl**, which maps the traces of slavery in Dutch cities, **slavevoyages.org** (big databases created from ships' logs), and **ru.nl/slavenregisters/**, which digitized the slave registers of Suriname and Curaçao.

These and similar projects have proven their usefulness to a broad audience, but they also present us with an important consideration. In a digital environment, the complexity of colonial slavery is reduced to a seemingly orderly whole. A key challenge for research and education in this field lies in addressing the complexity underlying that (apparent) order. A shared digital platform can help researchers and students to uncover particular viewpoints and practices. This is important because these have long determined the balance of power in society and have facilitated the perpetuation of inequality to this day. Another essential component of inclusive research is the opportunity to add previously unheard voices to the digital archives. One way that this can be achieved is by recording oral histories, and digitizing diaries and memoirs from private archives.

Innovative research tools in the field of genealogy are not only essential for researchers but can also contribute to the well-being and healing of the descendants of the enslaved by finally providing insight into their origins and the fate of their ancestors. Research into the repercussions of slavery is about insight into, and theory building about, the lived experience of the

enslaved in terms of work, family relations, health, religion, and violence. Digital technology can be of great significance in this respect. Researchers who have access to large amounts of textual source material can use new digital methods to significantly accelerate, improve, and enrich the data processing and analysis process. Text and Data Mining (TDM) platforms offer user-friendly options for analyzing corpora or large datasets. One example of this is **ianalyzer.hum.uu.nl**, which now includes the Delpher newspaper database. Topic modeling software can be used to filter large amounts of text for hidden thematic structures and connections. Modern software can also perform analyses aimed at chronologies, or time stamps, and other intersections and associations. Such research methods promote a better understanding of complex situations and relationships.

Digital Humanities aimed at a broad audience is not necessarily very complicated to use. Anyone can create an interesting visualization simply by entering data correctly in an Excel sheet, or by using online tools for generating maps or timelines.

There are also platforms that provide a free web environment with a database in which researchers can share their collections and projects at no cost. One example is Digital Grainger, a British Caribbean project, in which anyone can add information and references (annotations) to a colonial text using the **Hypothes.is** tool.

Methods and tools like these can make a big difference in how the past is interpreted and discussed in education, research, and the cultural sector. However, there are some hurdles to take, particularly in research into the Dutch colonial past and the history of slavery. Many of the most relevant corpora are not digitally available and therefore cannot be added to TDM platforms. Additionally, systems and software products for large-scale analyses are often still unable to read lesser-known languages and manuscripts, including Papiamentu, Sranan Tongo, and Southeast Asian languages. These barriers need to be taken away if we are to conduct large-scale inclusive historical research into the afterlives of slavery.

Abstract

In the textbooks that guide Dutch history education, the history of slavery has never been concealed. Yet the topic is usually limited in scope and treated from an economic perspective. In recent decades, changes in society, education policy, pedagogy, and historiography have led to more, and better, discussions of slavery in textbooks, with greater attention to social and cultural aspects of the topic from multiple perspectives. In this development, some textbooks led the way, while others were more likely to follow or lag behind. As all textbooks are periodically reviewed, their quality can be expected to continuously improve. However, differences in quality will persist.

Keywords: history; textbooks; slavery; Dutch; education; didactic

The Topic of Slavery in Dutch Education

Tom van der Geugten

How much are Dutch people taught at school about their country's involvement in slavery? In a 2021 survey of 30,000 Dutch citizens, 4 percent reported knowing “a lot” about the history of slavery and 23 percent said they knew “quite a bit.” Forty-two percent said they were taught “a little,” 28 percent “almost nothing,” and 3 percent “nothing.” The majority (68 percent) believed that it would be beneficial to have more lessons on this topic in schools.¹

It is no easy task to ascertain exactly what students learn in school. There are guidelines for what should be taught and textbooks that most teachers use, but their actual implementation in the classroom is unclear. Having said that, textbooks do guide the curriculum and are therefore the primary source of information about the content of history education. Another important source is teacher training manuals, which show us what prospective teachers are expected to know about certain topics.

Core Objectives

The history of slavery has been a mandatory topic in Dutch education for thirty years. The Basic Education Act (1992) authorized the government to specify which topics all students must be taught in primary education and the lower grades of secondary education by issuing guidelines (core objectives).² In the upper grades, where about half of the students take history, nationwide examination requirements apply. Because freedom of education is enshrined in the Dutch constitution, these guidelines may only specify what students must learn, not how these topics are taught. The first set of core objectives from 1993 mentioned “the colonial and postcolonial

relationship between the Netherlands and the East and West Indies.”³ New core objectives were introduced in 2006, which were still in force as this chapter was written in 2023.⁴ They refer to the following topics: (1) the VOC (Dutch East India Company), slavery, and the decolonization of Indonesia, Suriname, and the Netherlands Antilles (and since 2020: both the VOC and the WIC, or Dutch West India Company, slavery, Anton de Kom, and the decolonization of Indonesia, Suriname, and the Caribbean) and (2) slave labor on plantations and the rise of abolitionism.⁵

The way these topics are referenced (as “windows of the Dutch canon” and “characteristic aspects of historical periods”) gives teachers considerable discretion in how to treat them in primary and lower secondary education. Moreover, while the second topic is explicitly mentioned in the HAVO and VWO exam programs, it is not part of the VMBO exam program.⁶

In 2021, a committee proposed future core objectives with a limited scope, replacing the mention of plantation slavery and abolitionism with the less Eurocentric term “the emergence of intercontinental human trafficking.”⁷

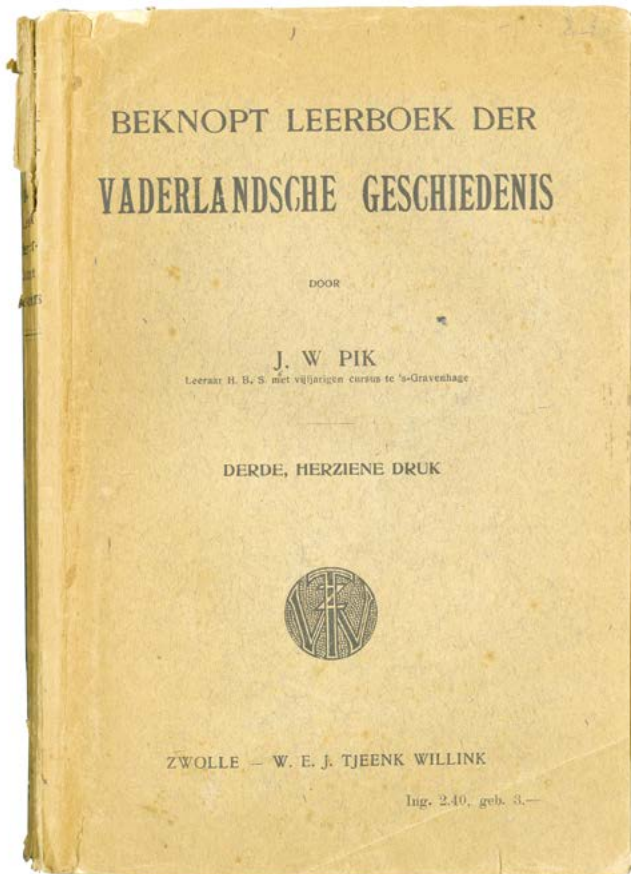
Textbooks

In the Netherlands, roughly six commercial educational publishers produce history textbook series (both in print and digital form). These publishers and their authors are free to determine the content of their books, but it is obviously in their interest to comply with government guidelines and core objectives. Since textbooks are typically revised every five years, freedom fighter Anton de Kom, for instance, has been included in all textbooks since the last revision in 2020.⁸ However, the manner in which the mandatory topics are treated remains diverse and ranges from meticulous to superficial. Therefore, it can make a big difference which textbooks the history teachers at a school decide to use, and much also depends on the extent to which individual teachers can or want to focus on a particular topic.

From 1878 to around 1960, National History was a separate subject in schools, with textbooks that gave limited space to slavery in the context of Dutch overseas expansion. For example, the 1919 textbook *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis* [National History Textbook] stated:

In order to supply the plantations with sufficient numbers of negro slaves—because even Johan Maurits deemed slavery neces-

sary—he conquered St. George del Mina on the Guinea coast. ... Only the trade in slaves, war supplies, and Brazilian wood was reserved for the Company. ... Around 1750, there were (in Suriname) about 400 plantations with 80,000 slaves. The cultivation of coffee, cocoa, and cotton was successful, and the trade in coffee and other colonial products became very important; sometimes goods worth millions were traded on the Amsterdam market. The biggest trouble in Suriname came from the Bush Negroes or Maroons, as the runaway slaves were known; they banded together, raided the plantations, and often took bloody revenge. Slave uprisings also occurred.⁹



Between 1878 and 1960, all Dutch schools taught National History as a separate subject.

From 1960 onwards, Dutch history was integrated into general history in schools, which in the textbooks was described from a European perspective. In *Wereld in wording* [World in Development] (1959), for example, the author placed “our” slave trade in an international context and also addressed its inhumane aspects:

This slave trade was particularly profitable, not only for us but also for other European peoples. Between 1500 and 1800, more negroes were transported across the oceans from one continent to another than Europeans moved during the Migration Period.¹⁰ The slaves were often bought from African negro kings and chiefs. These continuously waged wars among themselves to obtain prisoners for sale. The prisoners were herded to the coast, branded like cattle, chained in pairs, and attached in groups of fifty to a heavy chain. They were packed so tightly in the ship’s hold that soon an appalling filth and stench arose in the slave quarters. Often, many died of suffocation en route. But... the profits were so enormous that this partial ‘spoilage’ of ‘goods’ could easily be borne.¹¹

Generally, the broader orientation on the topic did not lead to more specific attention to the Dutch involvement in slavery. For instance, plantation slavery in North America was often discussed more extensively than plantation slavery in the Dutch colonies. This changed only when the core objectives were introduced in 1993.

Departing from the Eurocentric textbooks, *Sprekend verleden* [The Past Speaks] (1987) started to present topics related to what was then called non-Western areas from those areas’ own perspective. In the chapter on “Black Africa,” for example, there is a section that discusses how the “Europeans come and mainly trade in slaves.” This includes an excerpt from the autobiography of the “former slave” Equiano, in a section that asks, “How did Africans become slaves?” The chapter on Indonesia briefly addresses slavery: “During colonial times, the Dutch also began to use slaves as domestic servants and craftsmen.” The chapter on Suriname contains an extensive and richly illustrated description of slavery. A boxed text discusses Anton de Kom, who viewed Surinamese history “through the eyes of the colonized.” The chapter on the Netherlands Antilles includes a boxed text on slave resistance.¹² Some aspects of this innovative approach have been adopted in other textbooks.

Knowledge and Skills

When the Basic Education Act was implemented in 1993, students were also expected to develop certain academic skills. For example, they were required to “consider the bias of sources and their own bias.” As a result, history became a subject that students had to interactively engage with rather than one for which they had to memorize facts. The role of textbooks dwindled and made way for assignments, often in separate workbooks. The government-led requirement to address “the relationship between the Netherlands and the East and West Indies” meant most textbooks included sections on the Dutch transatlantic slave trade and plantation slavery. However, due to other requirements, such as the obligation to discuss “European overseas expansion” and “the emergence of a world economy,” the history of slavery was still mainly discussed from a Eurocentric mercantile perspective.

Based on the new 2006 guidelines, history teachers were expected to cover more mandatory topics. In practice, they had a hard time properly implementing these changes, because history education was in dire straits. Many schools decided to reduce the teaching time for history, and many primary and VMBO schools resorted to combining or integrating history with other subjects, a decision based in part on pedagogical arguments. Publishers responded by creating textbooks on umbrella subjects like *Wereldoriëntatie* [World Orientation] and *Mens en Maatschappij* [Social and Human Development].

The amount of space devoted to the history of slavery varies greatly between textbooks written for students who take history as a separate subject and the books written for those who are taught history in combination with other subjects. For example, the primary school textbook *Wijzer! Geschiedenis* (2014), in its eighth-grade edition, devotes seven pages to this topic, featuring short texts, images, and assignments:

You will learn about a newly discovered continent: America. Many Europeans went to live there to trade products with Europe. Slaves did the work on the plantations and in the mines. ... Due to ideas about equality and democracy that arose during the time of wigs and revolutions,¹³ the slave trade and slavery in the colonies were abolished.¹⁴

One of the texts discusses Tula's revolt in Curaçao and is accompanied by a photo of the Tula Monument and an assignment about Tula's statement: "They have treated us very badly. We don't want to harm anyone, but we want freedom. Isn't everyone on earth a descendant of Adam and Eve? Even an animal receives better treatment." The authors of this textbook chose to give relatively ample space to the history of slavery and focused on the perspective of the enslaved.

Because there is more available teaching time in the upper grades of VWO, the history textbooks for these grades also devote more attention to the topic and give more space to multiperspectivity and multivocality. For example, *Feniks* (2012) quotes Equiano and gives some context about him and then asks students whether Equiano's life story is a representative and reliable source on the slave trade and slavery.

While most textbooks primarily address the economic and political aspects of slavery, the slave trade, and abolition, and discuss disagreements among white men (and the exceptional Black defender of slavery, minister Jacobus Capitein), others, such as *Memo* (2011), take a different approach based on new insights in historiography:

In the course of the 19th century, more and more countries abolished the slave trade and slavery. For a long time, these events were seen as the successful outcome of abolitionists' efforts. This traditional, Eurocentric view is now criticized. ...

For historians who study slavery from the perspective of the slaves, abolitionism is a tainted term. It implies action by whites only. They prefer to see the abolition of slavery as part of a longer emancipation struggle, which is primarily the result of the slaves' own efforts. A second point of contention among historians is the extent to which historiography is influenced by the late 18th century image that abolitionists created of the slave trade and slavery. ... Some historians believe this image is not incorrect, but incomplete. ... Other historians see these views as an example of colonial historiography.¹⁵

Forum (2019) extensively covers the Dutch role in slavery in the wider context of the global history of slavery starting in antiquity. Students are presented with disagreements among historians. For example, one assignment

asks how it is possible that historians sometimes draw different conclusions from their research: “Do they use different data, or is there another reason?”

Like most textbook authors, the authors of *Forum* do not use the term “enslaved” and explain why:

These days, some people avoid the word “slave” and replace it with “enslaved.” This is intended to express that slaves were unwillingly turned into slaves by others and were not naturally or actually slaves. The authors of this book choose to use the word “slave.” If you avoid using a historical term because you disagree with it, you are essentially trying to change the past retroactively. Historically, it was common for people to be pushed into a role against their will, such as medieval serfs, servants of wealthy landowners, or conscripted soldiers in wars. It would be cumbersome to call all of these “enserfed,” “those made to serve their masters,” and “people made to serve in the army against their will.” The authors of this book find it self-evident that slavery is morally wrong and that slaves did not choose to be slaves. Assignment: “Which term do you prefer and why?”¹⁶

When textbooks like *Sprekend verleden* started paying some attention to the history of Dutch slavery in Asia and this was picked up and discussed by the media in 2015, more textbooks followed suit.¹⁷ For instance, *Geschiedeniswerkplaats* [History Workshop] (2018) states:

But during the VOC period, the Dutch also transported many hundreds of thousands of slaves in Asia. This slave trade began already when the [Dutch] Republic officially still condemned slavery. Just like in Africa, an extensive indigenous slave trade had existed in Asia for centuries. For example, the VOC brought slaves from India to plantations on the Banda Islands after the population was massacred there in 1621. Slaves were also used for the construction of trading posts (*factorijen*) and other heavy labor. Even larger numbers of slaves were personal property of VOC personnel, working in their households and as personal servants. Men bought slave women for sex and companionship. Children from relationships between Europeans and Asians were called

Indos [Eurasians] in Indonesia. ... But the VOC also got many of its slaves from slave markets on the coasts of East Africa, India, Bangladesh, and from Malaysia and the Philippines.¹⁸

A small number of textbooks explicitly state that slavery involved racism. For example, *Geschiedeniswerkplaats* (2 VWO, 2019) includes an assignment asking students to indicate whether a Dutch plantation owner's statement, made in 1804 in Suriname, is an example of white Dutch people's superiority complex and racism.¹⁹

Some textbooks draw connections between the history of slavery and present-day issues. For example, *Geschiedeniswerkplaats* (2 VMBO, 2019) states:

Since the abolition of slavery, Ketikoti (broken chains) has been celebrated on July 1 in Suriname and the Antillean islands. But in the Netherlands, there was little interest in the history of slavery. It took until 2002 for a national slavery monument to be erected in Amsterdam. Books, films, and websites about the history of slavery were published, and in 2007 slavery became a mandatory subject in education. In 2013, the Dutch government expressed deep remorse for its role in slavery.²⁰

In *Tijd voor geschiedenis* [Time for History] (2 VWO, 2019), there is an assignment about how the Netherlands deals with its own historical role in slavery: "The history of slavery is a dark chapter in the history of the Netherlands. Think carefully and give your own opinion on how we can/should best deal with this past."²¹

Memo (2011) offers multiple perspectives by posing various questions about a photo of the Dutch National Slavery Monument:

- Why was the establishment of this monument important for the Surinamese and Antillean communities in the Netherlands?
- Think of two things a slavery commemoration might mean to a Surinamese Dutch person.
- What significance could the Dutch government lend to a slavery commemoration by attending it?²²

Teacher Training

When the core objectives of history education were formulated in 2006, the framework of ten time periods and their characteristic aspects devised by the De Rooy Commission became a predominant influence in all teacher training programs. The influence of the “Canon of the Netherlands” was less extensive.²³ The Canon was used more in primary education teacher training (PABO) than in secondary education teacher training at university level.

Before 2006, there had only been a handful of Dutch compendiums for prospective secondary education teachers, which had devoted little space to the history of slavery. This changed when *Oriëntatie op geschiedenis* [Focus on History] was published in 2009 (fourth edition 2020). This compendium treats the history of Europe’s involvement in slavery in a broad context with room for different perspectives. Despite the attention to slave revolts and quotes from enslaved people, however, the description remained Eurocentric. For example:

After purchase, the infamous Middle Passage followed, and then the sale in slave markets. The Middle Passage was notorious for its harsh conditions and high mortality rates. It should be noted that in this period, the number of casualties among ship crews was also high. While on average one in five slaves did not survive the journey, the crews on the slave ships lost lives at the same rate. ... In any case, slave ship captains did their best to keep as many slaves alive as possible. After all, each death meant an economic loss.²⁴

For PABO, there are two compendiums, both of which appeared in a fifth edition in 2021. *Geschiedenis geven* [Teaching History] devotes extensive space to the history of slavery, providing a multifaceted picture of the tasks of plantation slaves, cruel treatment, revolts, and offering side texts about figures like the black slave owner Elisabeth Samson. On the subject of the Dutch participation in the transatlantic slave trade, it states:

The mortality rate aboard the slave ships was high—ranging from 40 to 70 percent—because the ships were overcrowded and the conditions on board were appalling. In total, more than half a mil-

lion Africans were transported as slaves to the Dutch colonies in the West Indies. ...

Human trafficking had existed since antiquity, but slaves were only sold on a large scale to Europeans from the 16th century onward. This transatlantic, large-scale slave trade has determined our image of slavery.²⁵

In *Geschiedenis & samenleving* [History and Society], the history of slavery is discussed more briefly and matter-of-factly, for example: “During the Middle Passage, the slaves are locked in the cargo hold of a ship. Once arrived in the Americas (in Suriname or Curaçao, for example), they are sold at a slave market to plantation owners.” Contemporary debates about slavery are addressed with two recent quotes about the history of slavery:

- “Facts matter. Those who speak loudest about the history of slavery tend to exaggerate. ... We should not view history through today’s lens but through the eyes of contemporaries.” (Piet Emmer, 2018)
- “If a great injustice has been committed with regard to human rights, then every country should apologize for it.” (Aspha Bijnaar, 2019)²⁶

Conclusion

Textbooks determine to a great extent how history is taught in Dutch schools. Those books have never ignored the topic of slavery completely. However, they have mostly dealt with it in brief and from an economic perspective. This begs the question how Dutch people perceive the history of slavery and the Dutch role in it, whether they base their ideas on what they have learned in school, and what possible consequences this has. More research is needed to gain insight into the effects of past and current history education on people’s perception and understanding of the history of slavery.

Prompted by societal, educational, didactic, and historiographical developments in recent decades, textbooks have improved and expanded their sections on this topic. They devote more space to its social and cultural aspects, and to multiperspectivity and multivocality. In this develop-

ment, some textbooks have taken a leading role, while others have followed suit or lagged behind. Textbooks in the first two categories show us how education is changing. However, this does not mean that there is no room for improvement. For example, the history of slavery in Asia and the Dutch role in it deserve far more space.

Most likely, all textbooks will keep being improved, but differences in quality will persist. The biggest structural problem in history education in Dutch schools is the lack of adequate teaching time, which means that many students learn (too) little about important topics. The fact that the history of slavery is discussed so briefly in some textbooks should be seen as a reflection of this time crunch problem.

Notes

- 1 Survey conducted by *EenVandaag* (Dutch public broadcasting news platform) "Onderzoek koloniale geschiedenis: slav-ernijverleden," September 2021.
- 2 Basic Education Act (*Wet Basisvorming*) 1992. *Basisvorming* is the educational program for Dutch primary education and the first two to three years of Dutch secondary education, intended to provide students at all secondary school levels with the same foundational knowledge for the remainder of their education.
- 3 Besluit vaststelling kerndoelen (*Staatscourant*, October 10, 1997), <https://zoek.officiëlebekendmakingen.nl/stb1997484.html>.
- 4 Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), 'Kerndoelenboekje basisonderwijs,' *Rapport | Rijksoverheid.nl*, March 30, 2022: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2006/04/28/kerndoelenboekje>; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), 'Kerndoelen onderbouw voortgezet onderwijs,' *Besluit | Rijksoverheid.nl*, November 25, 2022, www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/besluiten/2010/09/17/kerndoelen-onderbouwvoortgezetonderwijs.
- 5 P. de Rooy, *Verleden, heden en toekomst: Advies van de Commissie historische en maatschappelijke vorming* (Enschede: Stichting leerplanontwikkeling (SLO), 2001).
- 6 VMBO, HAVO, and VWO are three types of stratified secondary education in the Netherlands. VMBO is pre-vocational education, HAVO is "higher" general secondary education, and VWO is pre-university secondary education.
- 7 "Eindadvies referentiekaders Ruimte en Tijd," SLO, www.slo.nl/publicaties/@20449/eindadviesreferentiekadersruimtetijd.
- 8 De Kom (1898–1945) was a Surinamese freedom fighter and author of the seminal book *We Slaves of Suriname*. The Dutch government regarded him as an enemy of the state, incarcerated him, and banished him to the Netherlands. He was not rehabilitated until 2023.
- 9 J.W. P. *Leerboek der Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis*, 2nd ed. (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1919), 148, 258.
- 10 The Migration Period, a.k.a. Barbarian invasions, was a period in European history (2nd to 5th centuries AD) marked by large-scale migrations that saw the fall of the Western Roman Empire and subsequent settlement of its former territories by various tribes.
- 11 Novem, *Wereld in wording 2* (The Hague: Van Goor Zonen, 1959), 116, 117.
- 12 Leo Dalhuisen, ed., *Sprekend verleden. Deel 3 boek ii* (Haarlem: Nijgh & Van Ditmar Educatief, 1987), 203, 247, 259, 264.

- 13 The “time of wigs and revolutions” refers to the eighteenth century, and is one of the ten historical periods cyclically taught in the Dutch education system.
- 14 Milicent Kruis, ed., *Wijzer! Geschiedenis. Groep 8* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 2014), 14, 40–43.
- 15 Elco Beukers and Stephan Klein, *Memo: Bovenbouw vwo* (Den Bosch: Malmberg, 2011), 198, 199.
- 16 Arie Wilschut et al., *Forum: Bovenbouw havo* (Groningen: Noordhoff, 2019), 83.
- 17 Reggie Baay, *Daar werd wat gruwelijks ver-richt: Slavernij in Nederlands-Indië* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum 2015) and Matthias van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek: Slavernij onder de VOC* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2015).
- 18 Tom van der Geugten, ed., *Geschiedeniswerk-plaats. Bovenbouw vwo* (Groningen: Noordhoff, 2018), 107.
- 19 Tom van der Geugten, ed., *Geschiedeniswerk-plaats. Werkboek 2 vwo* (Groningen: Noordhoff, 2019), 112.
- 20 Tom van der Geugten, ed., *Geschiedeniswerk-plaats. 2 vmbo* (Groningen: Noordhoff, 2019), 15.
- 21 Miesje Engels and Mark de Rouw, *Tijd voor geschiedenis, 2 vwo* (Vodix, 2019), 5, 2.
- 22 Elco Beukers and Stephan Klein, *Memo. Bovenbouw vwo* (Den Bosch: Malmberg, 2011), 201.
- 23 The Canon of the Netherlands was included in the school curriculum in 2009. It is an overview of “what everyone ought to know, at the very least, about the history and culture of the Netherlands” and provides a framework for what historical topics need to be taught in Dutch schools. It consists of 50 sections, called “windows.”
- 24 Marcel van Riessen, Frits Rovers and Arie Wilschut, eds., *Oriëntatie op geschiedenis: Basisboek voor de vakdocent* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2011), 297.
- 25 Ron de Bruin and Meereke Bosua, *Geschiedenis geven: Praktische vakdidactiek en vakinhoud voor het basisonderwijs* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2021), 186, 220.
- 26 Kees van der Kooij and Marjan de Groot-Reuvekamp, *Geschiedenis & samenleving: Kennisbasis inhoud en didactiek* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2021), 158, 168.

Abstract

In this chapter, four specialists reflect on how the history of slavery is taught in schools in Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire, in Suriname, and in Indonesia. Schools in the Caribbean islands devote some attention to slavery and its afterlives, but they lack modern, localized teaching materials that students can relate to. In Suriname, historiography was Surinamized after independence, but since 1989, hardly any new insights have been added to the textbooks. The history of slavery is not treated extensively. In Indonesia, the topic of slavery is linked to Dutch colonial rule and the Japanese occupation.

Keywords: education; history education; Caribbean islands; Suriname; Indonesia

Colonialism and Slavery in Education: The Dutch Caribbean and Indonesia

*Luc Alofs, Edu Dumasy, Kenny Meyers,
and Elviera Sandie*

The history curriculum in Dutch schools has never completely ignored the legacy of slavery, but has often treated the topic in a limited and Eurocentric manner. Nowadays, there is more emphasis on slavery's social and cultural aspects, as well as on multiperspectivity and a pluriformity of voices. How is the history of slavery taught in Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, Suriname, and Indonesia?

History Education in Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire

Kenny Meyers and Luc Alofs¹

As independent countries, Aruba and Curaçao chart their own course when it comes to education, and this goes for history education as well. As a “special municipality of the Netherlands,” Bonaire follows Dutch regulations and standards in its education policy. Despite this difference, there are many similarities in the way that history is taught in primary and general secondary education on the islands.

Primary Education

Since 2017, students in Aruba must be able to “interpret events in local, regional, and global history to show an understanding of world developments.” In Cycle 1 (grades 3–5), students must be able to recount and depict children's stories from the Indigenous population and settlers from the Caribbean region, and from North and South America. In Cycle 2 (grades 6–8), students learn to recognize colonialism and slavery in the Caribbean, and North and South America. They learn to identify the causes and consequences of colonization and the slave trade in these regions.

Aruban primary schools are required to address the topic of slavery, but they lack an appropriate textbook tailored to the local context. Some schools use the now outdated book *Chispa di tempo* [Spark of Time] (1998), which mainly highlights Aruba's Indigenous history. Some teachers develop their own material on slavery, but in practice, many primary school children are not taught about slavery at all. A similar situation is found in Curaçao; the standards exist, but the textbooks do not. Various elementary schools mainly address the topic of slavery in August, the month in 1795 when thousands of enslaved Curaçaoans revolted under the leadership of Tula. Afterward, the topic usually recedes into the background.

From the moment Bonaire became a special municipality of the Netherlands in 2010, primary schools had to meet Dutch educational standards. In practice, not much changed. Textbooks that predate 2010 are still used in class, and these hardly discuss slavery or its impact. Here too, schools and individual teachers try to solve the problem by inviting experts and developing their own slavery-related instructional materials and projects. Consequently, students in Bonaire also lack knowledge about the history of slavery and its impact on their own island.

General Secondary Education

In 2000, Aruba drafted guidelines for subjects in general secondary education (AVO). In *Ciclo Basico* (grades 1 and 2), history education was integrated with geography, social studies, and economics into a single subject called *Algemene Sociale Wetenschappen* (Social Studies, known by its Dutch acronym ASW). The ASW textbook *Calbas* [Calabash] (2005), written and published in Aruba, featured eight lessons on slavery and emancipation, but after a few years, it was replaced by Dutch textbooks. This ended the integration of subjects and contextualization of the curriculum that ASW had aimed for. In Curaçao's lower secondary education, slavery and its impact are also addressed, but only to a limited extent, in an integrated school subject called People and Society.

Aruba's document specifying the learning outcomes for history in *Ciclo Avansa* (MAVO grades 3 and 4, HAVO 3–5, and VWO 3–6) includes slavery, but again, implementation is lacking.² *Bahul* [Trunk] (2011), a locally developed textbook, devotes only one paragraph to slavery and emancipation. Moreover, this textbook is used in MAVO schools because Colegio Arubano

(until 2012 the only fulltime school that taught HAVO- and VWO-level students in Aruba) decided to fall back on Dutch textbooks for the upper grades of secondary education. The European curriculum includes topics like industrialization, modern imperialism, and World War I, but often disregards the topic of slavery, particularly from a local, context-oriented perspective.

A similar situation exists in Curaçao's upper secondary education. In 2019, the revised history learning outcomes for HAVO and VWO now included slavery, the emancipation process after 1863, the opening of the oil refinery in 1915, and the period following the May 30, 1969 uprising. However, just like in Aruba, there is no modern textbook that incorporates these learning outcomes. Curaçaoan secondary schools address this deficiency by using the outdated but tried and true textbook *Nos Pasado* [Our Past] (1985) and more recent publications from the National Historical Archives. A challenge is that students transitioning from VMBO, pre-vocational education, have little prior knowledge of the history of slavery.

Bonaire's secondary education is dealing with the same issues. Students must attain the same learning outcomes as students in the Netherlands. But because these learning outcomes are not covered in local history textbooks and teaching materials, Bonairean students are addressed as if they were European Dutch youths. Dutch textbooks may address slavery, but they do not present it in the local context, nor do they use an appropriate personal perspective which would connect with Bonairean students' lived experience. They overlook the fact that Bonairean students should discover, process, and reflect on their own history of slavery rather than some abstract "general history of slavery." It is no wonder that, the day before the Dutch government's apologies for slavery, the headline in *Trouw* about history education in Bonaire read: "The Netherlands still decides what we know about ourselves."³

Slavery, emancipation, and the impact of slavery occupy a modest place in the learning outcomes set for history education in the Leeward Islands.⁴ But there are no teaching materials that can facilitate achieving these goals. Local education authorities have failed to develop suitable textbooks and this is one of the reasons why schools have opted for other ways to achieve the desired learning outcomes. However, imported Dutch textbooks take

a European perspective and lack the contextual embedding and local perspective necessary for high-quality education that connects with the Leeward Islands students' lived experiences. History education rarely achieves "existential clarification" (i.e., teaching students to look at society from different perspectives and make sense of the reality around them) with regard to the continued impact of slavery on the Leewardian societies. Thus, lessons from the past remain unlearned.

The Surinamization of History Education in Suriname

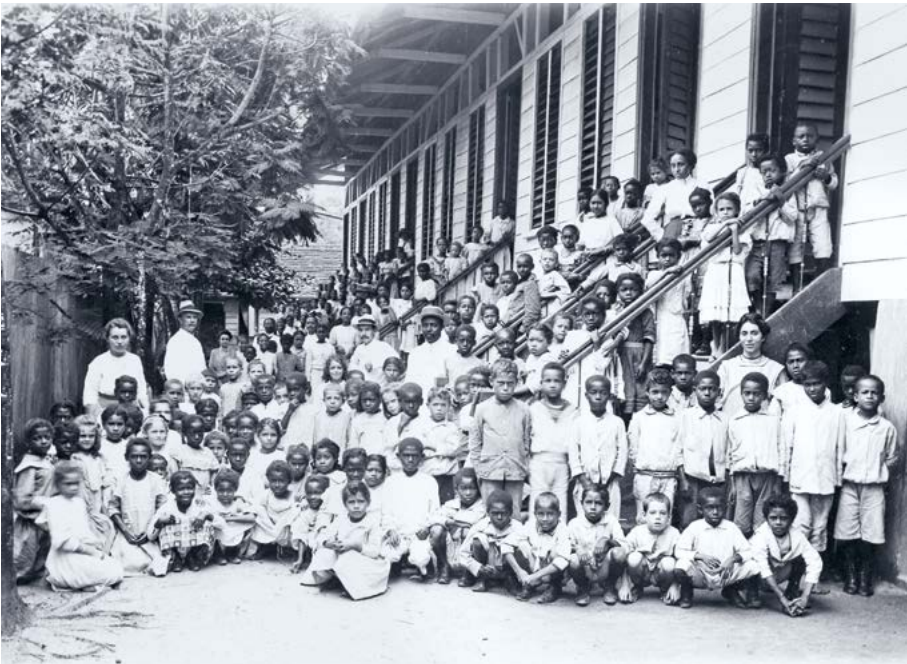
Elviera Sandie

"Our education system is a legacy from the Netherlands, and we are now slowly changing this,"⁵ as Education Minister Marie Levens put it in 2022, so it seems logical to ask to what extent the history curriculum has been decolonized and given a Suriname-oriented perspective.

In colonial Suriname, the Dutch curriculum was the only curriculum taught by preachers and teachers. It remained that way until 1863, when a colored Surinamese teacher named Maria Vlier wrote *A Brief History of the Colony of Suriname*, a history textbook from a Surinamese perspective. She was convinced that her students would be more patriotic if they knew about their own Surinamese history. This was controversial at the time, and her book was replaced by more than fifteen history textbooks not written from a Surinamese perspective. Today, Vlier is praised: historian Mildred Caprino rightly calls her the founder of the Surinamese history curriculum.⁶

After independence in 1975, the Ministry of Education developed new educational goals and a textbook for teaching history in Primary Education and Junior Secondary Education. This made Surinamization structural, in the sense that Surinamese historiography was researched, written, and rewritten under the direction of scholars and educational experts, incorporating topics relevant to the country and its people. According to historian Maurits Hassankhan, Surinamization increased awareness among Surinamese people and led them to more fully appreciate and respect their cultures.⁷ The result was the self-published textbook *Ons Volk* [Our People] (1976), which was regularly updated and renewed until 1989. After 1989, no new insights were added to the textbook, and very few academics were trained to continue the Surinamization process. As a result, argues

Hassankhan, history education is now lagging thirty-five years behind. Today, in 2023, history education in Suriname still pays minimal attention to the history of slavery and immigration, despite the fact that, before and after Suriname's independence, a new curriculum and various history textbooks were developed that address history from a Surinamese perspective. For example, only 3 percent of the questions in recent state exams for Primary Education and Junior Secondary Education pertained to the (forced) labor and migration systems that have had such a great impact in Suriname.



Students and teachers at a school in Paramaribo pose together in this 1910 photo.

The complete Surinamization of history education is going to be a long process with a steep learning curve. It is important to catch up on the thirty-five-year lag when training scholars to conduct socially relevant historical research, and historians to document the findings. This should result in new educational goals and methods, history textbooks, and a curriculum for all educational levels. It is no easy task for Education Minister Levens, but an absolute necessity; forty-eight years after Suriname's independence, change is in order.

Slavery in Indonesian Education

Edu Dumasy

Indonesian secondary school textbooks tend to associate colonial-era slavery in Indonesia exclusively with colonialism. They do not link it to Indonesia's own traditional feudal system that existed in the principalities in precolonial and colonial times. History education in Indonesia is intended to reinforce the country's sense of unity despite all ethnic and religious differences; negative aspects such as Indigenous corvée labor and precolonial slave markets are omitted.

The Indonesian government seeks to influence the content of history education. Based on the curriculum set in 2013, schools across the archipelago can be compelled to use the same history books, which are also available for download as e-books. Since the last curriculum revision in 2013, slavery (*perbudakan*) and forced labor (*kerja paksa*) related to slavery are addressed in two periods discussed in secondary education:

- a. The phase of greed (*keserakahan*) or trade tyranny (*kezaliman kongsi dagang*). Attention is paid to the role of the VOC—which used forced laborers to build forts, and to load and unload ships—and the genocide perpetrated by J.P. Coen in Banda.
- b. The phase of colonial dominance. Topics discussed include:
 - Economy-related slavery, which includes both slavery (*perbudakan*) and forced labor (*kerja paksa*). The introduction of these types of slavery tends to be dated to the period of interim rule by Herman Willem Daendels (1807–1810) and Thomas Stamford Raffles (1811–1816). This was the time when the Post Road in Java was constructed at the cost of thousands of Indonesian lives.
 - The nineteenth-century Cultivation System (*Tanam Paksa*) under Governor General Johannes van den Bosch, which required forced laborers to produce goods for export, greatly benefiting the colonial government.
 - The plantation economy (*Sistem usaha swasta*), in which private companies profited from their investments in coffee, tea, and rubber in Sumatra (The Deli Miracle) and elsewhere.
 - Notably, Multatuli is mentioned as a critic of forced labor, but the role of Indigenous rulers is omitted.⁸ Heroes like Pattimura, Diponegoro, and Bonjol, who rebelled against forced labor, are featured.

- The Japanese occupation (1942–1945), a period when thousands of Indonesian forced laborers (*romusha*) lost their lives.

In general, slavery in the history books is treated factually, with questions for students mainly focusing on the colonial period and the Japanese occupation. The rise and fall of Indigenous principalities in the archipelago are outlined, but slavery and forced labor are not mentioned in that context. The post-independence period is presented in a positive light, without explicitly addressing the history of slavery or forced labor. The history books glorify the revolutionary period, during which Indonesians fought for their freedom against the British Gurkhas and Dutch troops, a common Western enemy.

Notes

- 1 With the assistance of Arthur Sealy and Roman Sillé.
- 2 MAVO, HAVO and VWO are three types of stratified secondary education. MAVO is “mid-level” general secondary education, HAVO is “higher” general secondary education, and VWO is pre-university secondary education.
- 3 Bart Zuidervaart, “Bonaire wil zijn eigen geschiedenis kunnen vertellen: ‘Nederland bepaalt nog steeds wat wij over onszelf weten,’” *Trouw*, December 18, 2022. <https://www.trouw.nl/excuses-slavernijverleden/bonaire-wil-zijn-eigen-geschiedenis-kunnen-vertellen-nederland-bepaalt-nog-steeeds-wat-wij-over-onszelf-weten~b31a0d17/?referrer=https://www.google.com/>.
- 4 In this chapter, the term “Leeward Islands” refers to the Dutch Antillean collective name for Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (*Benedenwindse eilanden*). The Dutch Antillean distinction between *Bovenwindse eilanden* and *Benedenwindse eilanden* is generally translated as Windward and Leeward Islands, but does not coincide with the English-language distinction that goes by the same name.
- 5 S. Gallant, “Dekolonisatie Surinaams onderwijs in alle rust,” *Gfncnieuws.com*, August 22, 2022. <https://www.gfncnieuws.com/dekolonisatie-surinaams-onderwijs-in-alle-rust/>.
- 6 Eric Jagdew, ed., *Een Liber Amicorum voor Andre Loor*, (Paramaribo: Instituut voor de Opleiding van Leraren 2006), 179.
- 7 “De toekomst van het historisch bedrijf: een terugblik en perspectieven 1975-2020,” Inaugural address by Maurits S. Hassankhan upon receiving an honorary doctorate from the Anton de Kom University in Suriname, March 6, 2019, <https://www.lallarookh.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Redevoering-erepromotie-Hassankhan-6-maart-2019-definitief.pdf>.
- 8 Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820–1887), better known by his pen name Multatuli, was a Dutch writer best known for his satirical novel *Max Havelaar*, which denounced the abuses of colonialism in the Dutch East Indies.

Interviews: Multiperspectivity in the Public Debate on Slavery

Over the past ten years, the public debate on slavery and its afterlives has become louder and more heated, in academia, politics, and society at large. In this context, we asked five experts how the discussions at these different levels interrelate, and how this dynamic has been influenced by the Dutch government's apologies for slavery on December 19, 2022. Each of these experts has in some capacity engaged with the history of slavery in various regions of the world. Taken together, these interviews provide a snapshot of the debate on the history of slavery and its afterlives in late 2022.

Gibi Bacilio (1950) is a theater maker, poet, and performance artist. He is a member of *Platform Slavernijverleden en Erfenis van Slavernij* [Slavery and its Legacy Platform] and *Asosiasjon Promoshon Konsenshi Istóriko* [Association for the Promotion of Historical Awareness]. Since 1979, he has been active from his home base in Curaçao, focusing on recognition and commemoration of slavery and its afterlives: "In my long struggle for commemoration, there have been many important milestones. The rehabilitation of resistance hero Tula in 2010, for instance, and the fact that he was later declared a hero."

Society

Pioneering individuals in Curaçao had been trying to break the silence surrounding the history of slavery since the 1950s. That silence persisted for a long time. When I tried to interview people about slavery for the TV show *Koehoorn* in the 1980s, for instance, no one seemed interested in talking about it. In the decades after that, the shame surrounding the topic turned into anger. Later still, the anger was replaced by pride and a renewed sense of the strength of our ancestors. From that moment on,

people started talking more about the past—though the emphasis was still mainly on the emancipation—and art projects and plays were made about it. In terms of reaching a big audience, Charles do Rego's book *Sklabitut i Rebellion 1795* [Slavery and Resistance, 1795] written in Papiamentu about the 1795 struggle for freedom, was a landmark moment. It also demanded a lot of perseverance from our organization, *Asosiashon Promoshon Konsenshi Istórico* [Association for the Promotion of Historical Awareness], to stand our ground amidst the resistance we met from society. In 1986, for instance, when we were lobbying for a memorial to commemorate the history of slavery, we were told to put it in our own backyard.

In 2009, Curaçao decided to cluster all the interest groups in one Slavery Platform. The platform has succeeded in making the Curaçao government reflect on what the history of slavery means to the island and take appropriate measures. We wrote the report *Wij willen niks anders dan onze vrijheid* [We Want Nothing But Our Freedom], which was included in its entirety in the report *Chains of the Past*, submitted by the Slavery History Dialogue Group Advisory Board that advised the Dutch government. This report clearly communicated to the Dutch government what we want to see happen with respect to our history of slavery and its continued impact.

Academia

There is still much we can learn from academic research into the history of slavery. Most importantly, we have to ensure that new research is less Eurocentric. More attention should be paid to the average person, the role of women and children in slavery, the origin and development of Papiamentu and the role of the Roman Catholic Church. There should also be more focus on the present, for example on the traumas and psychological problems that stem from slavery and are still having an impact. As for the church, it is important to explore how they can follow up on their apologies for their role in slavery by helping to heal the wounds it left behind. And all this research should primarily be financed by the Dutch state. That would be a significant step toward redressing the colonial past.

We should also look into fair proposals for reparations: how can we talk about reparations if we don't even know the extent of the damage our society has suffered? And let's look at the land distribution in Curaçao. Currently, 60 percent is privately owned and tourism threatens to increase this even more. I think it would help Curaçao a lot if 70 percent of the land was state-owned. All beaches should be accessible to everyone, for instance. The sea is our collective heritage.



The Tula monument in Curaçao was a long time coming. In 1997, the monument created by artist Nel Simon was finally unveiled on the spot where Tula was executed.

Apologies

The apologies were a very important step. Because “the comma” was made explicit, we can finally start talking about what comes next, what should be done about the development of the islands. The best thing, I think, is that Van Huffelen, the deputy minister of Kingdom Relations, made it clear that the islands will have a say in this. This gives us control over the redress. We have several very important points that will promote redress for slavery: Tula must be rehabilitated by the Dutch state on October 3, the day of his murder. In addition, the king must apologize for the House of Orange-Nassau’s role in slavery.¹

Furthermore, the only way to get a clearer view of the afterlives of slavery and to help our society heal is by making sure our education system devotes much more attention to the history of slavery and by quickly organizing more dialogues to discuss the ways in which the Dutch Caribbean islands are disadvantaged: administratively, educationally, culturally, psychologically. And socially, too, by which I mean the continuing tangible and intangible impoverishment caused by slavery.

The Dutch government must fund specific action plans to reverse this disadvantage, by means of reparations. We need to talk with each other—that is, with all interest groups, local and national governments, and the various Caribbean islands—but also with the Dutch government.

Note

- ¹ On October 5, 2023, Tula was rehabilitated by the Dutch state and on July 1, 2023, King Willem-Alexander repeated the 2022 apology by the Dutch state, asked forgiveness for the role of the state and the royal house in slavery and apologized for his family’s past failure to take action for the abolition of slavery.

Karwan Fatah-Black (1981) is a historian and university lecturer at Leiden University and an expert in Dutch Colonial History. He earned his PhD with a dissertation on Suriname and the transatlantic slave trade, and continues to research various aspects of the history of slavery and to engage in public debate.

Society

The descendants of the enslaved are asking for a different historical narrative than the one that has been common in Dutch commemorative culture. There appears to be a growing awareness of the role that power plays in shaping the national historical narrative. The apologies offered on December 19, 2022, mark a key moment in this process, but also show how persistent the identification with the slaveholders is. The phrase "knowing what we know now" speaks volumes. Who is the "we" referred to in that phrase? Clearly not the enslaved, who were herded into Dutch history against their will.

The enormous amount of media coverage is not always a positive thing in my opinion. Media like to give the impression that all kinds of new facts have come to light, while actually these are often old insights that are now no longer marginalized. This makes it very hard for me to determine what role I, as a historian, want to play in the media. I also see nonsense appearing in the media under the guise of "attention to the history of slavery." I recently read a book that was promoted as "a slavery narrative," but it turned out to be just another retelling of a travel log by some European explorers.

Academia

I see lots of ways that historical research on slavery can be improved. Dutch historians tend to get swept up in the government hype about this topic. That results in research in which the national framework is more important than it was in colonial times. Traders and administrators in the colonies weren't so concerned with the Netherlands, and neither were the enslaved. You can see that the specific flag an administration was flying didn't matter much. Neither migration, nor the exchange of knowledge, nor personal identity were determined by the colonial flag. Historians would do well to keep this in mind, even if the grants they receive for their research and the archives they study are often national.

Some great interdisciplinary research is being done, in which fields like archaeology play a key role. Uncovered objects tell us a lot about the living conditions and the culture of the enslaved, particularly in the cities. I am currently researching the transition from slavery to citizenship. This transition varied greatly from place to place, and we need to understand the outcomes of this process in order to comprehend the afterlives of slavery.

Apologies

It speaks volumes that it was Rutte who imposed the form and timing of the official apologies on December 19, 2022. The commemoration movement has managed to achieve a lot, but not everything. It is a good thing that the afterlives of slavery have been put on the agenda. The apologies will also have an impact on academia. There will be more room for research into the legacies of slavery.

When analyzing the apologies, it is important to be aware that there were essentially three distinct audiences. And all three of them reacted differently to the moment. The first audience was the Netherlands. It was made very clear that this history is part of Dutch history and that the Netherlands has to deal with it. The second audience was the Caribbean part of the kingdom. There, the feeling was mainly that the apologies were hastily pushed through. They care most about what will happen now, after the apologies. The third audience was Suriname. There, the apologies were least well received, because neither the embassy nor the Surinamese government were involved in the apologies. The Dutch government is apparently still unable to treat Suriname as a sovereign state at so many levels. The Netherlands still sees Suriname too much as part of the kingdom.

Mercedes Zandwijken (1957), founder and director of the Keti Koti Dialogue Table Foundation, only became aware of the history of slavery in her forties. “When I attended the first slavery commemoration in Amsterdam’s Oosterpark, I noticed there was no moment of reflection after they laid the wreath. That’s how the Keti Koti Dialogue Tables came about: a new tradition in which white and Black people talk to each other about the scars left behind by slavery.

In my own family, many emotions went unspoken. The plantation culture, which was largely determined by ideas about power and powerlessness, is still present in Afro-Surinamese family structures. The Keti Koti dialogues call into question that culture and all kinds of exclusion mechanisms, including racism.”

Society

So much has changed in the debate surrounding slavery and its afterlives in the past five years: from the language used, to the discontinuation of Zwarte Piet in big parts of the country, to the growing awareness that apologies are necessary. The main achievement so far is that we don’t get all awkward when the conversation turns to the history of slavery.

Ten years ago, white Dutch people mainly felt guilt and shame, which meant that the focus was on them and not on what had happened to us. Now white Dutch people seem to be better active listeners and more aware of the big role that racism plays in the lives of Black Dutch people. That’s an encouraging development which has led many white people to say, “I want to make a difference.”

The decolonization process, the pressure to study the history of slavery, and the call for slavery monuments were all initiated by the Black communities, by the way. Big changes have been set in motion by the perseverance of grassroots organizations, activists, and Black scholars. The new generation is more assertive than ever and willing to take to the streets if necessary.

Academia

It is important to examine the collective intergenerational trauma that slavery and colonialism have left behind in society. Is there such a thing as a post-traumatic slave syndrome? And what exactly is intergenerational trauma? Hardly any research has been done on these questions.

Four elements need to be addressed: how intergenerational trauma is dealt with; the effects of migration; family dynamics; and social dynamics in relation to the traces left by slavery. This requires not only a multidisciplinary, academic perspective, but in particular a systemic one. Academic research needs to be transformed; researchers need to look inside themselves when they do their research. We need not only book knowledge but also knowledge of how this transforms people.

I also think that it is important to look at the expertise that already exists in the Black community, but is overlooked. Why don't our society and government acknowledge and spread this expertise?

Apologies

The Slavery History Dialogue Group worked on the *Chains of the Past* report for two years. Rutte offered apologies on the basis of this report without waiting for the publication of this book [*Staat & Slavernij*]. Our foundation was also not consulted for the *Chains of the Past* report. I wonder who else was not included. And, as we all know, a large part of the Black community wanted the government to apologize on July 1, but that wish was ignored. Offering apologies as a gift doesn't work. All of society should have been involved, because that's how you raise awareness about the importance and meaning of those apologies.

What would I have liked to see? Not twenty-five people in a room in the National Archives, but big screens in several cities where the speech could be watched live, so it would have been a collective experience. But the way it was done, it was sort of behind the scenes. I am curious to see how things will go from here. Rutte and all the officials said that a process of dialogue would follow "after the comma," but in the meantime, months have gone by and there has been no further communication from the government. It seems like they are still dragging their feet.

Piet Emmer (1944) is an emeritus professor in the History of European Expansion and has written many publications about slavery and migration. In his own school days, his history textbook dealt only with abolition, not with slavery itself. These days, he sees that interest in the topic is far greater: "You can't get away from it, it's everywhere, all the time."

Society

The public debate about slavery has its origins in all the attention devoted to the resistance of the enslaved. I sometimes get the sense that activists have started rewriting history and deliberately leave out the nuances of scholarly research. A scandal or a simple story just sells better than the complexity of the past.

This "activist" historiography is not new, by the way. Back in the eighteenth century, those who supported the abolitionist lobby used the same tactic. In the public debate, the historical context is often missing and slavery and the slave trade are either consciously or unconsciously measured by today's standards. Such a comparison paints a completely incorrect picture, because slavery should be compared with the working conditions of the time, when, even in Europe, contract workers, convicts, and small children were forced to work. Not all plantation owners were equally harsh. Some let slaves visit their family on the weekend and lent them a boat for the trip down the rivers in Suriname. In my opinion, this kind of information is usually omitted by "activist" historiography, which mainly focuses on resistance.

Discussing slavery in the media is difficult, too. Newspapers have limited space, so there is often no room for nuances. I don't think there's any use discussing slavery in the papers anyway.

Academia

We know next to nothing about the slave trade on the African continent. And very little research has been done on the African crew members who were sometimes taken on board to replace European crew members who had died. They made the voyage to the Americas, but how did they get home again? And how did they view the slave trade? It's important to realize that sources are not always easy to use. It's hard to determine whether what was written down is an accurate description of what happened: African, Asian,

and Indian slaves and Western rulers didn't understand each other's worlds, and the sources reflect this.

In addition, it seems fairer to me to acknowledge that colonial slavery existed for four hundred years. If there was so much resistance among the slaves, how could slavery exist for all those centuries?

Apologies

The apologies have nothing to do with academic research, but are clearly political and the result of active lobbying. Apologizing is always nice, but I don't see the use. I think that apologies for injustice are more appropriate at a time when perpetrators and victims are still alive. Measured by today's standards, a lot went wrong in the past, so actually we should also apologize for the persecution and punishment of homosexuality, the large-scale exploitation of child laborers, and the exclusion of and discrimination against women and girls.

What I also found strange is that the apologies for slavery were focused on the Caribbean, while there were many more enslaved people in the Dutch colonies in other regions. This makes it all the more clear that the government caved in to pressure from a strong Caribbean lobby.

I have no idea what the money from the "awareness-raising fund" that the government promised should be spent on. We already devote enough attention to slavery in education. I still get emails every week from schoolkids who want to do a research project about slavery and have a question for me.

I don't think "reparations" are the way to go. If others want to try to figure out how in the world reparations should be calculated, I wish them luck. As far as that goes, I have a clear opinion: just be happy that you live now and realize that the past was a strange place.

Wim Manuhutu (1959) is a historian and heritage expert specialized in the history of Maluku. He was previously the director of the Museum Maluku. He has been researching slavery since his time as a student, when it was not yet widely discussed in the public debate.

Society

The public debate about the history of slavery often makes a distinction between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean. This is a reflection of the division that scholars maintained for many years. There was hardly any collaboration between the historians who focused on either part of the world. Publications in 2015 by Reggie Baay and Matthias van Rossum made short shrift of the misconception that the enslaved in Asia were treated less harshly. This marked an important turning point in the academic and public debates.

This new interest in Asian slavery has also led to new friction. The descendants of enslaved people in Asia started feeling that the focus was too much on the Atlantic world, while the descendants of the enslaved in the Atlantic accused Asian descendants of jumping on the bandwagon. But the debate was never meant to turn into a competition. It's in nobody's interest to continue the colonial divide-and-rule policy.

How can the story of slavery reach the general public? The biographies of historical figures can provide context, and fiction also plays an important role. Fiction allows academics to add new dimensions to their work and to fill in gaps, for instance by using Saidiya Hartman's concept of critical fabulation. I also think that research institutes should be active on social media because that is the way to reach young people and to share open access research findings.

The public debate acts as a catalyst for academia. We live in a time when research needs to have social relevance and now that the descendants' lobby has proven the social relevance of slavery, money is finally being freed up for more research.

Academia

Actually, I feel very positive about the state of research and the developments in academia. A lot has changed in the field of knowledge production in recent years. This is why people now see that slavery was everywhere. For too long, people thought that only Holland and Zeeland

were involved in slavery, but research in various cities has changed that perception.

There is also more research into slavery as a system these days. The division between the WIC (West India Company) and the VOC (East India Company) is often abandoned, and the focus is instead on the interconnectedness and the systemic nature of colonial expansionism. The only thing I would still like to see changed is for the research to become less Dutch. More researchers from the regions under scrutiny should be involved. These researchers should be actively invited to access Dutch research findings and should be paid by Dutch institutions.

Researchers play a special role: they are positioned in the academic world but must also consider the public debate. By the way, it is also important for academics to realize that they can't demand that people participate in their research. It's extremely colonial behavior on the researchers' part to expect that everyone will always want to talk to you.

Apologies

The apologies were an important symbolic first step toward healing, which highly depends on what comes "after the comma." The apologies can't be the end of it. Of course, the run-up to picking December 19 as the date to offer apologies was stupid and bizarre: how could something like that still happen in 2022? What a colonial blind spot. The authorities were insensitive toward the people whom it was all about. I do think that the apologies will promote academic research. It will ensure that the research agenda will be more carefully worded and that more attention will be devoted to the repercussions and continued effects.

It is important that Rutte acknowledged the need to address systemic racism, because its existence was denied for so long. He did briefly mention slavery in Asia in his speech, but he didn't really apologize for it. This shows you how politically motivated the apology was. Slavery in "the East" has never been a major topic. The conduct of the Dutch during the Indonesian war of independence of 1945–1950 was a big topic, and the king apologized for that. But slavery there is part of a much bigger story. It's strange that he apologized only for the last five years of colonialism, and not for the whole 350 years.

Abstract

The further we grow removed in time from slavery, the greater the effort made to keep its memory alive. To fully understand why commemoration is gaining in importance, we need to take into account the broader social and political context of the politics of memory and consider factors such as culturalization, multiculturalism, migration, secularization, and identity politics. In the politics of memory, slavery has become symbolic and cultural capital and thus a contested topic. This chapter argues that further research into these dynamics can improve our understanding of the afterlives of slavery that affect Dutch society to this day.

Keywords: commemoration; politics of memory; cultural heritage; racism; religion; culturalization

The Commemoration and Afterlives of Slavery in the Netherlands

Markus Balkenhol

In 2011, Glenn Willemsen, then director of The National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and Its Legacy (NiNsee), and Kwame Nimako, sociologist and founder of the Summer School on Black Europe, noted that the further we grow removed in time from slavery, the greater the effort made to keep its memory alive, commemorate it, and secure a place for it in the public sphere.¹ Slavery has long been commemorated, especially in Suriname. In the Netherlands, commemoration became more widely practiced in the second half of the twentieth century, but mostly in private, Surinamese circles at first. Occasionally, slavery was publicly commemorated, such as in Amsterdam on July 1, 1963, the centennial of its abolition. But for a long time, there were no public commemorations. This changed in the early 1990s, when slavery in particular, and the shared history of the Netherlands, Suriname, and the Antilles in general, started to be prominently commemorated in the public sphere. The public commemoration of slavery gained momentum, and a growing number of initiatives were taken to incorporate it into the collective memory and the historical canon. The 2010s—the decade following Willemsen and Nimako’s observation—saw a further increase in such initiatives.

The commemoration of slavery is inextricably linked with identity processes. Historians, traditionally the guardians of Dutch “national” history, have had to acknowledge that historiography is part of the politics of memory. By nature, historiography is politically loaded, because people’s sense of belonging and identity, of being part of “us,” is largely based on the idea of a shared past. Hence, the history of slavery has become part of, and central to, claims to full citizenship. Besides national identity, the history of slav-

ery also plays a role in how people relate to “Blackness,” “whiteness,” “Africanness,” and identities such as “Surinamese,” “Antillean,” or “Maroon.” In order to better understand these dynamics, we need not only historical, psychological, and sociological research, but also more ethnographic research.

The Complexity of Slavery Commemorations

According to historian Gert Oostindie, Dutch authors started writing more about Surinamese history when the Netherlands “became aware of” the colonies in the West, at the time of Surinamese independence in 1975, as large numbers of people from Suriname began migrating to the Netherlands. Oostindie argues that it is not surprising that slavery and the slave trade are “the most discussed topics from the West’s colonial past.”

It is not only, in a negative sense, the most impactful episode, but it also spans over two centuries and thus the majority of colonial history; moreover, half of the Surinamese and most of the Antilleans are descended from Africans who were once brought over as slaves. But there is more. No other topic from our shared history lends itself better to an appeal for Dutch gestures; and no other topic is associated with such strong ideas about contemporary legacies that must somehow be reckoned with.²

This observation applies only to the past two decades. Before that, slavery was not at all an important social issue in the Netherlands—with the exception of a small circle of historians and some Surinamese and Antillean Dutch people. There were Surinamese and non-Dutch authors who wrote about Suriname, but there was very little public awareness of either slavery or these authors.³ According to anthropologist Guno Jones, this is due to the dominant (political) culture’s lack of critical reflection on the role of the Netherlands in slavery.⁴

It is not just a matter of whether society is aware of the issue, but also of what kind of awareness there is—or ought to be. Dutch historians’ analyses and conclusions have been widely divergent, even leading to a sort of *Historikerstreit* over historical facts regarding slavery and their significance.⁵ The highly controversial statement by historian Piet Emmer, in which he compared a slave ship to a modern-day transatlantic flight in

economy class, is just one example.⁶ Discussing slavery did not always lead to awareness; the way some historians talked about it caused new silences. For example, historian Henk den Heijer claimed in a series about slavery aired on a Dutch public broadcasting channel that rape did not occur in the slave forts in West Africa because he had been unable to find any evidence of it in the archives. The fact that sexual violence is barely mentioned in the archives does not, of course, mean that it did not occur. Therefore, it is important to consult other sources than the ones written by those who were in power. It is probably not possible to ascertain precise numbers or individual cases, but much more information can still be accessed through oral history, genealogy, and research into folk tales.

Plantation slavery in Suriname has always received more public and academic attention than any form of slavery on the Caribbean islands. It is telling that in the Netherlands, July 1 has become the annual commemoration date rather than August 17 (Tula Day, the most significant day for Curaçao). We know much more about Surinamese perspectives on the history of slavery than Antillean ones, which is why more research needs to be conducted on the history of slavery and the role of the Dutch outside of Suriname. Similarly, slavery in Indonesia has only become a topic of research in the past decade or so. The first people to speak out publicly about this were often reminded by the descendants of enslaved Africans that, according to them, “this was not about slavery.”⁷

In short, awareness of the history of slavery is neither universal nor straightforward. It is the result of a political struggle involving many stakeholders. Public attention to this history must therefore be understood in that context.

The Struggle for Citizenship

Wayne Modest, cultural scholar and content director of the Museum of World Cultures, recently wrote that the growing popularity of slavery commemorations should be seen as part of a political momentum that was present around the turn of the century, “a period of intensified debate about the present and future of a presumed multiculturalism.”⁸ In the 1990s, the public debate about the multicultural society shifted from the idea that minorities could integrate while preserving their own culture to the notion that minorities should adapt to Dutch culture, norms,

and values (assimilation). Consequently, it became increasingly pressing to define the essence of “Dutch culture,” to establish exactly which cultural norms and values minorities were expected to embrace. This led to a quest to define the “Dutch essence of the Netherlands,” which often focused on a past that could serve as a foundation for the nation and as a social binding agent. With citizenship and history becoming increasingly intertwined, minorities started to claim their own histories, which had until then been insufficiently acknowledged in the historical canon.

The initiators of the commemoration at Amsterdam’s Surinameplein, and later Barryl Biekman, the driving force behind the national slavery monument in Amsterdam’s Oosterpark, and Roy Groenberg, chair of the *Stichting Eer en Herstelbetalingen* [Foundation for Honor and Reparations], expressed their “conviction that officially commemorating slavery is essential for equal citizenship in the Netherlands.”⁹

It took quite a bit of negotiating to get the slavery monument built, however. In the end, there was enough support for the monument, but it would be an exaggeration to claim that the government led by Prime Minister Wim Kok acted solely out of a sense of moral or legal responsibility for slavery. For Kok’s “purple” coalition at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a slavery monument fit perfectly with the multicultural society that they envisioned. As historian Alex van Stipriaan, who was closely involved in the creation of the monument, wrote at the time: “[the monument] offered them an opportunity to reinforce their profile as a multicultural government.”¹⁰ Thus, political considerations were at least as big a motive as moral obligations.

The organizations that lobbied for the slavery monument and criticized the narrative of Dutch national history faced a significant backlash. The unveiling of the monument occurred during a wave of populism led by Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, who vehemently opposed such initiatives. In his words, “[t]hose who claim to still suffer from the past, from the slavery of their distant ancestors, should see a psychiatrist, and not sit at the negotiation table over financial compensation.”¹¹ Rita Verdonk, the first successful right-wing populist after Pim Fortuyn, told her audience during the launch of her political movement *Trots Op Nederland* [Proud of the Netherlands]: “There is a strong ‘out-with-us’ movement that has been trying to make us believe for years that our culture does not exist and that our norms and values are inferior to those of other cultures. They even question the

Saint Nicholas Day celebration and want slavery monuments everywhere to make us look bad.”¹²

According to Verdonk, the monument was an attack on Dutch benevolence and innocence, while in her view, the Netherlands had been “a hospitable nation for centuries.” Due to the rise of social media, such reactions have become more numerous and acerbic. Activists, politicians, journalists, and academics who publish or speak out about the history of slavery are now being intimidated and threatened.



Winti priestess Marian Markelo offers a libation during the 2013 slavery commemoration in Oosterpark. She is accompanied by a dancer wearing the Kabra ancestor mask.

Tangible, Intangible, and Psychological Heritage

The creators of the permanent exhibition “Our Colonial Inheritance” at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam explicitly assume that colonialism, including slavery, has consequences for the present. For a long time, this idea was not widely accepted, but especially since Prime Minister Rutte’s apologies on behalf of the Dutch state in December 2022, many have expressed support for it, if only because so many descendants of enslaved people now live in the Netherlands and are part of society.

Some traces of slavery appear to be fairly easy to find. The past ten years has seen the publication of many studies into specific geographical sites associated with transatlantic slavery. These include guidebooks describing walks along historical sites and studies on certain Dutch cities’ role in slavery (see Chapter 2 by Nancy Jouwe). Through historical research, it is possible to determine, for example, whether the owner of a building was involved in the slave trade. Tracing the impact of slavery becomes more complex when it involves non-physical, i.e., psychological repercussions and intangible heritage such as traditions, rituals, and beliefs. Historians Gert Oostindie and Ulbe Bosma, for example, write that colonialism, slavery, forced labor, and racism have caused traumas that burden social relationships.¹³ Even after the abolition of slavery, wounds were inflicted, for example, by the “chilly” reception that the Surinamese were given in the Netherlands, which comes down to racism and persists to this day. This racism is part of what anthropologist Gloria Wekker calls a “cultural archive,” and is thus also a residue of colonialism and slavery. How exactly this manifests depends on the specific historical context. New traumas have been stacked on top of old ones. This means that identifying slavery as the (main) cause of the current problems is not only complicated but can also obscure other historical developments. The question should therefore be how historical trauma is reproduced in complex social relationships. This requires looking at the interplay between tangible, intangible, and psychological heritage, that is, the cultural-political and psychological dimensions of heritage and how these continue to influence contemporary perceptions.¹⁴ Research into these dimensions of representation and how worldviews are transmitted (and challenged) through material culture is still in its infancy.

Religion

Religion plays a key role in the legacy and memory of slavery, but research into this aspect is still scarce (see Chapter 27 by Martijn Stoutjesdijk). This may have something to do with the fact that history is generally seen as a secular phenomenon, practiced by secular historians at universities, discussed in the secular public sphere (as cultural heritage, in politics or on talk shows). However, religion is an important part of life for many who see themselves as descendants of the enslaved. Many of them are Christians, and their faith helps them make sense of their cruel history, and sometimes even come to terms with it.

At the same time, there are those who categorically reject Christianity because they see it as a colonial religion. They emphasize that Christians played a significant role in perpetuating slavery and unequal power relations. However, this does not necessarily mean that they see themselves as secular; many who reject Christianity practice other forms of religion or spirituality. The Afro-Surinamese Winti religion is gaining popularity among young people, for instance. They see embracing Winti as a form of emancipation from the history of slavery and colonialism.

The popularity of the Winti religion can sometimes lead to tensions between African migrants and Afro-Caribbean Dutch people in the Netherlands. Many West African migrants are members of Pentecostal churches, which reject all forms of African traditional religion, including Winti and Brua. West African churches in Europe tend to believe that secular Europe should return to the Christian church. They often feel a responsibility to “convert” Europeans. There are many questions that need further exploration regarding religion. To what extent do people embrace the Winti religion? Do people become practicing Winti adherents? How does this affect their relationship with (secular) Dutch society? What tensions exist between different religious positions and what implications does this have for the commemoration of slavery?

In Conclusion

Due to its scale, duration, and cruelty, slavery is an important part of Dutch history. However, it is no simple matter to ask why slavery is commemorated, or—perhaps more importantly—how it should be commemorated and by whom. These are complex questions. Collective memory is a multi-

layered socio-cultural phenomenon that is constantly subject to change because it is connected to identity formation. Group identity is largely derived from the idea of a shared past. Identity formation is a continuous positioning process in which origin, class, political affiliation, age, and gender can play a role, but are not necessarily decisive. This means that every time we look at the past, we are influenced by the search for our own identity in the present. This does not make historical research less “true,” but it is imperative to take the dynamics of collective memory into account. It is high time for more comprehensive research into these processes.

The strong emphasis on the impact of slavery (and colonialism) on the present raises questions. While both the psychological and the socio-cultural afterlives of slavery are widely asserted and discussed in public debate, systematic academic research is still scarce. There is much to be gained in the field of interdisciplinary research into matters such as historical trauma and other cultural repercussions. If slavery and colonialism have “shaped the world,” as the Tropenmuseum asserts in its permanent exhibition, are there also parts of the world, and worldviews, that have not been shaped by colonialism and slavery? And what is the role of other histories, such as decolonization, neocolonialism, (civil) wars, and (trans)migration in shaping that same world?

We can conclude that there is no single “impact” of the history of slavery. Every individual deals with traumas differently. Academia must systematically investigate these different afterlives and ways of dealing with the past. This is its duty to society. More research is also needed into cultural dimensions such as religion; we need to look at its role as a faith, but also as a power relationship, as a form of memory culture, and as an arena of social conflict. Because of the complexity of the processes described above and the interplay between psychological, social, and cultural aspects, research should not be limited to individual disciplines, but should also be carried out in interdisciplinary collaborations involving psychologists, anthropologists, and others.

Notes

- 1 Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic: Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 7.
- 2 Gert Oostindie, *Postkoloniaal Nederland: Vijfenzestig jaar vergeten, herdenken, verdringen* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2010), 161.
- 3 Nancy Jouwe, "Slavernijfergoed vanuit de Grassroots," in *De slavernij in Oost en West*, ed. Pepijn Brandon et al. (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2020), 355–63.
- 4 Guno Jones, "In de Schaduw van Politieke Erkenning," in *De slavernij in Oost en West*, 364–72.
- 5 The *Historikerstreit* [historians' dispute] was a 1980s polemic between conservative and left-of-center academics about how to deal with Nazi Germany and the Holocaust in historiography and in society.
- 6 Pieter C. Emmer, *The Dutch Slave Trade 1500–1850*, trans. Chris Emery (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).
- 7 Nancy Jouwe, "Van wie is de Nederlandse slavernijgeschiedenis?" in *De slavernij in Oost en West*, 377.
- 8 Wayne Modest, "Slavernij en Kolonialisme in Museale Tentoonstellingen," in *De slavernij in Oost en West*, 391–400.
- 9 Jones, "In de Schaduw van Politieke Erkenning," 368.
- 10 Alex van Stipriaan, "The Long Road to a Monument," in *Facing up to the Past: Perspectives on the Commemoration of Slavery from Africa, the Americas and Europe*, ed. Gert Oostindie, (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001), 118–23.
- 11 Pim Fortuyn, *De puinhopen van acht jaar Paars* (Uithoorn: Karakter, 2002), 158.
- 12 *Trotsopnederland.com*: <https://web.archive.org/web/2008040703253/trotsopnederland.com/index.php?pageID=3&messageID=26> (accessed October 29, 2022).
- 13 Ulbe Bosma, Jan Lucassen and Gert Oostindie, "Introduction. Postcolonial Migrations and Identity Politics: Towards a Comparative Perspective," in *Postcolonial Migrants and Identity Politics* 18 (New York / Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 12.
- 14 Alex van Stipriaan et al., *Op zoek naar de stilte: Sporen van het slavernijverleden in Nederland* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2012).

Annemarie de Wildt

The Golden Coach

On January 13, 2022, King Willem-Alexander announced that the Golden Coach would, “for the time being,” not be used on *Prinsjesdag*, the third Tuesday in September when the national budget is presented and the monarch gives an annual speech. Seven months earlier, at the opening of an exhibition of the iconic royal carriage at the Amsterdam Museum, the king had discussed the matter with artists who presented their critical reflections on the Golden Coach. On that occasion, Amsterdam-based artist AiRich called the coach’s side panel—titled *Tribute from the Colonies*—a misleading and “toned down” version of history. In her own version of the panel, AiRich shows the coercion and inhumanity of Dutch colonialism. An installation by Ghanaian artist Bernard Akoi-Jackson posed the question: “Where does this gold come from?”

The coach was a gift from the citizens of Amsterdam to Wilhelmina of Orange-Nassau for her eighteenth birthday, in 1898, shortly before she was crowned queen. It was paid for with the twenty-five-cent coins collected from the inhabitants of the working-class Jordaan neighborhood and generous donations from the city elite, including the board members at Spijker Carriage Factory, the manufacturers of the Golden Coach. The coach was designed to represent the entire kingdom, including the colonies. We do not know what instructions were given to artist Nicolaas van der Waay, who painted the coach, because most of the archives of Spijker, Van der Waay, and the committee that commissioned the coach were lost. On the left panel of the coach, Van der Waay depicted the inhabitants of the Dutch East Indies and the Caribbean colonies offering products and gifts to a white woman on a throne. This kind of iconography representing the submission of the colonized dates from the earliest days of European colonization. A similar scene can be found on the tympanum decorating the back facade of the old Amsterdam City Hall, now the Royal Palace on Dam Square.



The Golden Coach, designed for ceremonial use by the Dutch royal family, depicts scenes from the colonies that glorify colonialism.

From the beginning, there was criticism of the coach. It was decried as a symbol of the undemocratic monarchy and its profligate spending. However, the scene on the left panel of the coach appears not to have raised any eyebrows back then. Criticism of the panel was first expressed in 2009, when Jeffry Pondaag (chairman of the Dutch Debt of Honor Committee) spoke out about how the Golden Coach portrayed the colonial past. In September 2011, he wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper *NRC Next* in which he called on Queen Beatrix to have the panel removed. In the years that followed, the letter's co-signee, Barryl Biekman of the National Platform on Slavery, bombarded the government and the monarch with critical letters, but even so, a decision was made in 2015 to restore the Golden Coach and continue using it. Then, Black Lives Matter intensified the debate about racist imagery. The Amsterdam Museum asked visitors to give their opinions about what should be done with the coach in the future. In September 2022, the coach's status as a "colonial object" was solidified when geological research determined that the gold leaf used to gild the coach had originally come from Suriname. By that time, the king had already declared the Golden Coach unsuitable for ceremonial use.

The Golden Coach is a typical example of how the colonial history of Dutch national objects could remain seemingly invisible, even as the objects themselves were publicly on display. The combined efforts of activists and one museum that decided to put the spotlight on the coach's colonial aspects led to intense but nuanced discussions, new perspectives, and ultimately, the king's decision.

Abstract

How can the pain caused by Dutch slavery be understood, acknowledged, and healed? And who should decide how to engage with its legacies? Recognition is deeply intertwined with power, and thus risks confirming rather than challenging hierarchies. Therefore, those for whom recognition is intended should be the ones who determine its process and substance. This chapter shows the discrepancy between notions of reparation advocated by the Dutch state and the notion of redress circulating in descendant communities: While the former is symbolic, the latter is about transforming a social relationship. This notion of redress broadens our current understanding of what justice for historical wrongs is about, seeking a form of justice that is transformative.

Keywords: recognition; reparation; transformative justice; slavery; the Netherlands

A Perspective on Reparations and Transformative Justice

Nicole Immler

“I personally did not experience slavery, but I can very well understand that it still bothers people. Because it still resonates to this day,” said a participant of Surinamese descent during one of the dialogues about slavery organized by the city of Rotterdam.¹ Such remarks show that slavery, although it dates back more than 150 years, is still part of many people’s memory. The descendants of the enslaved experience this history as communicative memory or living memory rather than cultural memory, which is only visible in archives, museums, and official commemorations.² The proximity to slavery felt by some is made possible by the traces that this history has left behind in the present. Painful personal experiences—only recently acknowledged in Dutch political debate as the result of institutional racism—continually confirm this legacy. Many descendants of the enslaved experience the structural and cultural continuation of colonialism and slavery in their daily lives. Most are no stranger to racism and discrimination based on their background and skin color. They can often give dozens of examples: being underestimated at school, having to work harder to obtain a diploma or receive recognition. While politicians like to tell us what historical injustices have or have not expired, what is or is not too long ago, and what topics do or do not deserve our attention, the experiences of slavery continue to affect many people in profound, yet often invisible and elusive ways.

How can the pain of this past be understood and acknowledged? What are the right tools to recognize and repair this historical injustice and its afterlives in today’s society?³ In recent decades, it has become clear that not every instrument for recognition and restoration is equally effective in

addressing historical injustices. To study the effectiveness of such tools, a new discipline emerged in the 1990s called transitional justice. Initially, this discipline focused mainly on experiences from World War II, examining how a society could come to terms with its violent past through measures such as criminal trials, truth and reconciliation commissions, apologies, restitution, reparations, the establishment of museums and monuments, commemorations, and discussion of the past in education and politics. Such research revealed that being recognized as a victim of World War II did little to make some groups feel like equal citizens. In these cases, recognition actually pushed people back into their marginalized position and reinforced existing social hierarchies instead of changing them and challenging perceptions. Therefore, social scientists began searching for ways to recognize past injustices while effectively helping to create equal citizenship for marginalized groups. Philosopher Nancy Fraser calls this “transformative recognition,” a form of recognition that substantially improves the position of marginalized groups in society, both socially and economically.⁴

Human rights scholars Paul Gready and Simon Robins popularized another important concept, transformative justice, which addresses historical injustice systemically. “It seeks a form of participation that engages with but transforms victimhood,” they wrote.⁵ Recognition should create agency, emphasize participation and relationship-building, and change the power dynamics. Reparative measures can only promote restoration if they put marginalized groups front and center and create equal citizenship. According to legal scholar Lisa Laplante, it is essential for successful recognition and restoration to first determine the type of justice desired. Is it about reparation for specific damages in the past with a causal link (reparative justice), restoring relationships between all stakeholders (restorative justice), or a broader idea of equality regarding participation and inclusion in society (civic justice), or socio-economic justice?⁶ If we look at the Dutch debate about slavery from this perspective, we can see that the stakeholder groups from Suriname and the Caribbean pursue civic justice and socio-economic justice by combating institutional misrepresentation, discrimination, and racism, while the government’s focus is more on reparative and restorative justice, taking a rather narrow victim/perpetrator-oriented approach that acknowledges misconduct and damage, but limits reparation mainly to symbolic gestures.⁷

This chapter discusses the ways in which the history of Dutch slavery is acknowledged in the public space and reflects on how slavery continues to have an impact on personal experiences today. In a family setting, other issues are discussed than in the public domain, particularly everyday insults and hurtful behaviors. This home or family perspective reveals a multiplicity of voices that goes beyond the public debate, which is oversimplified into a recognition of “Black” by “white.” If we want to talk about transformative justice, we need to listen to this multiplicity of voices.

Recognition of Slavery: The Public Debate

The views on recognition and reparation for historical injustice have changed significantly over the past two decades, partly because the descendants of the enslaved are making themselves better heard. For a long time, even as the descendants’ call for the recognition of slavery and reparations grew louder, the government failed to respond. Some steps were taken; a National Slavery Monument was erected in Amsterdam’s Oosterpark (which Queen Beatrix inaugurated in 2002, expressing “deep remorse” for the slave trade and slavery by the West India Company), and *Keti Koti* celebrations evolved from a local happening for the Surinamese community to a widely attended public event broadcast on national television.

In 2013, the Dutch king attended this celebration, but to the disappointment of many, he did not apologize for slavery. The crown misjudged the moment and missed an opportunity. However, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Affairs Lodewijk Asscher, speaking on behalf of the government, called slavery an “inhumane practice” and a “blemish on our history” and expressed “deep regret and remorse.”

Meanwhile, in public debate, greater demands were made on the government. The actions of dozens of people in civil society were sparking increasing dialogue in society. The Mapping Slavery project, the *Keti Koti* dialogue tables, and The Black Archives are just some of the many initiatives that show how great the need was to raise awareness of slavery and integrate it into the public consciousness. Cities and municipalities also started investing in research, awareness raising, monuments, and apologies. Some private companies also investigated and expressed regret for their part in slavery. It became clear that slavery was all-pervasive in Dutch society. The many initiatives showed a willingness to investigate the close ties

between past and present and to make the entanglements between stakeholders more visible; instead of “their” history, we began to speak of “our” history.



A Ketikoti celebration in the Amsterdam Museum. Ketikoti tables are organized as a commemoration ritual of shared remembrance, dialogue, and healing.

On July 1, 2020, the debate between the government and interest groups seemed to take a turn. People were looking for a new narrative that could form the basis for a “shared past,” according to Linda Nooitmeer, chair of the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and Its Legacy (NiNsee). The emphasis, it was felt, should be less on regret and shame and more on connection. The government also appeared to put in a greater effort to understand the interest groups. After the 2020 Ketikoti celebration, a debate on institutional racism took place in the Second Chamber of Parliament, and Prime Minister Rutte established the *Adviescollege Dialooggroep Slavernijverleden* [Slavery History Dialogue Group Advisory Board] to determine what needed to be done to acknowledge the history of slavery. The advisory board’s report *Chains of the Past* (2023 [2021]) recommended that the Dutch government acknowledge that slavery is a crime against humanity, offer national apologies, establish a national museum, institute a national day of remembrance on July 1, conduct more research

on slavery and its legacy and incorporate this into education, and establish a Kingdom fund to finance reparation on a structural and sustainable basis, also in the Caribbean islands.⁸ On December 19, 2022, then Prime Minister Rutte responded to this report by formally apologizing for slavery and figuratively extending a hand to the descendants of the enslaved. Before a society is ready for the conversation about reparation, it must first fully realize that there was something wrong in the past that continues to affect the present. That is why the Dutch government’s apologies were considered crucial. As historian Hilary Beckles put it in 2021: “There must first be awareness and recognition that there is a problem before reparatory instruments can be offered.”⁹

Over the past decades, there has been a significant shift in the debate on how historical wrongs can be addressed. While the term “reparations” initially played a key role, since 2020, the debate has shifted to legal redress.¹⁰ As Kenneth Donau, who lobbies for reparations for the descendants of the enslaved, explained: “The Dutch word for reparations—*herstelbetalingen*—contains the words “paying money,” which narrows down the idea of reparations and creates resistance. ... If you talk about redress, the conversation gets easier and it also becomes easier to gain support.”¹¹ In other words, “reparation” is a term mainly focused on the past, while “redress” concerns the future. Barryl Biekman, chair of the National Platform on Slavery, spoke about the “Reparation Decade” and emphasized that it is about “restoring every aspect of the rights of people of African descent.”¹² The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and anti-Zwarte Piet activism made the transition to new terms focused on claiming rights more visible in the public domain in the Netherlands.

Additionally, the focus shifted to a different kind of narrative. In the words of cultural anthropologist, Francio Guadeloupe: instead of trauma, victimhood, and slavery (the “cultural trauma narrative”), activists focused on the struggle for freedom and equality against a system of oppression, a theme already common in the Caribbean.¹³

Recognition of Slavery: The Family Perspective

Since the 2000s, interest groups and activists have called for more dialogue about the history of slavery and for an effort to achieve equal citizenship. This call for transformative justice was inspired by the personal experiences of Black people in the Netherlands. To better understand its importance, it

is essential to consider the experiences of descendants in the Netherlands: what are the issues at play in the family sphere? What is discussed in private and not in public?

The legacy of colonial hierarchy has also imprinted a colonial mindset on various communities of descendants of the enslaved, leading to racism and discrimination within those communities. Thus, in addition to external racism, there is also internal racism between and within these communities, and even within families. To conform to Western white norms, people straighten their hair, bleach their skin, and deny their heritage by refusing to speak their parents' language or by remaining silent about the past. This can result in feelings of displacement and other internal conflicts.

Part of this internal racism is the prolonged silence about the history of slavery. For a long time, families with roots in the Dutch colonies barely spoke of the past. Internalized shame about the colonial past fostered a culture of silence. As Marcel van Kanten, author of the book *Wortelzucht* [A Longing for Roots] (2020), explains:

I come from a Surinamese family of teachers. We never spoke about slavery in our family. Only later did I understand this “Surinamese silence.” The question is, why was it a taboo? To understand that, you have to know how Surinamese colonial society was structured. There was a social hierarchy: at the top, the white upper class, below that the Creoles, then the Chinese, then other contact laborers (Hindustanis, Javenese), and at the very bottom, the Maroons. What did you do in such a hierarchical society? There was tremendous downward discrimination. So, even in the 1950s, this colonial mentality still prevailed in my family, where we looked down on uneducated people. By speaking Dutch at home, the language of the colonial rulers, and pursuing good education, my Creole family tried to resemble the white upper class as much as possible. There was no reason to delve into slavery; people were ashamed of it.¹⁴

It was especially the first-generation migrants for whom internal racism and so-called “white-passing” became the norm. They saw this as the only way to lead successful lives in the Netherlands. People who migrated to the Netherlands also felt shame in relation to those who stayed behind in the

former colony, and felt “double-blooded,” for instance—belonging neither in one’s country of origin, nor in one’s country of residence. The children of these first-generation migrants, on the other hand, have often sought to reconnect with their roots and now demand more visibility for their past (“I want to contribute to reducing the colonial amnesia of the Netherlands and give space to the stories about my hidden family history”). Other feelings that surface are gratitude towards ancestors and pride in their resistance (“I am proud of my ancestors’ fighting spirit and am grateful that I can still draw strength from it today”). As it turns out, not only public attention to the history of slavery was needed to discuss the painful aspects of family histories; generational and geographical distance were also key.

The public debate on the recognition of slavery is dominated by overly simplistic frameworks. Personal experiences like the ones quoted above show how the past and present are interconnected and that the history of slavery is not a matter of Black against white, victims against perpetrators, minority against majority, diaspora against government. Personal experiences are much more complex, just as post-colonial communities are hybrid and intricately entwined with Dutch society. As Urwin Vyent, director of NiNsee, put it: “We do not fully realize how the history of slavery still affects contemporary society, among both white and Black people and in their mutual relationships. But also in the relationship between Black and Black.”¹⁵ Personal experiences at home show that the term “redress” must be understood more broadly; it is not only about reparation for past suffering but also about restoring present-day social relationships as well as the dialogue between and within communities. Personal perspectives disrupt the essentialist arguments and polemics that dominate public and academic debates on the “politics of recognition.”

Reactions to the Apologies from the Communities

Personal stories make it clear that the debate on recognition should not only be about apologies but also about recognizing the inequity of the economic and social system. This economic system originated during slavery but still persists even if the natural resources are different. While the Netherlands once benefited from the sugar produced in Suriname during slavery, it now profits from gold produced there under very similar conditions. As one interviewee put it: “You should not offer apologies. You should ensure that we [in Suriname] can also achieve a normal standard of living,

someday. You [the Netherlands] try to push everyone away: Curaçao, Aruba, Saint Martin. And you decide that they don't get any money. Because they have no power. You have the money. But where did that money come from in the first place?"¹⁶

Awareness and reform of this economic system are seen as ways to put apologies into practice; otherwise, it is just an empty gesture. It is important that the parties—organizations and companies—that made the most profits back then apologize for the past. It is not about individual citizens, though. Responsibility should be borne by those who were responsible for slavery as a structure. Reparations are not seen as money going from one party to another, but as a way to develop the economy in Suriname and the Antilles, which were left in a bad state by the Dutch colonizer. Reparations are therefore a form of structural redress. It is also important that Suriname and the Antilles decide how to spend the money instead of the former colonizer earmarking it for particular goals.

There is a deep-seated sensitivity to the Dutch government's paternalism in the formerly colonized countries. It shone through in the resistance and frustration expressed by several Caribbean island governments and Suriname in the run-up to the Rutte IV Cabinet's apologies on December 19, 2022. It also came to the surface in Surinamese and Antillean organizations in the Netherlands. The same frustration was palpable during various "city dialogues" held in Rotterdam and other major Dutch cities—long before the official apologies of December 19, 2022. "And yet again, my [Surinamese-Antillean] community is not represented!"¹⁷ Many communities came away with the sense that they were not truly included in the public debate. Many experienced the city dialogues as a symbolic and highly selective participatory process where the same people were invited to speak over and over again, but were then ignored when it was time to make decisions.

In Conclusion

While activists and descendant communities are discussing reparation, the mainstream political and public debate on the subject remains limited to symbolism, such as apologies, July 1 as a holiday, and the establishment of a national slavery museum. Even now, the debate barely touches on measures and resources to address misrepresentation, discrimination, and racism at the institutional level. One promising development came from De Neder-

landsche Bank. On July 1, 2022, when the Dutch central bank apologized for its past role, it also put forward a list of steps that it intends to take in the future. Another promising move was the government's announcement that it is going to establish a EUR 200 million Kingdom Fund for awareness raising and other measures, based on the idea that consciousness of the history of slavery, the Dutch role, and its repercussions, will eventually lead to new practices.

Within the descendant communities, we see a clear vision of what redress truly entails. Rather than a narrow "victim-perpetrator" or "guilt-reproach" framework, which the term "reparations" seems to invoke in the public debate, it is about a collective process and about realizing that the social and relational dimensions are essential for restoration. You could even say that the term "reparations," which is prevalent in the public domain, and the broader idea of legal or social redress in the descendant communities, are diametrically opposed. Reparation is born from the perspective of damage, while redress is born from the perspective of justice; the first pertains to individuals or groups, the latter pertains to society as a whole.¹⁸

There needs to be greater sensitivity to the descendant communities' need to "participate in decision-making processes" and their call for "redress" (two needs that are closely intertwined). This will enable a broader debate about restoration that aligns more closely with the idea of transformative justice: a form of radical participation that addresses but also transforms victimhood. In this quest for recognition, the parties must be aware of, and sensitive to, questions of power: who determines what recognition and restoration entail? Recognition issues are deeply intertwined with power issues and there is a significant risk that recognition will confirm existing power dynamics rather than change them. The danger is that a politics of recognition simultaneously (consciously or unconsciously) reproduces a racial discourse, hierarchical relationships, or positions of superiority and inferiority. It is important that those for whom the measures are intended are the ones who determine the process and substance.

Apologies are necessary to address what it is really about: seeing the colonial past with all its dark sides as part of Dutch history and acknowledging its afterlives in our society. After all, the legacy of the colonial past is present in many ways, albeit more visible and tangible for some than for others.

Notes

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- 3 Janna Thompson, *Intergenerational Justice: Rights and Responsibilities in an Intergenerational Polity* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009).
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- 5 Paul Gready and Simon Robins, "From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8, no. 3 (November 2014): 358.
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- 10 Armand Zunder, *Herstelbetalingen: De "Wiedergutmachung" voor de schade die Suriname en haar bevolking hebben geleden onder het Nederlands kolonialisme* (The Hague: Amrit Consultancy, 2010).
- 11 Attendee at the Reparation Summit in New York in 2015, interviewed by the author on June 14, 2018, interview Dataset *Narrated (In)Justice* research project, <https://doi.org/10.17026/dansze8yg84>.
- 12 Barryl A. Biekman (Civil Society Speaker), *General Assembly of the United Nations*, www.un.org/pga/69/101214_statementbiekman (December 14, 2014).
- 13 Francio Guadeloupe, "Reparaties als een hedendaagse uiting van de permanente revolutie: Een standpunt," *BMGN: Low Countries Historical Review* 129, no. 4 (2014): 106–17.
- 14 Hester Buwalda, "Wat is dialoog? Een onderzoek naar de praktijk van de interculturele dialoogbenadering en hoe deze zich verhoudt tot de dialoogbenadering van filosoof Isaacs" (MA thesis, University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht, 2020).
- 15 Harriët Salm, "Het slavernijverleden drukt nog altijd een stempel op de samenleving, zegt organisator herdenking," *Trouw*, July 1, 2020 <https://www.trouw.nl/binnenland/het-slavernijverleden-drukt-nog-altijd-een-stempel-op-de-samenleving-zegt-organisator-herdenking~b2e82c0f/>.
- 16 Lachman, "De meerstemmigheid."
- 17 Lachman, "De meerstemmigheid."
- 18 Immler, "What is Meant by 'Repair'."

Research Method: Oral History

For a long time, historians relied on written sources to reconstruct the past. Since the second half of the twentieth century, a wide range of academic disciplines have recognized the value and importance of oral history as a means of recovering, representing, and interpreting the voices and memories of individuals and communities. This method literally and figuratively gives voice to those who are absent from mainstream historiography. More and more museums, libraries, neighborhood communities, churches, trade unions, and other groups are making use of oral histories passed down from previous generations.

Oral history is a method that records oral testimonies and traditions for use as historical evidence. It stems from a cultural tradition of orally passing down information that is important for the community from one generation to the next. Especially oral cultures—which for a long time did not use written language—have used the spoken word to pass on genealogical information, etiological narratives, legends, myths, songs, proverbs, prayers, poems, theater, and riddles. Some examples of such oral traditions include *odos* (expressions and sayings) of the Maroons and Afro-Surinamese which concisely retell their history; the *guritan* (folk poetry) of South Sumatra; the stories in *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry) from Java and Bali; the *kantika di makamba* (traditional work songs) in Curaçao and Bonaire and their counterparts, the *shanties* of the Antillean Windward Islands. These oral sources are sometimes considered the oldest form of historical research, as they predate historiography based on the written word. Since 2003, UNESCO has paid special attention to these oral sources as a form of intangible cultural heritage, which has led to increased protection, knowledge, and awareness.

In oral history research, researchers interview people and give them time and space to talk about their lives, memories, and experiences. Interviews are typically focused on historical topics that have been overlooked or sidelined. One angle that oral historians currently pay a lot of attention

to is the role of trauma in a life story. Not only can these interviews be used to document unknown or neglected memories as historiographical sources, but they can also be used to explore how and why people use their recollections to position themselves in, and making sense of, the present.


As the attention to oral history increases, historians are actively compiling collections of sources in databases and archives. In the Netherlands, for instance, there are various archives that store recordings of people's personal memories about the colonial past on sound carriers, videotape, or film.¹ A well-known example is the archives of the *Stichting Mondelinge Geschiedenis Indonesië* [Indonesian Oral History Foundation], which contain summaries of 1,190 interview sessions with 724 people who talked about the Dutch colonial presence in Asia from 1940 to 1962. In Curaçao, ethnographers Paul Brenneker and Elis Juliana have been collecting a large amount of oral history since 1958. Most of the information that they gathered is stored in the *Zikinzá* collection, a database holding 1,400 songs, narratives, and life stories. The Saint Eustatius Historical Foundation has saved the voice recordings of children of the enslaved, which had been collected by American journalist Vivian Graham in the 1970s. More recently, journalist and author Boi Antoin collected a large number of videotapes, audio tapes, and other sources in Bonaire, all of which have been digitized and are now easily accessible in the *Archivo Boneiru*. Part of this collection is included in the archives at *Beeld en Geluid* [Sound and Vision], the Dutch institute for media culture. In Suriname, the Amazon Conservation Team, in collaboration with local communities, has documented the history of the Matawai Maroons by means of oral history, interactive maps, old photographs, and archival records.

Storing oral history sources and making them digitally accessible preserves them for future research, reinterpretation, and analysis. These sources thus become verifiable for research and available for educational use. Despite the heightened interest in oral history as a means of uncovering Dutch colonial history, a great deal of material is not yet accessible to researchers and the general public.

Note

1 See Data Archiving and Networked Services (DANS), <https://mediasuitedata.clariah.nl/nl/dataset/dans-oral-history>.





Section 2

Slavery & Its Abolitions and Afterlives

patricia kaersenhout

“Entangled One is a very personal series of eight works about being able to escape the unsafe and confusing feelings that come from being Black in a predominantly white society. That position made me question my identity and where I belonged. The only place where I could escape my ‘otherness’ was an imaginary world. Only there did all boundaries dissolve and did the freedom I was allowed become a reality of possibilities. Through the language of imagination, I liberated my inner soul, which is trapped in an outer body defined by race, sex and hierarchy.”

Entangled One no. 4 (2021)

mixed media on paper, 48 x 64.5 cm

Photography: Marjolein van Veen



Abstract

After their emancipation, the formerly enslaved people in the Dutch colonies were still subjected to a colonial world of unequal labor relations and economic opportunities. Indentured labor, convict labor, the Cultivation System, and exclusion through racism impeded their socioeconomic freedom. The colonial state was searching for new ways to control this evolving society that was shedding the social boundaries of slavery. Repressive policing and the police force's organizational structure not only illustrate the struggle to reconsolidate colonial power, but also reveal the weaknesses of the colonial state in this transitional period. Holding on to the colonial relations of the past eventually proved impossible; society was inexorably changing.

Keywords: abolition; free labor; colonial police; Suriname; Dutch East Indies; Dutch Caribbean

The Winding Path from Slavery to “Free” Labor

Ellen Klinkers

The abolition of the slave trade and slavery paved the way for free labor but did not preclude new forms of coercion. In the Dutch colonies, slavery, forced labor, and contract labor could exist side by side. Sometimes, one was followed by the other. Studying the relationships between slavery, forced labor, and contract labor in the colonial context that legitimized all three can contribute to a better understanding of the transition from slavery to free labor.

The former Dutch colonies of Suriname, the Dutch Caribbean islands, and the Dutch East Indies differed sharply in terms of size, location, population, economy, and society. Therefore, the effects of abolition and the rise and persistence of forced and contract labor in the Dutch colonies can only be discussed in broad terms. One common denominator was that the economies, and thus the deployment of labor, were largely in the service of the colonial rulers who legitimized and controlled labor.

The Ban on the Transatlantic Slave Trade

In 1845, Francis Meynell, a British lieutenant of the Royal Navy, was sailing off the coast of West Africa on the warship *HMS Albatross*. His mission was to combat the slave trade. On March 1 of that year, the crew of the *Albatross* overpowered the Spanish ship *Albanez*, which was carrying more than seven hundred enslaved people. Lieutenant Meynell painted a watercolor of the ship’s hold where the enslaved were locked up.

The *Albanez* was taken to the port of Freetown, Sierra Leone. No less than 148 enslaved people had died en route. The survivors regained their freedom, and the slave traders were prosecuted.



Francis Meynell painted the people in the hold of the *Albanez*, after it was seized in 1845. The enslaved people would later be brought ashore and freed.

The watercolor depicts the slave trade that evidently also took place in the Dutch Atlantic colonies after the English banned it in 1807. Incidentally, the British were not the first to abolish the slave trade—the Danes had preceded them in 1803. The English were in a position to impose the ban on the Dutch colonies because they controlled these colonies during the Napoleonic occupation of the Netherlands. After the restoration of Dutch control over the colonies in 1815, the ban on the slave trade remained in force.

Because slavery itself was still allowed, the demand for enslaved Africans did not abate on the plantations in Suriname, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. Operating from a trading hub on the Danish island of Saint Thomas, the Dutch islands of Saint Eustatius, Saba, and Saint Martin actively participated in this trade. Archaeologist and historian Ryan Espersen showed that this participation included providing the paperwork required to legitimize the illegal trade in enslaved people. Suriname, a country where about a thousand enslaved people were smuggled in annually, effectively combated this practice by punishing the traders and making the registration of enslaved people mandatory from 1826 onwards.¹

In the Surinamese plantation economy, where more than 90 percent of the population was made up of enslaved people, demographic figures show not only the consequences of slavery for people's lives but also why that system collapsed after the slave trade ended: the number of births would never exceed deaths. Life on the sugar plantations took its toll. When the import of new enslaved people came to a stop, planters' businesses felt the effects immediately.

On the islands, deaths did not outnumber births. This may have been due to a healthier climate and the absence of large-scale plantations like the ones in Suriname. Because of the lower death rate, it was long assumed that the slavery regime on the islands was less harsh. However, this idea is challenged by recent archaeological (bone) research and studies into oral traditions in the Caribbean islands by archaeologists like Felicia Fricke. Both lines of inquiry provide new perspectives on the living conditions of enslaved people, their diet, physical condition, possible injuries resulting from punishments, and hence also on resistance, and religion. These studies reveal differences between the islands. Future research of this type might also offer more information about the living conditions in the final phase of slavery, after the abolition of the trade.²

The abolition of the (illegal) slave trade prompted the colonial administration to make changes. Minimum requirements were set for food and living conditions, unlimited punishment was curbed, the sale or relocation of enslaved people was made more difficult, and Christianization was encouraged. In Curaçao, conversion to Catholicism had already begun in the eighteenth century, in contrast to Suriname, where the Protestant Moravians were admitted to the plantations a few decades before the abolition of slavery. However, Christianization would not threaten the survival of the Afro-American religions, languages, and cultures formed during slavery in Suriname and the islands.

In Suriname, the reforms were introduced in the hope of slowing the population decline. In both Suriname and Curaçao, they were aimed at preventing uprisings and ultimately, after the abolition of slavery, at founding a culture and economy based on European values with a corresponding work ethic.

The Abolition of Slavery

In the Dutch East Indies, slavery formally ended on January 1, 1860. Recent research has revealed how extensive and deeply rooted slavery was in the Dutch East Indies. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) had owned and traded enslaved people there on a massive scale since the early seventeenth century. The enslaved people came from East Africa and various countries in Asia. They were put to work in households, mines, workshops, and construction (for building military forts).³

After the abolition of slavery, a small number of slave owners in Java received compensation for the human “property” that they had lost. On the other Indonesian islands, there were fewer cases of compensation, but slavery did not immediately end there either, in spite of the ban; it was tolerated in various manifestations including debt slavery (labor to pay off debt). In addition, other forms of coercion persisted in the Dutch East Indies after the abolition of slavery. Under the Cultivation System introduced in 1830, farmers were obliged to use part of their land to grow export crops, which they paid as rent to the government (see also Chapter 12 by Jan Breman).

The colonial legal system made it possible to send prisoners sentenced to forced labor on military expeditions of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL), although initially this could only be done with the prisoner’s consent. From 1873, forced laborers sentenced to more than three months could also be deployed outside their region. These forced laborers were derogatorily called “chain bears” because they were sometimes chained together. The mortality among the forced laborers in the KNIL was high. The exact numbers are not known, but during the Aceh War (1873–1914), an estimated 25,000 of them died. Forced laborers were also used in road and harbor construction, mining, and agriculture. In the twentieth century, the use of forced laborers in the KNIL decreased because fewer military expeditions were organized, not because it was forbidden; in principle, this form of forced labor was still allowed in the Dutch East Indies.⁴ The Cultivation System and the deployment of forced laborers in the KNIL are proof that the abolition of slavery did not put an end to forced labor.

More than three years after abolition went into effect in the Dutch East Indies, slavery was abolished in Suriname and the Dutch Antilles. The end of slavery in Suriname and the Antilles had become inevitable because these areas were surrounded by British and French colonies that had abolished

slavery in 1834 and 1848, respectively. Enslaved people escaped, albeit in modest numbers, from the Surinamese border area, Nickerie, to British Guyana and from Saint Martin and Saint Eustatius to the British islands of Saint Kitts and Anguilla. The abolition of slavery by the French led to escape attempts from the Dutch half of Saint Martin in the south, to the French-ruled north. Many who remained on the Dutch part of the island refused to work as enslaved people any longer. This led to a de facto abolishment of slavery there. Slave laws were repealed and wages were paid. When slavery finally was officially abolished in Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean, on July 1, 1863, it was the culmination of a long process of lobbying and procrastination.



Writer and artist W.E.H. (Willem) Winkels satirized the abolition of slavery in 1863. He criticized colonists for whom the slave trade had been “gold mining.”

In a series of cartoons, the writer, artist, and former plantation overseer Willem Winkels portrayed the abolition of slavery as doomed to fail, suggesting that formerly enslaved people would no longer work for the planters and that it would lead to economic decline. He denounced the planters who mistreated the enslaved and thought only of their own profit. This line of thinking continued until the abolition of slavery. The planters successfully demanded compensation for the loss of human “property.” In Suriname, compensation amounted to 300 guilders per freed person. In Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, Saint Eustatius, and Saba, planters received a rate

of 200 guilders. Since slavery in Saint Martin had effectively already ended in 1848, the owners there were paid only 100 guilders per freed person. The freed people themselves received nothing.⁵

The abolition of slavery in Suriname was followed by a decade-long transition period. Under what was called state supervision, the formerly enslaved were obliged to work on plantations for another ten years. They could sign annual contracts with plantations of their choice. Changing employers was one of the few ways that they could taste labor freedom and impress upon planters that they were dependent on the laborers' willingness to work. However, the wages they received were barely sufficient to support a family, while older people without contracts often lived on the plantations in poverty.⁶

On the Dutch Caribbean islands, there was no state supervision. The islands were trading colonies, not economies that depended on the massive deployment of enslaved people; the island plantations mainly produced for local markets. An exception was Bonaire, where enslaved people worked in the salt pans.

Free labor did not mean equal opportunities on the islands, where color, class, and religion had long determined the status of both the free and unfree islanders. Abject poverty prevailed due to a scarcity of work and land. The descendants of enslaved people were the hardest hit. The lack of available fertile land and work sometimes drove the freed people back to their former owners. In Curaçao, for instance, economic hardship left them no choice but to continue living on their former owners' land. In exchange, they worked for the landowner (the *paga tera* system). Large numbers of people, mainly men, left the islands to escape poverty (see Chapter 15 by Charles do Rego).

A turning point was the rise of the oil industry in the 1920s after Royal Dutch Shell built refineries in Curaçao and Aruba. Oil refining gave a huge boost to the economy, provided employment, and attracted many migrants to the islands. However, the unprecedented economic growth was not sufficient to break down the deeply rooted racial barriers. The oil company was firmly rooted in the colonial past. *Koninklijke Olie*, the company founded in 1890 in the Dutch East Indies that later became a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell, built the foundation for the Shell empire there, where it could set favorable conditions for itself and exploit the labor (under unfavorable working conditions) of Chinese and Javanese contract workers—at that time disparagingly called “coolies.”

Contract workers were the solution for many of Suriname's plantation owners during the period of state supervision, as they sought new ways to run their plantations on cheap labor. At first, they brought in relatively small numbers of contract workers from Madeira, China, and the Caribbean, but from 1873, labor was recruited en masse in Asia. More than 34,000 British-Indians and nearly 33,000 Javanese left for Suriname, where they worked under harsh conditions on the sugar cane plantations. Workers who breached their contract were prosecuted, as stipulated in the penal sanction policy.⁷ And so a new form of unfree labor took the place of the slavery system and remained there until World War II. For contract workers who migrated from the Dutch East Indies to Suriname, it must have felt like there was no escaping the colonial regime.

The formerly enslaved people who were replaced by the recruited contract workers gradually left the plantations where they had tried to eke out a living. It was not easy to build up a life in a colony where large-scale agriculture based on cheap contract labor was the standard. There were some opportunities in gold and rubber extraction in the new frontier areas of the Surinamese interior (areas on the boundary with cultivated land). Some free people found jobs working for the colonial government.

To this day, little is known about what opportunities existed in the free labor market in the decades after the abolition of slavery. Did the free workers band together in solidarity, or did new barriers arise between the different groups among them?

Navigating between Change and Preservation

The abolition of slavery and the ensuing introduction or continuation of contract labor and unfree labor required adjustments in the organization of governance and the maintenance of law and order. The royal family played a symbolic role in shaping and reforming the colonial state. In Suriname and the Caribbean islands, King William III was portrayed as the initiator of abolition, although in reality all he did was sign the decision. The authorities encouraged gratitude towards the monarch and used it to promote obedience, diligence, Christianity, and loyalty to colonial authority. In the Dutch East Indies, the crown was used to create a sense of unity between the metropole and the colony after the troops had performed their repressive tasks: Indonesian princes signed loyalty declarations and were invited to royal celebrations.⁸

During the period of state supervision in Suriname, an administrative system of districts and district commissioners was set up to register and control labor. The authorities issued ordinances against vagrancy and refusal to work, which could lead to imprisonment or forced labor. Participation in “heathen rites,” that is, Afro-religious rituals, was banned to promote assimilation.

In Suriname, the abolition of slavery gave rise to the introduction of a police force: the *corps marechaussee* became active on July 1, 1863. Discipline and law and order had to be enforced differently now that social relations were no longer determined by slavery. Plantation owners had lost their instruments of control; they could no longer sentence and punish workers as they had during slavery. An additional factor the authorities had to contend with was the population growth of nearly 37 percent between 1863 and 1900 due to the influx of Asian contract workers. On the islands, it was not so much the abolition of slavery that changed law enforcement and policing, but the rise of the oil industry in the 1920s, which also triggered enormous population growth and thus prompted the reorganization, expansion, and militarization of the police force. In the vast Dutch East Indies archipelago, the police force was more developed in the early twentieth century than in Suriname and the Antilles. This modernization process came to a halt in the 1930s, when the rise of nationalism and the population’s growing political self-awareness led to increasing friction with the colonial state, as the police strove to maintain the state’s grip on power by means of repression and violence.

In the late nineteenth century, the colonial police in Suriname, the Caribbean islands, and the Dutch East Indies represented both security and control, that is, both justice and discipline. Providing security legitimized the police force, but that security was also a necessary precondition for the colonial economy to function properly. In the scholarly literature of the 1980s and 1990s, repressive police action was described as an effective display of colonial power. However, modern studies regard it more as a sign of weakness in the colonial state and law enforcement.⁹

From the moment the Antillean police force was created, it saw a significant influx of Dutch military and civil personnel. The police in the Dutch East Indies consisted almost entirely of Indigenous Indonesians, except for the highest ranks. In Suriname too, the police force ended up consisting of mostly non-white people. Following Curaçao’s example, the ideal had been to establish a civilian police force there, made up of former European

military personnel, that relied heavily on military discipline and the show of force. It proved impossible to create a fully white corps *marechaussee*; there were simply too few suitable white ex-military people available. This led to the foundation of an Indigenous police force, manned with Creole people (formerly enslaved people and their descendants) in addition to the white police force. Hence, Suriname ended up with two police forces, segregated by color. This rigid distinction was remarkable because during slavery, plantation owners had been assisted by *basyas*, Black overseers. The racial distinction in the police can be explained as a redefinition of social boundaries after the abolition of slavery. As historians Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler state in their analysis of colonial societies, the Otherness of the colonized was not a given, but had to be continually reaffirmed. A white police force represented the colonial state and symbolized the unbroken authority of the white colonial population after the abolition of slavery.¹⁰ In practice, maintaining two police forces, separated by skin color, turned out to be an untenable situation in the long run, so in 1895 both forces were merged into a single armed police force, and before long its officers mainly consisted of men of Creole descent.

Historian Michael Rothberg introduced the concept of the implicated subject to describe individuals associated with, or part of, a system or institution like the police, without having any influence on that system.¹¹ This begs the question to what extent individuals are responsible for the institutions that they serve. The police force in the Dutch colonies was established in an ambivalent context of conservatism and change. Local officers' knowledge of the local geography, language, and people was increasingly recognized and valued, but at the same time, local police officers never gained the colonial state's full trust, and the army was always kept in reserve as a loyal ally.

Underpaid and mistrusted, with hardly any career opportunities, local policemen also faced racism and exclusion—which they themselves helped preserve through their work. This clearly shows the complexity of a colonial state in transition and also illustrates how winding the path to free labor was.

Further Research

To understand the transition from slavery to free labor in the colonies, it would be useful to study this in conjunction with other forms of unfree labor. How could free labor develop in an environment where unfree labor was the norm? Was social mobility possible in societies where ancestry determined status? What opportunities and constraints existed? How can a concept like the implicated subject help us understand the dilemma of colonized people in government service? What did the abolition of slavery mean for enslaved people who had already been freed before the abolition? Did they show solidarity, or were new barriers erected?

Attempts to make the voice of enslaved and other unfree people heard are, of course, not new. Their voices are absent from the sources, which were written by colonial administrators, planters, and other entrepreneurs. Thus, a biased historiography seems inevitable. In the early 1980s, historian Ranajit Guha wrote that it is better to acknowledge this bias and treat it like a source of information that shapes historiography. By viewing and analyzing this bias as a given, we can approach the obscured past. Anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot also writes that “silences” are unavoidable in historiography. He believes that re-reading and re-evaluating sources allows us to better understand those whose voices have been lost.¹² These insights remain valuable, but in addition to written sources, we can access the material and immaterial cultural heritage of the colonized through oral traditions, museum exhibitions, questions about the restitution of heritage, making photo material accessible, reevaluating on-site cultural heritage, such as plantations, factories, cemeteries and monuments, and archaeological research. These developments must be encouraged and financed.

Notes

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- 2 Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast: Roofbouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie, 1750–1863* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1993); Gert Oostindie, *Het paradijs overzee: De Nederlandse Caraïben en Nederland* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1997), 33; Felicia Fricke, "The Lifeways of Enslaved People in Curaçao, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten/St. Martin: A Thematic Analysis of Archeological, Osteological, and Oral Historical Data" (PhD diss., University of Kent, 2019); L. Jason Laffoon, Ryan Espersen and Haley Mickleburgh, "Life History of an Enslaved African: Multiple Isotope Evidence for Forced Childhood Migration from Africa to the Caribbean and Associated Dietary Change," *Archeometry* 60, no. 2 (2018): 350–65.
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- 4 Petra Groen et al., *Krijgsgeweld en kolonie: Opkomst en ondergang van Nederland als koloniale mogendheid, 1816–2010* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2021), 184; Fred Lanzing, "Het KNIL: Enkele beelden en feiten," *Indische Letteren* 19 (2004): 53.
- 5 Dirk J. Tang, *Met Hollandse bedaardheid: Hoe Nederland tussen 1800 en 1873 slavernij in de koloniën afschafte* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2021); A. F. Paula, "Vrije" slaven: Een sociaal-historische studie over de dualistische slavenemancipatie op Nederlands Sint Maarten, 1816–1863 (Zutphen/Willemstad: Walburg Pers, 1993).
- 6 Ellen Klinkers, "De strijd gaat door: Creools verzet na de afschaffing van de slavernij," in *Ik ben een haan met een kroon op mijn hoofd: Pacificatie en verzet in koloniaal en post-koloniaal Suriname*, ed. Peter Meel and Hans Ramssoedh, (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007), 136–139.
- 7 Rosemarijn Hoefte, "Plantation Labor after the Abolition of Slavery: The Case of Plantation Marienburg (Suriname), 1880–1940" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 1987).
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Research Method: Archaeology

Archaeology can make an important contribution to our understanding of Dutch slavery heritage. This discipline focuses on the objects, structures, and other evidence (such as glass fragments, ruined walls, and plant remains) that people in the past left behind. Archaeology makes it possible to explore subjects that are seldom mentioned in historical documents, as well as the perspectives of those who did not write anything down. It is interdisciplinary, using different kinds of data and overlapping with disciplines such as anthropology, history, and sociology. Most archaeological information comes from excavations, where objects, structures, and changes in soil color can provide information about the existence of a house, a village, or a town. During and after an excavation, a number of scientific analyses can be conducted that examine, for example, the chemistry of a shard of pottery or the biology of an animal bone. From these data, archaeologists can reconstruct trade routes and subsistence patterns. Archaeology can also be an effective method for studying slavery and enslaved people.

In the Dutch Caribbean, there is a growing body of work on the archaeology of enslaved people, exploring the construction methods that they used, the food they ate, the illnesses they experienced, and their West African origins. Archaeology has also been used to investigate slavery in Suriname. Examples of this include the study of villages built by Maroon communities, genetic studies, and population-wide analyses of human remains. In South Africa, archaeologists have carried out mathematical analyses of the human skeleton that examine labor patterns, biomolecular analyses that explore population movements, and studies of rock art made by enslaved people who escaped and mounted a guerrilla resistance. Some archaeological research has also been conducted in Indonesia, including a landscape study of social control on a plantation in the Banda Islands.¹

While such archaeological studies provide amazing insights into the lives of enslaved people that are often unavailable from other sources, there are also shortcomings. These mainly revolve around the (neo)colonial aspects of a discipline that often does not consider itself accountable to local, descendant, and Indigenous communities. There have been several cases of poorly handled excavations of burial grounds, for example. In 2021, archaeologists at Golden Rock Plantation on the Dutch Caribbean island of St. Eustatius excavated the remains of almost 70 people without community consultation. Following widespread public complaints, changes to heritage management structures on the island are now being implemented to ensure that this does not happen again. Other challenges in the archaeology of Dutch slavery heritage include that of preservation in warm, humid climates, where archaeological remains may be less complete than elsewhere and decay faster after excavation.

Fortunately, strategies for improving the discipline of archaeology in terms of its community consultation and engagement already exist, such as the rubric for engagement with descendant communities developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund and James Madison's Montpelier in the USA. Additionally, the 1980s excavation at the New York African Burial Ground is often held up as an example of good practice implemented after public complaints. Within the Dutch colonial sphere, there are also local initiatives seeking to restructure the relationships between archaeologists, government, and community. For example, the Saint Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance, the Statia Heritage Research Commission, and the Statia Cultural Heritage Implementation Committee have all been working on heritage issues arising from the excavation at Golden Rock Plantation in 2021. Community campaigners, young scholars, and practitioners often lead the way in changing the attitudes of archaeologists.²

Finally, extraordinary methodological advances are constantly being made in the wider discipline of archaeology that may be of use in the study of Dutch colonial slavery, for example the extraction of DNA from a pipe stem in Maryland (USA); improved mapping methods; and the identification of disease proteins in dental calculus. There is also great potential for collaboration between historians and archaeologists, producing more thorough and nuanced scholarship than either discipline can achieve alone.

The future of the archaeology of Dutch slavery heritage is therefore one of increasingly detailed insights into the lives of enslaved people, facilitated by scientific developments and produced in partnership with local communities.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, David R. Carlson and Amy Jordan, “Visibility and Power: Preliminary Analysis of Social Control on a Bandanese Plantation Compound, Eastern Indonesia,” *Asian Perspectives: Journal of Archaeology for Asia and the Pacific*, 52, no. 2 (2013): 213–43; Felicia Fricke et al. “Delayed Physical Development in a First Generation Enslaved African Woman from Pietermaai, Curaçao,” *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*, 30, no. 1 (2019): 43–52; Brent SinclairThomson and Sam Challis, “Runaway Slaves, Rock Art and Resistance in the Cape Colony, South Africa,” *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa*, 55, no. 4 (2020): 475–91; Cheryl White, “Archaeological Investigation of Suriname Maroon Ancestral Communities,” *Caribbean Quarterly*, 55, no. 2 (2009): 65–88.
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Abstract

This chapter examines the relationship between abolition and emancipation. The Dutch did not abolish the slave trade voluntarily, but under pressure from Britain. Although official documents relating to the abolition of chattel slavery on July 1, 1863 speak of “emancipation,” what actually took place was merely a legal act. Emancipation is far more than legal abolition, however, as it entails a process in which a stigmatized and subjugated social grouping struggles to improve its collective condition. This emancipatory process is still unfinished, while the memory of slavery—especially the collective memory—lingers. As a result, knowledge production has also been slow and is as yet largely incomplete.

Keywords: chattel slavery; abolition; emancipation; legacy of slavery; Netherlands

Dutch Atlantic Chattel Slavery and Its Legacies

Kwame Nimako

Slavery and resistance are two sides of the same coin and should be studied and analyzed dialectically because people do not volunteer to be enslaved. Africans in Africa were free individuals before being captured, were captives in Africa and during the transatlantic crossing (the Middle Passage), and only became enslaved when they reached the Americas. That is why in this chapter, I use the terms “enslavement” and “enslaved” rather than “slaves,” and “enslavers” rather than “slave masters.” Viewed in this context, chattel slavery was a legal institution created and supported by European states. It was initiated, designed, and planned from Europe under the direction of European monarchs and executed by their subjects in the Americas. In the case of the Netherlands, the monarch was foreign, Spanish, and ruled through intermediaries, edicts, and decrees. The Dutch were involved in Atlantic slavery before they became a sovereign nation in 1648, which facilitated the formation of the state. In fact, some of the Antillean islands were purchased for slave trading purposes during the Eighty Years’ War (1568–1648), making slavery part and parcel of the history of that war.

The primary reason for kidnapping and transporting Africans into the horrors of slavery was to acquire forced labor for the production of goods by the enslaved, without a contract and under the supervision of the enslavers. Many scholars have referred to the enslavers as “planters,” though in reality they planted nothing. All evidence points to the fact that it was the enslaved who chopped, planted, and harvested, who carried, cooked, served, washed, and cleaned, so that the enslavers on the plantations could pursue their non-menial activities, such as reading, writing, sporting, and other

leisure activities. Atlantic slavery also created jobs for Europeans, as thousands of sailors and military worked on ships and tens of thousands were employed in ports and ancillary businesses associated with slavery. Millions of people profited from the goods produced by enslaved men, women, and children—including sugar, cotton, and coffee. The enslaved did not accept their condition and status without a fight. Some resisted passively, others collectively and actively.

The coordination and control of enslaved labor required active intervention in the social life of the enslaved, from the production process to reproduction and family life. These interventions and resistance to them are still a vital part of the memories of the descendants of the enslaved.

The colonies provided Europeans with escape routes from persecution (including the Inquisition) and afforded them far more freedom, mobility, and access to land and wealth than Europe had to offer. At the same time, enslavement and the expropriation of land led to bondage and servitude for many Africans and most Native American populations.

After 400 years of oppression, slavery was abolished. Yet, even that part of the story is not as straightforward as often presented. Therefore, this chapter will address abolition, with a focus on Suriname. It will answer two questions: what precipitated the Dutch withdrawal from the Atlantic slave trade, and how did the Netherlands abolish chattel slavery? I will conclude this analysis of abolition-without-emancipation by reflecting on the legacies of Atlantic chattel slavery.

The Abolition of Slavery

The enslaved were beaten, whipped, sexually assaulted, and worked to death. But that did not seem to bother the enslavers until the British declared an end to their part of the slave trade in 1808 and took steps to suppress it. However, the Dutch did not voluntarily abolish the slave trade that year. It took another six years and international pressure for this to happen. Napoleon's invasion and occupation of the Netherlands (1795–1813) was the beginning of the end of official Dutch involvement in the slave trade. Available data indicate that between 1751 and 1775, the Dutch transported 118,200 kidnapped Africans for enslavement. Between 1776 and 1800, this number dropped to 34,200. The opposite trend took place in France in the same period. Between 1751 and 1775, France transported 321,500 Africans for

enslavement; the figure increased to 419,500 between 1776 and 1800. This suggests that the French increased their share at the expense of the Dutch.¹

The Napoleonic occupation took place against a backdrop of two developments. First was the successful anti-slavery revolt in Haiti in 1791 and the suppression of a revolt in Curacao led by Tula in 1795. Tula was brutally tortured and killed. Second, the Napoleonic occupation expanded the wars of mainland Europe to the European colonies. Thus, in the same period when Napoleon occupied Europe, Britain occupied Bonaire in 1804 and Curacao in 1805. As part of their negotiations to regain sovereignty and install a constitutional monarch, the Dutch were obliged to end their participation in the slave trade in 1814. Britain held on to Sri Lanka and the Cape of Good Hope, however, and financially compensated the new Dutch King, William I, to build his army.

In the absence of African captives to replenish the declining population after the abolishment of the official slave trade, the Dutch government established a commission to report on the state of the Dutch slave colony of Suriname in 1844. The commission confirmed that the enslaved population was in decline and advised that if the Dutch government wanted to maintain Suriname as a Dutch colony, it had to abolish slavery; the government heeded the “advice” and set in motion a process to end chattel slavery in Suriname and the Antilles. In the process, the Dutch modeled themselves after Britain and started to prepare for abolition; like their British counterparts, the Dutch enslavers also sought compensation. To justify their claim to compensation before abolition, the enslavers’ lobby in Suriname presented a petition to the Dutch Parliament. The rationale of the petition was that slavery was a state-sanctioned “legal” institution, as we see from this excerpt:

In the past, and not even very long ago, the government not only encouraged and protected but also made compulsory the keeping and purchasing of slaves in the colony. Moreover, Manumission was made difficult, and slaves were even forbidden to buy themselves free. So, slavery was then not only considered legal, but also protected; thus, the slave is the legally recognized property of his master.²

There you have it. Chattel slavery was a state-sponsored institution, and the enslavers were protected by their state; thus, the state could not just

abandon the enslavers. This prompted a member of parliament, Elout van Soeterwoude (1805–1893), to question why the state was not compensating the enslaved: “Would not [also] the slave be entitled to some compensation from his master—and from us in the Netherlands who permitted this injustice—for the bitter suffering that was passed on from father to son for two centuries?”³



The unveiling of a plaque dedicated to King William III on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Emancipation, in Government Square in Willemstad, 1888.

On July 2, 1862, the government presented its abolition proposal to the parliament as a package deal with four components: First was the lifting or ending of slavery in the Dutch West Indies colonies. The date of abolition was set for October 1, 1863, but as a result of the debate and amendments, the date was moved to July 1, 1863. Secondly, the owners of the enslaved were promised compensation for the loss of “property.” The enslavers demanded compensation of 400 guilders for every enslaved person granted “freedom” under the abolition proclamation of July 1, 1863. But in the end, parliament and the cabinet agreed to different levels of compensation for slaveholders in different territories, namely 300 guilders for those in Suriname, 200 for Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, Saint Eustatius, and Saba, and

100 for Saint Martin. Thirdly, the government promised a ten-year period of state control over the freed slaves of Suriname. There were reasonable arguments against state control or a kind of apprenticeship, but the majority voted in favor. This period of state supervision amounted to progressive control, namely giving in to change without sharing power with the victims of oppression. The fourth component in the proposal stated that the government would arrange immigration for indentured laborers from British-controlled India for a period of ten years.

The implication of presenting the abolition of slavery as a package deal was that a general vote against any of the four components would delay abolition. Though some parliamentarians objected to the abolition proposal and considered it a form of intimidation by the government, they went along with it because they had concluded that slavery had become a curse and cancer on the honor of the Dutch nation, a stain that had to be erased. In the end, abolition became a means to an end, namely to maintain Suriname as an agricultural colony. By the time slavery was legally abolished in 1863, the Dutch had transported more than 500,000 Africans into slavery.

The official proclamation of the abolition of slavery contained details on the compensation for the enslavers, but this information was omitted in the version translated into Sranan Tongo and communicated to the enslaved. A day after the proclamation, the Dutch newspaper *Utrechtsch Provinciaal en Stedelijk Dagblad* published an editorial stating the following:

Only where a civilization is founded upon natural principles of freedom and equality can prosperity and flourishing be expected in the long run. May this prosperity and flourishing become the destiny of our West Indian colonies so that in the future one will always—with even more joy—remember the first of July 1863 as the happy day in Dutch history, as a fortunate moment during the reign of Willem III.⁴

The editors' statement was aspirational, but it neither registered in the Dutch consciousness, nor materialized on Dutch soil. There is no evidence that Dutch academia or media made an issue out of it. Instead of remembrance and commemoration, silence and denial ensued.

Legacy

Dutch chattel slavery had much in common with other societies established in the Americas, namely the brutal transportation and vicious enslavement of Africans, along with economic exploitation, political domination, and social subordination. All these societies developed or shared racist ideologies—born out of daily practice and philosophical writings. This included ideologies that defined Africans and black people as mentally and intellectually inferior, but physically superior (all the better to work in the burning tropical sun all day long).

Although official documents speak of an emancipation proclamation, all that took place in reality was a legal act of abolition. Emancipation is far more than legal abolition, however. Emancipation signifies a process whereby a stigmatized social grouping that finds itself in a dominated position in society struggles to improve its collective condition. The group seeks to attain a full-fledged place in society, integrate into the existing social order and effect significant changes therein. This is far more comprehensive, transformative, and enduring than the social mobility of an individual within a dominated group. This process is ongoing.

In Suriname and the Antilles, the descendants of the enslaved remembered and commemorated slavery, resistance, and resilience in very different ways and through very different narratives. Specifically, on July 1, 1993, Black people of Surinamese and Antillean descent, predominantly women, gathered in Amsterdam to publicly commemorate the abolition of Dutch Atlantic chattel slavery. This was followed by a formal request to the government to erect a monument for the annual commemoration of Dutch Atlantic chattel slavery. Through their activism and lobbying, the monument became a reality in 2002 and, as demanded by the Black community, this was followed by permission to establish an Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee) in 2003. It is important to note that very few mainstream Dutch historians and (public) intellectuals supported or encouraged the social movements that campaigned and lobbied for the monument or the establishment of NiNsee.

For future research on the legacy of slavery, four matters require attention. First, commemoration is visible but has not been systematically researched. Second, the compensation of enslavers has not been researched in the Netherlands, contrary to the situation in the United Kingdom, where its nature and extent has been thoroughly documented. Third, state super-

vision has not been systematically examined. Finally, the impact of the indentured labor regime on the free enslaved requires investigation.

It is equally important to consider exactly which institutions and individuals should conduct the research. As noted above, there are many omissions, silences, and evasions in the research on Dutch slavery carried out in the nation's main universities. The Dutch museums also played an important role in this process, being one of the main arenas in which the dominant Dutch narrative was presented and disseminated.

Notes

- 1 Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – Database, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>.
- 2 Kwame Nimako, Mano Delea and Mitchell Esajas, *Waarom vrijheid niet kon wachten: Het parlementair debat rondom de afschaffing van de slavernij* (Amsterdam: NiNsee: 2020), 69.
- 3 Nimako, Delea and Esajas, *Waarom vrijheid niet kon wachten*, 124.
- 4 *Utrechtsch Provinciaal en Stedelijk Dagblad*, no. 155, July 2, 1863.

Abstract

This chapter focuses on how Dutch politics dealt with slavery after 1795, how historians have written about it, and the questions that remain unanswered. From the 1840s onwards, the political debate about the abolition of slavery focused on the Atlantic colonies and on Suriname in particular. Politicians were not completely unaware of the abolition of slavery and its aftermath, but they prioritized domestic reforms, the economic interests of the colonial metropole, and maintaining the colonies as profit-making territories. Consequently, they did not use their political authority over the colony to expedite the emancipation of enslaved people.

Keywords: Emancipation Act; political discussion; slaveholders; historiography

9. Dutch Politics and Slavery in the Nineteenth Century

Lauren Lauret

During the Batavian Revolution in 1795, slavery and the slave trade were put on the national political agenda.¹ Moral critiques of slavery had already been widely published in the press and in philosophical writings through much of the latter half of the eighteenth century, but nothing had changed as a result. This chapter focuses on how Dutch politics dealt with slavery after 1795, how historians have written about it, and the questions that remain unanswered.

Revolution and Restoration, 1795–1840

In April 1797, the radical representative Pieter Vreede called on the National Assembly, the new Dutch Parliament created during the revolution, to include a ban on slavery and the slave trade in the new constitution.² A committee set up by the same National Assembly studied this issue but advised against it, as a ban would make it very difficult to preserve the remaining colonies—particularly Suriname, Curaçao, the Gold Coast, and parts of the Dutch East Indies—due to a lack of colonists to maintain order and cultivate the land after abolition. Besides, the unrest in Santo Domingo that had followed the French abolition of slavery (1794) was still fresh in everyone’s mind. The newly established Batavian Republic could not afford any adverse economic consequences. These practical concerns outweighed any moral objections to slavery and the Batavian Republic’s draft constitution did not mention the topic at all. In 1798, a year after his appeal for abolition, Vreede took part in a successful campaign to reject the new constitution. In January 1798, he staged a coup, enabling the radicals to draft a new constitution themselves. However, even in that draft, slavery

remained unaddressed. Clearly, the issue was no longer a political priority for Vreede and his supporters. Though they frequently used the phrase “liberty, equality, and fraternity,” they apparently did not apply those ideals to the enslaved people in the Batavian overseas territories.

After the revolution, when the Netherlands became the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815, the new constitution stipulated that it was no longer the States General, but King William I who had supreme authority over the colonies.³ He had grand plans for these regions, backed up by the power granted to him by the constitution and the rapid recovery of the Dutch slave colonies and slavery-related industries after the Napoleonic Wars. After losing much of its colonial empire, the Netherlands was no longer among the world’s largest slaveholding states at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but the slaveholding plantations still held economic significance for the state and private enterprise. Recent research into the founding of De Nederlandsche Bank, for example, revealed that part of the capital used to establish the Dutch central bank was put up by entrepreneurs with direct interests in plantation slavery. Also, the consumption of cotton, indigo, sugar, and coffee increased, even though public opinion was turning against slavery. William I wanted the state treasury to benefit from this and sent bills to the Second Chamber of parliament proposing an increase in excise taxes on coffee and sugar. Despite attempts by Amsterdam trading houses to thwart the bill because it would affect their profits, both the Second Chamber and the First Chamber (Senate) approved the increase. British-led international pressure had imposed the abolition of the slave trade. Slaveholders realized that they could pay lip service to the abolitionist cause by quietly accepting the abolition of the slave trade; it did not hinder the use of slavery as a mode of production.⁴

As the supreme governor of the colonies, William I found a kindred spirit and loyal servant in military officer Johannes van den Bosch. Together, the men developed an all-encompassing vision of a colonial administration that sealed the fate of many enslaved people and local farmers.⁵ Van den Bosch, who had served in the Dutch East Indies, was appointed commissioner-general of Suriname and the Antilles in 1827 and tasked with overhauling the administration. Part of Van den Bosch’s policy was to introduce a significant change in the colonial regulations (1828), whereby enslaved people were henceforth legally considered persons instead of property.

Plantation owners and investors in the Netherlands were opposed to this. They managed to convince the Ministry of Colonies to delete the relevant article when the Regulation was revised in 1833.

Consequently, enslaved people could once again be treated as property. This had far-reaching consequences for the political debate on the abolition of slavery. In his new role as governor-general of the Dutch East Indies (1830–1833), Van den Bosch introduced the Cultivation System to make the colony more profitable. Slavery thus gradually gave way to forced labor by villagers in rural areas, who had to cultivate part of their land to deliver set quantities of crops to the government at fixed low prices.



View of the Ministry of Colonies housed in the former Huygens House in The Hague.

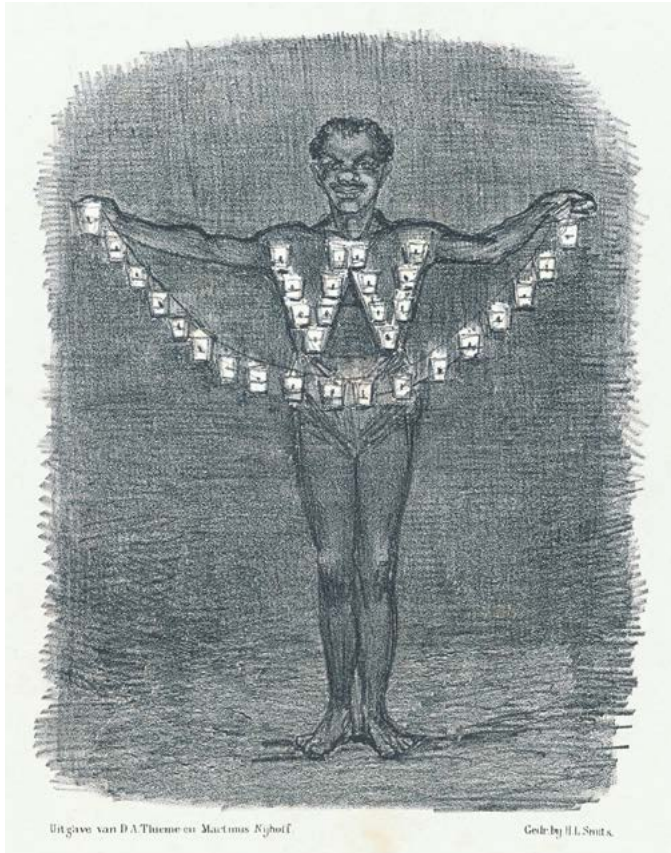
Abolitionism and Anti-Abolitionism, circa 1840–1850

From 1840 onwards, the political debate on the abolition of slavery focused on the Atlantic territories, particularly Suriname. Although historians have written much more about the plantations in Suriname, there was large-scale slavery in the Dutch Caribbean, too. In Curaçao, for instance, up to 40 percent of the population lived in slavery. However, the Caribbean islands never became full-blown plantation economies like Suriname. The Dutch were most invested in Suriname, hence their objections to abolition there. When ministerial responsibility and the participation of the States General in colonial budgets were introduced in 1840, the Orange monarchy no longer had sole say over the colonies. Disillusioned by the curtailment of his power, King William I abdicated; the throne went to his son, William II. In the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne of 1841, the Second and First Chambers alluded to the emancipation of the enslaved. Public opposition to slavery was also growing. Encouraged by British abolitionists, Dutch citizens organized to achieve abolition in the Netherlands as well.⁶

This resurgence of abolitionism prompted Amsterdam trading houses to approach the new king and seek his support to protect their colonial property.⁷ In a petition, the stakeholders declared the Dutch government to be responsible for emancipation, making it clear that if the government were to sign off on emancipation, they would demand “adequate compensation.” Several signatories had already received compensation from the British government. They also opposed the role that an “Association or Society” for “the emancipation of slaves” wanted to play in the abolition of slavery in Suriname. William II sided with the plantation and slave owners: he refused to support the Society for the Promotion of the Abolition of Slavery, and tasked his Minister of Colonies, Jean Chrétien Baud, with first studying whether abolition was necessary.

Baud’s study avoided public scrutiny because the dire financial problems left by William I dominated the political agenda. The reorganization of the national debt created an opportunity to petition for political reforms such as the abolition of slavery, and abolitionists urged parliament to take action.⁸ But the fact that part of the Second Chamber had very different priorities became clear when the chamber heard an anti-abolitionist petition from stakeholders in 1845. The signatories claimed that the governor of Suriname’s attempts to improve the lot of the enslaved were instead causing unrest. Meanwhile, liberal parliamentarians seized upon the ensuing

debate to try to gain greater influence over colonial policy by questioning the constitutional article dealing with the balance of power between the king, the cabinet, and the Second Chamber. This in turn led a chamber subcommittee to accuse the liberals of having “deliberately cast a veil” over “the defense of unrestricted slavery” hidden in the petition.⁹



Cartoon from 1862 about the abolition of slavery. An enslaved man's chest is decorated with lights in the shape of the letter W (for King William III).

The constitutional revision of 1848 made the States General, as co-legislators, responsible for colonial affairs again. However, the government had deliberately passed up the opportunity to abolish slavery during this revision because of the high costs involved. France had abolished slavery that year and the Dutch ministers were aware that this had cost the French

state dearly in compensation for slave owners, so they deemed it ill-advised to address the issue in the revised constitution. As long as the government refused to recognize the owners' demand for compensation, the owners would continue to question the need for abolition. The deadlock lasted until 1852. Only then did the owners grudgingly acknowledge that continuing slavery was undesirable and did the Second Chamber realize that attempting to abolish slavery without compensation was doomed to fail.

The State Commission and the Emancipation Act, 1853–1863

In November 1853, a State Commission led by former cabinet minister Baud began preparing for abolition. Parliamentary support turned out to be slim, however. Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer resigned from the commission because of Baud's cumbersome approach and the considerable influence that the stakeholders in slavery had on the commission. Groen, who represented the Society for the Promotion of the Abolition of Slavery, was seen as the Dutch counterpart of William Wilberforce, the eighteenth-century British abolitionist. However, fellow commission member and plantation owner A. P. Brugmans was bitterly disappointed by Groen's resignation and his criticism of the State Commission in his role as an MP. Instead of "enlightening the State Commission from within," Groen had "abandoned the banner," Brugmans felt.¹⁰ Groen's decision not to champion the abolitionist cause in the State Commission gave stakeholders the opportunity to influence the commission's reports and the bills based on them.

There were various reasons why the run-up to abolition in the Netherlands took a long time. A study of the Ministry of Colonies' archives reveals that the ministry devoted most of its time to the Dutch East Indies. Another factor slowing down the process was the individual involvement of administrators like Minister Baud and his successors, including Jan Jacob Rochussen. As a former governor-general, Rochussen had received a petition for the abolition of slavery in the Dutch East Indies but had ignored it. Still, in his role as the minister of colonies, Rochussen was the one who ushered the Emancipation Act for the Dutch East Indies through parliament. The law took effect in 1860.¹¹ He also wrote to the governor in Suriname that he hoped to "bring about the great measure of Emancipation—whatever one may think of it in the abstract ... in the next session [of the States General]."¹² After three failed attempts and a rejected

budget, Rochussen resigned. The progress of the bill was not only hindered by disinterest but also by the high turnover rate of ministers holding the Colonies portfolio. Between 1855 and the Atlantic Emancipation Act of 1862, parliament received six emancipation proposals, defended by four different ministers.

Moreover, it was usually an old hand from the Dutch East Indies who headed the Department of Colonies and who—in terms of West Indies affairs—was completely dependent on (his staff's) dossier knowledge and the information that he received from stakeholders in the region.

On July 1, 1863, the Emancipation Act came into effect in the Atlantic region. Slaveholders in Suriname received 300 guilders per enslaved person and 60 guilders if the emancipated had previously acquired the right to “manumission” (release by the owner). On Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, Saint Eustatius, and Saba, owners received 200 guilders and on Saint Martin 100 guilders per enslaved person. These different amounts were based on the difference in market value of the goods produced in the individual colonies. In total, the Dutch government paid out 9,864,360 guilders in compensation, amounting to over a third of the national budget for the year 1863. The Dutch government was able to pay this out of the budget surplus obtained from forced labor in the Dutch East Indies under the Cultivation System.¹³

Many historians have described the long-drawn-out legislative process from 1853 to 1862 that led up to the Emancipation Act. Most studies approach slavery as a socioeconomic and cultural phenomenon and were written by Dutch historians under the auspices of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in Leiden.

The historiography of the Dutch Caribbean received a significant impetus when scholars started responding to a groundbreaking article by Seymour Drescher, a British historian who focused on the causal relationship between capitalism and the abolition of slavery. In his response, historian Gert Oostindie provided an alternative explanation for the late abolition in the Netherlands: the modest economic importance of slavery-based production in the Atlantic region meant that the issue had been given no political priority.¹⁴ Renewed interest in the importance of slavery in the Atlantic system might lead to the conclusion that this explanation is less than plausible, and the time seems ripe to seek answers in another direction. In 1979, Surinamese historian Joseph Siwipersad wrote a standard work on the Dutch government and the abolition of slavery in Suriname.¹⁵

Rather than a cultural or social issue, he considered slavery primarily a political issue. From that angle, he argued that economically motivated owners delayed the decision-making process on the abolition of slavery.

State Supervision and Immigration, circa 1863–1900

For many enslaved people, the formal abolition of slavery did not mean immediate freedom. In Suriname, a period of state supervision, instituted by the Dutch government, began on October 1, 1863. More than 33,000 emancipated enslaved individuals were required to work under state supervision for an employer of their choice for a maximum of ten years. Furthermore, the government subsidized the immigration of contract laborers to the Caribbean. Despite abolition, Dutch officials remained convinced that the formerly enslaved had to be governed with a firm hand, and that Suriname, in particular, needed additional labor. In 1871, Nicolaas G. Pierson, Director of the Surinamese Immigration Society (1865–1870) and later Prime Minister, wrote: “The Emancipation Act has always been a failure in my eyes. ... I would have wanted: fifty years of state supervision and mandatory education ... while also importing foreign workers—because Suriname still needs more labor, even if all the Negroes work.”¹⁶ A year after this letter was written, the Second Chamber of parliament approved a treaty between the Dutch and British governments on the migration of Hindustani contract workers from British India to Suriname. After 1890, the Dutch also started bringing in Javanese contract workers. Thus, while the slave trade had been abolished in 1814 and slavery in 1860/1863, the Dutch government became ever more deeply involved in the recruitment and financing of immigrants from Asia, resulting in Suriname’s current demographic composition.

In addition, the powers of administrators and institutions in the colonies remained limited. The inhabitants’ dissatisfaction with this clearly showed during the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Colonial States of Suriname in May 1891. Riots broke out, resulting in one death and leading to the departure of the governor, M.A. de Savornin Lohman. Parliamentary chronicler Frans Netscher succinctly summarized the influence of the De Savornin Lohman family in both the colonies and The Hague: “Members of this family govern the darkies in the West Indies and the blacks in our Parliament on a Christian-historical basis!”¹⁷ Prime Minister Mackay then sounded out former Minister of Colonies Willem de Brauw for the governorship of Suriname. De Brauw was not keen to assume

a role in Suriname that would effectively be tightly controlled by the government in The Hague. After all, the governor represented the Crown and administered the colony based on decisions made by the Dutch government. De Brauw knew “exactly how much needed to be done in Suriname” because the government “had already ruined things in Suriname during the slave emancipation.” At the same time, the former minister noted “how woefully little a governor can do ... as long as political circles in the Netherlands remain completely indifferent to the fate of the colony, which they regard as a burden that they want to hear as little as possible about.”¹⁸

The most notable aspect of De Brauw’s statement is his observation about the Hague’s indifference towards the fate of the colony and its inhabitants, even though they held full political responsibility. De Brauw thus confirmed the existing view of how administrators and politicians handled the political responsibility for slavery in the nineteenth century. However, current research suggests that we should question the status of this disinterest as an explanation for the late abolition of slavery in the Netherlands. Slavery, both its abolition and its aftermath, did not completely pass politicians by, but they prioritized domestic reforms, the economic interests of the colonial metropole, and maintaining the colonies as profit-making territories. Consequently, they did not use their political authority over the colony to expedite the emancipation of enslaved people.

Conclusion

To do justice to their role in the history of slavery, several Dutch cities, provinces, and institutions have conducted research into the part they played. First of all, the outcomes of this growing body of histories need to be synthesized. In addition, three lines in the political history of slavery need further investigation.

First, the 1815 constitution regarded the colonies as the domain of the Orange monarchy. Hence, supreme control was in the hands of King William I until 1840. A study of the House of Orange’s involvement in slavery and colonialism is therefore in order, and has been underway since December 2022.

Second, we need to study the influence of administrators with a colonial background. William I and William II relied on men like Johannes van den Bosch and Jean C. Baud, who began their careers in the Dutch East Indies. Frits de Kock, a childhood friend of William III, became his private secre-

tary and director of the King's Cabinet. He was born in Amboina (present-day Ambon), and his father was Hendrik de Kock, the commander in the Java War (1825–1830) and Minister of the Interior under William I.

Third, we need to study the period following the Emancipation Act. Upon the abolition of slavery, slave owners received compensation. We know not only where this money came from—from forced labor in Asia—but also how much each owner and investor received. Now we should investigate what the recipients of the compensation did with this money.

Researchers studying the labor history of the British Empire have argued that the abolition of slavery led to intensified colonization and a shift to a production system based on unfree contract labor. In her study on labor migration from British India and Java to Suriname, Rosemarijn Hoefte has already shown that this shift was driven more by the legal instruments to control cheap labor than the migrants' economic motives and the theoretical safeguarding of their welfare. Historian Ulbe Bosma has also pointed out similarities in the treatment of workers by colonial powers in the second half of the nineteenth century. But unlike other countries, the Netherlands did not grant the formerly enslaved people Dutch citizenship after their emancipation. We need to clarify the political decision making underlying this decision and the alternative forms of citizenship that later emerged. Only then will we better understand the long-term impact of the history of slavery.

Notes

- 1 An anti-authoritarian revolution against the stadtholders, the princes of Orange, by a combination of Dutch revolutionaries who espoused democratic ideals and their French allies who later occupied the Netherlands. The Batavian Revolution marks the end of the Dutch Republic.
- 2 Dirk Alkemade, "Why was Slavery not Abolished in 1798? Humanity and Human Rights in the Batavian Revolution," *BMGN-LCHR* online first (2024): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.51769/bmgn-lchr.12807>.
- 3 The United Kingdom of the Netherlands was the unofficial name of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg during the period of 1815–1830.
- 4 Pepijn Brandon and Karen Lurvink, "Shrewd Sirens of Humanity": The Changing Shape of Pro-Slavery Arguments in the Netherlands (1789–1814)," *Revista Almanack* 14 (2016): 3–26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2236-463320161402>.
- 5 Angelie Sens, *De kolonieman: Johannes van den Bosch (1780–1844), volksverheffer in naam van de koning* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2019), 222–26, 237, 241–45.
- 6 Maartje Janse, *De afschaffers: Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland 1840–1880* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2007).
- 7 Lauren Lauret, "No Emancipation without Compensation: Slave Owners' Petitions and the End of Slavery in the Netherlands, c. 1833–1873," *BMGN-LCHR* online first (2024): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.51769/bmgn-lchr.12783>.
- 8 Joseph Siwpersad, *De Nederlandse regering en de afschaffing van de Surinaamse slavernij, 1833–1863* (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis 1979).
- 9 M. Kuitenbrouwer, "De Nederlandse afschaffing van de slavernij in vergelijkend perspectief," *BMGN-LCHR* 93, no. 1 (1978): 96.
- 10 Baud Collection, National Archives (NA), Inv. no. 930, Brugmans to Baud, May 5, 1856.
- 11 Reggie Baay, "De stille afschaffing van de slavernij in Nederlands-Indië," in *De slavernij in Oost en West: Het Amsterdam onderzoek*, ed. Pepijn Brandon et al. (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2020), 329–32.
- 12 Cited in Karwan Fatah-Black, Lauren Lauret and Joris van den Tol, *Serving the Chain? De Nederlandsche Bank and the Last Decades of Slavery, 1814–1863* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2023).
- 13 Janny de Jong, "Van batig slot naar ereschuld: De discussie over de financiële verhouding tussen Nederland en Indië en de hervorming van de Nederlandse koloniale politiek, 1860–1900," (PhD diss., University of Groningen, 1989).
- 14 Gert Oostindie, "Explaining Dutch Abolition," in *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit*, ed. Gert Oostindie (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1995), 14.
- 15 Siwpersad, *De Nederlandse regering en de afschaffing van de Surinaamse slavernij*.
- 16 J.G.S.J. van Maarseveen, *Briefwisseling van Nicolaas Gerard Pierson 1839–1909*, Pierson to Van Houten, November 30, 1871 (Amsterdam: De Nederlandse Bank, 1993), 309.
- 17 Frans Netscher, *In en om de Tweede Kamer: Parlementaire portretten en schetsen* (Amsterdam: Warendorf 1889), 55–56. "The blacks" were members of the Anti-Revolutionary Party: conservative, often orthodox Protestant politicians who were opposed to liberal and secular changes in society.
- 18 NA, Mackay van Ophemert archives, 2.21.115, Inv. no. 622, W.M. de Brauw to AE. Mackay, March 27, 1891.

Abstract

After the slave trade was formally abolished in Dutch colonial territories in 1814, it continued illegally. In Elmina, Suriname, and the Caribbean islands, the trade persisted for decades under the watch of the Dutch authorities. In Indonesia, there was widespread enslavement and slave raiding, which the colonial authorities could not have suppressed even if they had tried to, for lack of resources. These practices continued until the very end of the nineteenth century. Little attention has been paid to the massive scale of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago in the nineteenth century, and in Southeast Asia in general.

Keywords: slave trade; slave raiding; Indonesia; Africa; Dutch Antilles; Suriname

IO. Forced Relocation and Illegal Slave Trading After Abolition

Ulbe Bosma

When the British government returned the Dutch colonial territories to the Netherlands in 1815, the Netherlands was obliged to prohibit and combat the slave trade in these colonies and their territorial waters.¹ This included the Dutch Antilles, Suriname, the Dutch settlement of Elmina (on the coast of present-day Ghana), and the Indonesian archipelago. The abolition process took many decades and in the Indonesian archipelago was only completed in the early twentieth century. Although the number of people abducted and traded after abolition was much higher in Asia than in the Atlantic, the situation in the Atlantic region was politically more sensitive due to the continuing illegal slave trade, particularly by French, Portuguese, and Spanish ships. The British frequently accused the Dutch of negligence and even complicity in maintaining slavery in the Atlantic region.

Indonesian Archipelago

In the early nineteenth century, Dutch authority in most parts of the Indonesian archipelago was still marginal. Only in Java and the Moluccas could the administration directly intervene in local affairs and effectively deal with the frequent kidnappings, particularly by pirate ships. Centuries of colonial slave trade and a rapidly growing Chinese and European demand for products like rattan and pearls had significantly fueled the probably ancient practices of abduction and slave trading. Thus, the rapid growth of global trade, with the deployment of ever larger ships and new communication methods, played a crucial role in the persistence, and in some cases expansion, of the slave trade and slavery in the Indonesian archipelago.

In the early nineteenth century, large pirate fleets plagued the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, and present-day Malaysia. Most of these ships originated from the powerful independent Sultanate of Sulu, located north of Kalimantan (Borneo). The pirates hijacked all ships in their path, including those sailing under European flags, and raided entire villages. In their violent plunder, they killed 1,500 to 2,000 people and enslaved 3,000 to 4,000 people in the Indonesian archipelago annually.² They even carried out raids on the coast of Java, seat of the colonial administration and the best-defended island in the region. Combating piracy was therefore a high priority for the Dutch East Indies government.

Despite their political and economic rivalry, the British and Dutch increasingly cooperated to tackle maritime slave raids in Southeast Asian waters. Initially, they struggled against the fast pirate ships, but this changed when their colonial navies started using steamships. Nonetheless, piracy remained a serious threat to shipping and fishing until the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to actively combating piracy, the Dutch East Indies' colonial administration in 1820 started registering slaves to halt the supply of enslaved people to the colonial territories. Any unregistered enslaved person was legally free, and newly enslaved people could not be traded. In this way, slavery was expected to gradually decrease through manumission and mortality. The number of registered enslaved people declined from approximately 20,000 in 1820 to around 10,000 in 1841.

Most of the slaves that remained performed household work, but some toiled on the nutmeg plantations in the Banda Islands, which were owned by Dutch descendants. In the 1830s, the administration considered solving the labor shortage there by transferring 400 slaves from Bali. However, this idea was abandoned because it involved importing enslaved people from an area not directly controlled by the Dutch, but by local rulers. This would have contravened the spirit, if not the letter, of the British-Dutch treaty against the slave trade. So it was not Balinese, but a growing number of convicts and exiles from the Dutch colonies who were sent to Banda, although it cannot be ruled out that illegal slave transports took place, too.

More than 10 percent of the Indonesian population lived in slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century. There were enslaved people living throughout the archipelago, except in Java, where slavery had been more or less eradicated. In absolute numbers—which remain rough estimates—anywhere from 567,000 to 806,000 people lived in slavery, approximately

a quarter of whom had ended up enslaved through kidnapping or the maritime slave trade.³ This number dwarfed the 10,000 to 20,000 enslaved people registered by the colonial authorities.

After the formal abolition of slavery in the Dutch East Indies in 1860, the colonial administration concluded treaties with the many independent principalities in the archipelago, obliging them to combat the slave trade and gradually eliminate slavery. Sometimes, this resulted in manumissions for which the former owners were compensated. However, enforcement of these treaties, let alone military intervention, was rare; the colonial administration simply lacked the manpower for this. Moreover, the colonial army was waging a bloody war against Aceh after 1873 and could not afford other military conflicts. For this reason, the registration and emancipation of a large enslaved population in Southwest Sulawesi, which had begun in 1863, was postponed in the 1870s.

It was not just pirates who continued the slave trade in the Indonesian archipelago. Europeans were guilty of the same. In the first half of the nineteenth century, French slave ships transported slaves likely numbering in the thousands from Bali to plantations in Mauritius and possibly Réunion. In the 1840s, ships flying the Dutch flag were caught by local authorities transporting enslaved people from Portuguese Timor. The slavers were heading for Makassar, a slave trading hub run by European descendants.⁴ In the 1830s, even Dutch administrative officials were involved in the export of enslaved people from the island of Nias, off the coast of Sumatra, to the Sumatran city of Padang. In their own defense, the officials claimed that this was not slave trading but the transport of *pandelingen*, or debt slaves, who were required to work to pay off money that they owed and would be freed once they had done so. Debt bondage was not yet illegal at the time. The matter was referred to King William I, resulting in a decree that made the trade in debt slaves punishable. However, the colonial administration often turned a blind eye to the import of slaves and debt slaves to mollify local economic elites. In the 1870s, Dutch colonial officials in Pontianak, for example, deliberately declined to take measures to stop traders of Arabian origin from openly dealing in enslaved people.

In the same period, practically nothing was done to obstruct the continuing export of enslaved people from Sulawesi, Bali, Timor, Nias, and Sumba. In 1877, as many as 500 people were sold and exported from Sumba. In Central Sulawesi, abduction and enslavement persisted until the end of the nineteenth century, driven by significant economic interests in the

production of products like pepper and rattan. Human trafficking also occurred during the large-scale Chinese labor migration to plantations and mines in Asia and the Americas, which began in the 1840s. In 1856, the *Bellona*, a vessel sailing under the Dutch flag bound for Cuba, arrived in the port of Batavia with over 300 kidnapped Chinese on board. The Dutch Ministry of Justice intervened but limited its response to warning Dutch shipowners to refrain from this trade.⁵ Eventually, in 1868, the Dutch East Indies government decreed that given the existing ban on slavery, shipowners had to show proof for every individual Chinese immigrant that they were in the archipelago of their own free will.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Dutch East Indies government came under increasing national and international pressure to combat slavery and the slave trade. Telegraph connections and the rapidly developing press made violations more quickly and more widely known. Meanwhile, the Dutch were making their power felt ever deeper in the archipelago. In the 1880s, for example, the colonial administration threatened to blockade the port of Lombok to stop the ongoing slave imports for the island's rice fields. Fear of reputational damage and foreign interference prompted the Dutch East Indies government to forcibly subdue independent principalities. The pretext of fighting slavery came in handy in this context. The first such operation was carried out in Lombok in 1894 and then in neighboring Bali in 1908, after which the authorities began implementing the abolition of slavery. In 1900, the colonial army was sent to Nias for the second time (after its first bloody expedition in 1863). It took another fourteen years to get the island fully under control and to effectively end slavery and the slave trade there.

But this does not mean that the gradual elimination of slavery and the slave trade had been completed by 1914. As for forced labor by prisoners, that practice was far from over. It is important to note the high number of forced laborers that the colonial authorities exploited in the nineteenth century. Each year, 0.5 percent of the Indonesian population—more than 2 percent of the adult male population—was sentenced to forced labor. The coal mines initially operated almost entirely based on convict labor.⁶

Elmina

The colonial administration in the Dutch East Indies faced a constant shortage of military capability, partly because European soldiers died in large numbers in the tropics. This explains why the government resorted to recruiting soldiers through its colony of Elmina on the West African coast (modern-day Ghana). Elmina had been the main Atlantic supply point for enslaved people for the Dutch since the West India Company captured it in 1637. The Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1814 was supposed to put a stop to this, but in practice, it continued. From 1832 to 1873, about 3,000 enslaved men were recruited as soldiers in the Dutch East Indies army, and fifty in the Surinamese army.⁷ These were often prisoners of war held by Ashanti chiefs, who were ransomed by the Dutch, after which the recruit had to repay the ransom amount from his salary. In theory, African soldiers in Dutch service were free, but in practice, they were subject to military discipline, and desertion was severely punished.



Two portraits by Isaac Israëls of former African soldiers of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL). On the left is “Jan Kooi” and on the right is “Kees Pop.” The soldiers’ original African names were not documented.

Even after this form of recruitment was halted under British pressure, the Dutch continued it on the sly on a smaller scale. In a renewed protest in 1861, England emphasized that this recruitment encouraged slave hunting. Incidentally, the British had a double standard when it came to purchasing enslaved people for their own purposes. Planters in the British West Indies sometimes bought enslaved people on the Dutch Antilles, only to employ them as contract laborers on their plantations after granting them freedom. It was just as impossible for these laborers to quit their British employment as it was for the African soldiers to desert from the Dutch East Indies army.⁸

Nevertheless, the English protests against the recruitment in Elmina should be seen in the context of the large-scale illegal slave transports across the Atlantic Ocean, in which Spanish, Portuguese, American, and French ships played a leading role, frequently changing names and flags. The Netherlands was not blameless in this regard. In 1829, the commander of an English warship observed that the slave trade in Accra took place under the Dutch flag, in broad daylight, and only a few hundred meters from the English fort. Later, historian Joseph Dorsey suggested that there was a link between West Africa and Curaçao, enabling the smuggling of kidnapped Africans into the Caribbean, which also involved Dutch ships. It is certain that slave ships were regularly supplied with food and water in Elmina. British politicians repeatedly, and rightly, accused the Netherlands of negligence because providing rowers and canoes for the provisioning of slavers violated the British-Dutch slavery treaty. The Dutch excuse that they could not know in advance if a ship was a slaver must have been received with derision in London. The holds of slave ships were, after all, clearly designed for that purpose.⁹

Suriname

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Surinamese sugar cane plantations were in urgent need of labor, primarily because the extremely harsh working conditions led to high mortality rates and low birth rates. Planters therefore purchased enslaved people from the coffee plantations that were in decline. In addition, there were substantial slave imports, averaging around 100 people per year between 1816—when the British returned Suriname to Dutch control—and 1827. Around 1820, according to some observers, the number varied from 2,500 to 3,000 people, often brought over by slave traders from Martinique and Guadeloupe.¹⁰ These enslaved

people were often purported to come from the French Antilles, which was permitted under the Anglo-Dutch treaty. Up until the early 1820s, enslaved people would still be publicly auctioned without even the pretense of hiding their recent arrival from Africa.

We know a fair amount about this illegal slave trade, mostly thanks to two British judges who served in Suriname from 1822 to 1845. They, along with two Dutch judges, formed a court that had jurisdiction over the slave trade and could free its victims. Their correspondence reveals that hundreds of kidnapped Africans were still being imported into Suriname in the 1820s. For instance, in 1823, a French ship sailed right past Fort Amsterdam up the Suriname River with 350 enslaved people taken from Africa. The British judges concluded that the Dutch colonial administration in Suriname was in cahoots with the smugglers.¹¹

The British took a dim view of the lack of action by colonial officials in Suriname to combat the slave trade. They repeatedly pointed out the absence of a Dutch naval ship patrolling the coastal waters and urged the Netherlands to deploy an adequate number of warships there. Still, the Netherlands did take some measures. In 1824, penalties for the slave trade were increased to a fine of 10,000 guilders, 15 years of forced labor, and confiscation of the ship. Two years later, a slave registry was established for Suriname by Royal Decree, similar to the one in the Dutch East Indies, which was intended to prevent the illegal import of enslaved people. The appointment of Johannes van den Bosch as Commissioner-General for the Antilles and Suriname, and the fact that he was explicitly tasked with ending Atlantic slave imports into Suriname, reportedly had a positive effect. After 1827, the number of imported enslaved people appears to have declined.¹²

In any case, in 1833, the two British judges in Paramaribo reported to the British Foreign Secretary, Palmerston, that no enslaved people had been smuggled into Suriname for the preceding three years. Only imports from Curaçao had taken place, which was not in violation of the Anglo-Dutch treaty. However, it is doubtful that these enslaved people were truly from Curaçao, as other sources show that very few enslaved people—at most ten to twenty per year—were brought from this island to Suriname. Moreover, foreign slave traders continued trying to import kidnapped Africans into Suriname. After the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1834, the British judges in Suriname became increasingly assertive in their actions.

They accused the colonial administration of employing freed victims of the Atlantic slave trade on sugar cane plantations. They found it unlikely that this was voluntary, given the harsh labor conditions and high mortality on the plantations. The Dutch denied this, but the British remained skeptical, as the Foreign Secretary made clear to the Dutch government. Clearly, London's patience was wearing thin. The British now insisted that the treaty banning the slave trade be enforced to the letter. They were appalled by the continued existence of slavery in the Dutch kingdom. For their part, the Dutch authorities in Suriname, and the planters in particular, increasingly viewed the British judges as meddling busybodies. The planters did everything they could to make life difficult for these judges. Ultimately, the mixed court was abolished in 1845.¹³

Curaçao

From the seventeenth century until the British occupation of 1807–1816, Curaçao was a Caribbean slave trading hub. After the Dutch regained control of this island, where more enslaved people lived than in the rest of the Dutch Antilles combined, Curaçao remained a center of small-scale slave trade for decades. Between 1816 and 1847, over 4,000 enslaved people were exported. An 1834 overview shows that 87 percent of the 372 exported enslaved people went to Puerto Rico. Only seventeen made the crossing to Suriname, and another ten to the Danish colony of Saint Thomas.¹⁴

Before permission was granted for such exports, the enslaved individual had to declare before an official that he or she had no objection to being sold off the island. This supposed voluntariness seems dubious, but might not be entirely false. Unlike Suriname, with its extensive sugar production, the enslaved population in Curaçao grew without external input. The island also faced failed corn crops, the main source of food, which led to famines. Parents reportedly felt compelled to sell their children to save them from starvation—a topic deserving of further research. Plantation owners also felt compelled to sell their enslaved people and preferred doing business with planters in Puerto Rico, where the sugar cane plantations drove up the price of enslaved people. This explains why an 1831 measure to prevent the sale of enslaved people outside Dutch territory was soon repealed under pressure from the Curaçaoan elite. Still, the export of enslaved people decreased in the 1830s.¹⁵

In addition to these legalized transactions, illegal slave transports also took place from Curaçao, even though the introduction of a slave registry in 1839 was supposed to put a stop to this. Such a registry worked better against illegal imports than exports, and did nothing at all to prevent the outfitting and provisioning of slave ships. In 1839, one of the two British judges stationed in Suriname noted that a schooner had sailed from Curaçao to Puerto Rico. In 1840, the same ship returned to Curaçao, then sailed under a different name and flag to Saint Thomas, and finally docked in Curaçao under yet another flag. Curaçao's governor, Reinier Frederik Baron Raders, dismissed all suspicions, claiming that it was a ship carrying goods like salt, and was not a slaver.¹⁶ This explanation was hardly credible, especially to the British authorities, who saw it as part of a larger pattern of extensive illegal transatlantic slave transports to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil. Moreover, French and American slave ships had previously acquired Dutch shipping papers to avoid British checks under the Dutch flag.

The fact that Curaçao was a free port made it an especially attractive haven for slavers. In 1845, the Spanish ship *El Conde de Mirasol*—presumably just one of the names of this ship—was outfitted in Curaçao and then sailed to West Africa as a slaver. The intra-Caribbean slave trade remained a loophole, and this dovetailed nicely with Curaçao's role as an illegal transit port, the British authorities feared. They successfully pressed for a complete halt to permits for the export of enslaved people from Curaçao, which took force in 1847.

Conclusion

We can conclude that the slave trade continued for decades, even after the British required the Dutch to combat it after regaining control of their colonies in 1815. Illegal human trafficking reached its biggest proportions in the Indonesian archipelago; the Dutch colonial administration was partly to blame for this. The Dutch dragged their feet and often turned a blind eye, but even the British, who sharply criticized the Dutch, acted no differently in Asia and Africa. In the Atlantic region, the British did have a point. In Elmina, Suriname, and the Caribbean islands, the slave trade persisted under the watch of the Dutch authorities even after 1818.

Clearly, there are still significant gaps in our knowledge of slavery, the slave trade, and human trafficking in the Dutch colonies in the nineteenth century. It is especially notable how little attention historians have paid

to the massive scale of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago in the nineteenth century, and in Southeast Asia in general. Research into slavery and the slave trade in Dutch colonial areas and waters has become much more feasible now that the National Archives have made a large portion of the colonial archives digitally accessible. Compared to the rest of the world, there is a lot of catching up to do.

Notes

- 1 At the end of the Napoleonic era, practically all Dutch colonies were in British hands. The Dutch regained control of these colonies around 1815, partly as a result of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1814.
- 2 Ulbe Bosma, *The Making of a Periphery: How Island Southeast Asia became a Mass Exporter of Labor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 54.
- 3 Bosma, *The Making of a Periphery*, 55–57.
- 4 NA, Archives of the Dutch Ministry of Colonies, 2.10.01, Inv. no. 43–56.
- 5 NA, Archives of the Dutch Ministry of Colonies, Inv. no. 575.
- 6 Matthias van Rossum, “The Carceral Colony: Colonial Exploitation, Coercion, and Control in the Dutch East Indies, 1810s–1940s,” *International Review of Social History* 63, no. S26 (2018): 75.
- 7 Ineke van Kessel, “West African Soldiers in the Dutch East Indies: From Donkos to Black Dutchmen,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* no. 9 (2005): 4160; NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 49, scan 370.
- 8 NA, Archives of the Dutch Ministry of Colonies, Inv. no. 31; Joseph Siwipersad, *De Nederlandse regering en de afschaffing van de Surinaamse slavernij, 1833–1863* (Groningen: Boumas’s Boekhuis, 1979), 14.
- 9 NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 42, scan 157; Joseph C. Dorsey, *Slave Traffic in the Age of Abolition, Puerto Rico, West Africa and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean, 1815–1859* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 200.
- 10 Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast: Roofbouw en overleven in een Caribische plantagekolonie, 1750–1863* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1993), 314; Joseph Siwipersad, *De Nederlandse regering en de afschaffing*, 47.
- 11 NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 41, scan 551.
- 12 NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 41, scans 643, 649, 1132, 1285, 1565.
- 13 NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 42, scan 1114; NA, Archives of Curaçao, Bonaire and Aruba, 1.05.12.02, Inv. no. 154; NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 42, scans 1116, 139; 50, 808.
- 14 NA, Archives of Curaçao, Bonaire and Aruba, Inv. no. 154; W.E. Renkema, *Het Curaçaose plantagebedrijf in de negentiende eeuw* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1981), 119.
- 15 Renkema, *Het Curaçaose plantagebedrijf, 180–81*.
- 16 NA, Duplicate Administrative Archives of Suriname, Inv. no. 48, scans 311, 49, 468, 1091.

Research Method: Digitizing Slave Registers

Thanks to hundreds of volunteers and donors, the Dutch–Surinamese–Antillean project *Historische Database Suriname en de Cariben* (Historical Database Suriname and the Caribbean, HDSC) recently succeeded in making Suriname and Curaçao’s slave registers available online, at ru.nl/hdsc. These registers make it possible to track enslaved people through time, from one owner to another and from one colony to another and thus to record a cross-section of the diverse lives of the enslaved.

Slave registers were created by colonial authorities to establish a comprehensive “bookkeeping” system of all people who lived in slavery in a particular area. The registers were introduced by the British after they had abolished the slave trade in 1808. Their purpose was to prevent illegal enslavement and trading of people. It was under British rule that the registers were introduced in the Dutch East Indies and Suriname.

After the Dutch reassumed control of the colonies, these registers developed into the Registers of Serfs in the Dutch East Indies from 1819, and into the slave register of Suriname in 1826 and registers in Curaçao and the other Antilles from the late 1830s. In the East Indies, a separate slave register was kept for each residency (administrative area), but only in the parts of the archipelago that were under direct Dutch rule. In the Antilles, every island had its own register. Suriname was the only territory under Dutch rule that had a central register for the entire colony. No slave registers were kept at the Dutch forts and outposts scattered along the West African coast.

The registers clearly show the dehumanization that is typical of chattel slavery. To begin with, people are described as the “property” of others. In general, every slave register contained the names of the enslaved and the owner, the enslaved’s date of birth and death, and where applicable, information about their sale, manumission, and escape. This information

was organized differently from place to place. Most registers also listed the enslaved's sex, their age or year of birth, and their mother's name. The East Indies registers and the British registers in South Africa also contain the enslaved's place of birth or country of origin. This information was not recorded in Suriname and the Antilles. The Surinamese registers do include the name of the plantation where each enslaved person lived because there was a strict legal distinction between "plantation slaves" and "house slaves." The British colonial slave registers in South Africa and Guyana also noted each person's occupation and skin color or ethnicity. This information is absent from the Dutch slave registers, probably because skin color formally played no role in the legal status of enslaved people.

All this information makes the slave registers a valuable source for sociohistorical, demographic, and genealogical research. The enslaved were not registered as members of a family, and fathers were never mentioned. Therefore, genealogical research is only possible through the female line, unless a cross-reference can be made with the same person in other archives, such as civil registries or baptism records. Because the slave registers were introduced several years after the transatlantic slave trade was abolished, it is virtually impossible to trace individuals to the specific slave ship that brought them over from Africa. Another constraint on research is that some registers are missing. Curaçao is the only colony whose registers have survived in their entirety. The registers from Suriname are mostly complete starting from 1851, but older series have gaps. The slave registers of the Dutch East Indies are largely lost; only fragments have survived.

Slave registers can provide context in relation to other sources, such as newspapers, wills, and testaments, and court reports that name an enslaved person and their owner. Since the slave registers were put online, tens of thousands of people all over the world have searched for their ancestors, and the registers have been used by researchers for television series, podcasts, books, plays, and educational materials aimed at making the history of slavery more visible. For scholars, the large body of information presents an opportunity to reconstruct individual people's lives, but also to discover patterns underlying the individual data, such as the notable difference in life expectancy for men and women in Suriname, and the better chances of survival for the enslaved in Curaçao.

The HDSC's ultimate goal is to reconstruct the entire population of Suriname and Curaçao from 1830 to 1950, to facilitate the research into the impact of slavery and colonialism on subsequent generations. For this reason, the civil registry of Suriname is now also being digitized and linked to the slave registers and to the registers of contract laborers who were brought to Suriname starting in 1853. The next step will be to expand the dataset with records from Aruba, Saint Eustatius, and other areas in the Caribbean. The importance of digitizing and interlinking these sources is best illustrated by the example of Saint Eustatius. In 1863, 1,201 people were emancipated there, but 826 of them are absent from the island's civil registry. This can only be understood if we see Saint Eustatius in a broader context, because many of these "missing" people later show up in the population registers of Curaçao or the Danish Virgin Islands, or even in the registers of contract laborers in Suriname. So clearly, knowledge about migration during and after slavery is essential to understanding the history of slavery in this region.

Abstract

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the Dutch financial system was closely connected to colonial expansion and slavery. The Dutch East India Company's innovative financial structure—permanent capital with transferable shares traded on a secondary market—was quickly adopted by the newly established West India Company as well. The Atlantic plantation sector that arose in the second half of the seventeenth century required vast amounts of capital, giving rise to a variety of new forms of investment that had a lasting impact on the structure of the Dutch financial and service sectors. This chapter outlines some of the ways in which Dutch financial firms and wealthy families continued to profit from slavery well into the nineteenth century.

Keywords: slavery; finance; capital; plantation

Slavery, Colonialism, and the Financial Sector

Pepijn Brandon

In April 2022, ABN AMRO Bank formally apologized for the role that its predecessors had played in the history of international slavery. Soon afterward, De Nederlandsche Bank (DNB) followed suit. ABN AMRO's most notable predecessor whose connections to slavery had been scrutinized was Hope & Co. This was one of the largest international trading and finance houses of the latter half of the eighteenth century. During this period, Hope & Co earned between a quarter and a third of its annual revenue from slavery-related activities. The financial giant provided and managed loans to plantations in Dutch, British, and Danish colonies, profited from trade in commodities produced by slave labor in Asia and the Caribbean, and lent money to other major European trading houses that invested in plantations. Though much of the firm was eventually sold off, it continued to finance the slavery economy well into the nineteenth century with investments in plantations in the southern United States, for instance.¹

The bank's direct participation in plantation loans was part of a much broader involvement in slavery and colonialism. One of the cofounders of the firm, Thomas Hope, was an administrator for both the West India Company (WIC) and the Dutch East India Company (VOC), and, in that capacity, acted as a representative of the Stadtholders, William IV and William V. On the British market, Hope & Co speculated extensively in shares of the British East India Company. As the issuer of government bonds, the firm also financed many colonial ventures and played a significant role in facilitating the Louisiana Purchase (1803), which gave the fledgling United States of America control over large plantation areas in the South. Hope & Co also directly depended on the success of European

colonial exploits to be paid back for state loans. For example, the revenues from the trade in Brazilian diamonds and tobacco, partially obtained through slave labor, served as collateral for large loans in the early nineteenth century.²

Hope & Co typifies Dutch banking and finance's historical stakes in slavery and colonialism, though the firm's involvement was exceptional in terms of its size. We know from recent research into De Nederlandsche Bank (DNB) that the financial sector remained deeply entangled with slavery and colonialism in the last decades of slavery in the nineteenth century.³

Between the late sixteenth and late nineteenth centuries, colonial and slavery-related enterprises were financed in many different ways. It is impossible to discuss all of these in this short chapter, let alone analyze the worldview and mentality that underpinned this widespread system of investing in human trafficking or products obtained through forced labor. Therefore, I will focus here on three prominent ways in which the Dutch were financially involved: the financing of colonial trading companies in the seventeenth century, the expansion of the West Indies plantation sector in the eighteenth century, and legacies of the colonial and slave economies in the nineteenth century and beyond.

Financing the VOC and the WIC

The rise of Dutch slave trading and the organization of slavery in Dutch-controlled areas was inextricably linked to the VOC and WIC. But these companies never operated in isolation. As States General-chartered companies with extensive trade monopolies, they were partly funded by private investors, many of whom tried to profit from an expanding colonial trade happening beyond the purview of the VOC and WIC. The VOC was responsible for one of the most important financial innovations in the history of capitalism; it became the first company in the world with permanent capital and tradable shares.

This corporate structure was already common before the VOC was established in 1602. At that time, a company was a temporary partnership between merchants. Each contributed their own capital to facilitate an enterprise, such as the outfitting of a ship. These investments were made for a single voyage or a limited period. After that, the partners dissolved the company, received their initial capital back and divided the profits or losses. This is how an entrepreneur like Balthazar de Moucheron (ca. 1552–1630),

who was tangentially involved in the slave trade on the African coast, organized various fleets to Asia before the establishment of the VOC. Johan van der Veken, one of the first known Dutch participants in the transatlantic slave trade, set up similar temporary companies for his trade voyages on which he dealt in sugar and enslaved humans in the Atlantic region.



Surinamese plantations were often financed by European banks. This is probably the Jagtlust Plantation, built in 1735 by Frederik Berewout, director of both the WIC and the Society of Suriname. This print by Hendrik Huygens shows an almost idyllic plantation scene.

Organizing the trade with Asia through ad-hoc companies quickly proved ill-suited to Dutch economic and military ambitions. Mainly thanks to the efforts of Grand Pensionary Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, the various “pre-companies” united in 1602 into a single company supported by the States General. This “United East India Company,” commonly known as the Dutch East India Company (VOC), was granted a monopoly on Dutch trade between Asia and Europe and was allowed to use its initial capital of 6.4 million guilders, raised by issuing shares, to wage war, establish colonies, and administer justice in areas that it conquered on behalf of the States General. In terms of financing structure, however, it resembled a traditional company; the VOC was to be liquidated after ten years for the

benefit of the shareholders, who could then decide to set up a new company. But the enormous costs of war and conquest weighed on trade profits and the dividends paid to shareholders. The States General feared that the financiers, upon the company's liquidation, would take their money and decline to reinvest in a similar enterprise. Therefore, they took a radical new step: in 1612, the Dutch state allowed the company to ignore the promised liquidation date and indefinitely postpone repayment of the originally invested capital. This naturally led to tensions with the shareholders. Some even tried to set up their own businesses to break the VOC monopoly. The tensions lasted until 1623, when new guarantees from the state, combined with the VOC's breakthrough in Asia—forced by Jan Pieterszoon Coen's brutal, and on the Banda Islands even genocidal, conquests—resolved the conflicts in favor of the VOC directors.⁴ Around the same time, the States General also granted a charter to the WIC, modeled after its Asian counterpart. Initially, investors were cautious, spooked by the VOC's move to renege on the promise of returning the initial investment after ten years. By 1623, however, a start-up capital of 7.1 million guilders had been raised.⁵ From the beginning, the WIC faced much more direct competition from private entrepreneurs than the VOC. Several goods were excluded from the monopoly, and the WIC was heavily dependent on private merchants for outfitting its trade fleets.

The historiography of Dutch overseas expansion has mainly focused on the two large trading companies. We know a great deal about their financial structure, profits and losses, and the conflicts between companies and shareholders. However, investing in a trading company was certainly not the only way to profit from colonial expansion. In the Atlantic region and in Asia, the VOC and WIC acted as umbrella organizations for all sorts of private activities, legal and illegal. These included investments by company employees and free citizens in the slave trade and goods produced by enslaved people, even in areas controlled by the VOC. Recent research on colonial commerce, therefore, focuses less on tracing the direct money flows through the companies and more on the private capital flows around and behind them.⁶

Financing the Plantation Sector

The Dutch States General granted the VOC and WIC total or partial monopolies on trade in “the East” and “the West” and broad powers to set

up colonial administrations. The companies did not hold a monopoly on the production of colonial agricultural goods. In some parts of the world, production remained largely in the hands of local elites who collaborated with the companies, while in other places, European colonists took control of agriculture or even established entirely new colonial export economies. The most extreme example of the latter strategy was the establishment of a fully slavery-based plantation sector in various places in the Americas.

The mid-seventeenth century writer Ottho Keye is the first Dutchman known to have systematically used the word “plantation” in its current sense. He calculated that investing 5,000 guilders in a colony on the South American coast would yield far more profit than a much larger stake in the Netherlands or an agricultural colony in North America. His hypothetical example assumed that the entrepreneur would spend 3,750 guilders of the initial capital on the purchase of “a number of thirty Slaves or Negroes.” The remainder of the 5,000 guilders would be spent on tools, building materials, food, and cheap clothing for the enslaved people.⁷ Before long, it became clear that Keye had grossly underestimated the capital required to establish and maintain a plantation. By the mid-eighteenth century, the estimated average value of a coffee plantation was 105,000 guilders, and that of a sugar cane plantation 129,000 guilders.⁸ Annual expenses to keep an average plantation running could far exceed 20,000 guilders.⁹ A Caribbean plantation required a much bigger investment than an agricultural business in the Dutch Republic.¹⁰ The plantations became the center of a vast, uniquely integrated network of overseas industrial investments, large-scale use of African enslaved labor, a cluster of business and financial services, and trade, processing, and consumption networks reaching deep into the European hinterland. Many experts see the plantation sector, with its large-scale integration of (forced) labor and capital, industrial agriculture, trade, and consumption, as an important precursor of the modern-day capitalist world economy.¹¹

VOC-controlled areas in Asia also had plantations where the enslaved were forced to produce goods for export. However, the VOC’s monopoly on intercontinental trade posed a significant barrier to direct private investment from Europe in Asian slavery. Nonetheless, merchants and bankers in the Dutch Republic profited from slavery in Asia by investing in the VOC, by reselling mace, nutmeg, and other goods produced by enslaved people, and by their family members amassing wealth while stationed in Asia. Systematic research is still needed to reveal how these various avenues of profit

from Asian slavery contributed to the accumulation of wealth in the Dutch Republic.

We can identify three main sources for the millions invested in the Dutch Atlantic plantation system. First, there were colonists who privately gathered enough capital to establish a plantation and who then reinvested the plantation's profits. For larger plantations, there was a second option: borrowing money from wealthy merchants in the Dutch Republic or elsewhere. A third option emerged in the eighteenth century: the *negotiatie-lening*. This was a type of loan, a mortgage in which the plantation and the enslaved people working on it served as collateral. The loan often went through an Amsterdam trading and financial house, but these firms did not lend their own capital. Instead, they set up a fund and issued bonds on the capital market. The bond issuers promised the bondholders around 5 percent interest. They paid this by taking control of the sale of goods produced on the plantations. In this way, the trading and financial houses at the heart of the *negotiatie* system carved out a central position in the lucrative trade in Caribbean goods and demanded various commissions on top of that. In the late 1760s and early 1770s, the *negotiatie* system saw an unprecedented boom. Between 1753 and 1775, wealthy investors from Amsterdam and to a lesser extent Rotterdam, Middelburg, and elsewhere, pumped over 63 million guilders into Caribbean plantations. A financial crisis in the early 1770s brought an end to the boom, but this did not mark the end of Dutch merchant financiers' significant stakes in slavery. On the contrary, the involvement of major financial players such as Hope & Co and Insinger & Co reached its peak—both financially and in terms of influence on plantation policy—after the crisis.¹² In the nineteenth century, many wealthy families possessed substantial portfolios of shares and bonds in the West Indies plantation sector. These securities, acquired through marriages and inheritances, often continued to yield returns after 1815 (when the British returned control of the colonies to the Dutch).

Dutch research into the financing of the plantation sector has tended to focus so heavily on the *negotiatie* loan that other forms of financing have been largely overlooked. In reality, the *negotiatie* system was probably only a predominant form of investment from 1765 to 1775. A company like Hope & Co typically combined *negotiatie* investments with direct loans based on their own capital. The excessive focus on the *negotiatie* system in the Dutch literature has likely obscured other large slavery-related capital flows.

Legacies

In the nineteenth century, slavery, colonialism, and the Dutch financial sector underwent significant changes. The Dutch state stepped into the role previously played by semi-private chartered companies by assuming responsibility for colonial administration. Slavery came under immense pressure from uprisings, shifts in European public opinion, and international campaigns for the abolition of the slave trade and, later, slavery itself. The center of the Atlantic plantation sector moved from the Caribbean islands to new expansion zones in Brazil, Cuba, and the southern United States. Meanwhile, colonial trade from Indonesia grew vastly, fueled by the introduction of a new type of forced labor, the Cultivation System, in Java. This growth was also reflected in the portfolios of financial and trading companies in the Netherlands, and their investment in the East Indies increased significantly. However, this did not mean that investors simply “traded in” their stakes in slavery for other forms of participation in the colonial sector. Insinger & Co took over the management of several plantations and tried in all sorts of ways to increase the profitability of their slavery investments. Hope & Co scaled down its investments in the Caribbean, but grew deeply involved in the Citizens’ Bank of Louisiana through a complex financing structure. This bank was specifically established to finance the expansion of the plantation sector in the American South. As part of this operation, Hope & Co even issued a new loan, accepting 203 enslaved people and plantation acreage as collateral, to the owner of the Oswechee Bend plantation in Alabama in 1840.¹³ Some of these attempts to profit from slavery were successful, but others left the bankers with significant financial losses. Although by the mid-nineteenth century, the moral reprehensibility of slavery was widely acknowledged in Europe, this had little impact on the bankers’ actions. Prospective profits—sometimes based more on illusory hope than realism—remained their guiding principle.

With the abolition of the slave trade, the number of new forced laborers from Africa arriving on Dutch overseas plantations eventually dwindled. In the Dutch East Indies, the colonial authorities formally opposed the slave trade, but sometimes turned a blind eye to it. Most of the people emancipated in the early 1860s were born to enslaved parents. Their ancestors had often contributed to the wealth of Dutch families for generations. The abolition of slavery offered these rich families one last opportunity to profit from the formerly enslaved status of the emancipated. In December

1835, Anna Geertruida van der Paauw claimed approximately 1,000 British pounds in “compensation money” from the British government. Her claim was based on co-ownership of the Gelderland and Rotterdam plantations in the former Dutch colony of Berbice.¹⁴ Van der Paauw, the mother of the later brewer Gerard Heineken, had acquired her share in these plantations through her marriage to her first husband, Pieter Jacob Schumacher, whose ancestors had managed a *negotiatie* fund and were prominent planters and traders in agricultural products from Berbice. This makes the Heineken family one of the many wealthy Dutch families whose nineteenth-century ancestors were compensated for the emancipation of their enslaved people. The Netherlands waited to decide on emancipation in the Caribbean colonies until 1863, and paid a total of 9.9 million guilders to the former slave owners. This compensation was not granted without a fight. Financiers and plantation owners like Fritz Insinger, head of Insinger & Co., aggressively lobbied to influence the form and size of this compensation.¹⁵

The compensation paid to the families involved in slavery forms part of the direct material legacy of slavery, as does the capital that large companies like Hope & Co acquired through their slavery-related activities. But for the Dutch financial sector, there were also less tangible legacies. Colonialism and slavery gave rise to innovations in the financial system, such as the seventeenth-century introduction of tradable shares in companies with permanent capital and the eighteenth-century refinement of the *negotiatie* system as a new form of investment.

These innovations facilitated a financial services sector which remained heavily focused on colonial trade even after abolition. Thus, slavery contributed not only to individual families’ fortunes but also to the very architecture of the Dutch financial sector. And then there is that other crucial point, which is so easily overlooked amid all the details of financial-historical developments: the cultivation of a mentality in which human suffering was effortlessly sidelined in favor of cold investment considerations and profit calculation.

Notes

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- 3 Karwan Fatah-Black, Lauren Lauret and Joris van den Tol, *Serving the Chain? De Nederlandsche Bank and the Last Decades of Slavery, 1814–1863* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2023).
- 4 Oscar Gelderblom, Abe de Jong and Joost Jonker, “The Formative Years of the Modern Corporation: The Dutch East India Company VOC, 1602–1623,” *Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 4 (2013): 1050–76.
- 5 Henk den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1994), 33.
- 6 Cátia Antunes, “From Binary Narratives to Diversified Tales: Changing the Paradigm in the Study of Dutch Colonial Participation,” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 131, no. 3 (2018): 393–407.
- 7 Ottho Keye, *Het waere onderscheyt tusschen koude en warme landen* (The Hague: Henricus Hondius, 1659), 148–149.
- 8 Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast: Roofbouw en overleven in een Caribische plantagekolonie 1750–1863* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1993), 206.
- 9 Humphrey E. Lamur, *The Production of Sugar and the Reproduction of Slaves at Vossenburg Suriname 1705–1863* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Centre for Caribbean Studies, 1987), 132.
- 10 Jan de Vries, *The Price of Bread: Regulating the Market in the Dutch Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 182.
- 11 The classic text on this topic is Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944). Recently, this idea has been revived by the emergence of the “New History of Capitalism.” See, for example, Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015).
- 12 De Kok and Brandon, *Het slavernijverleden van ABN AMRO*; Joost Jonker, “De vroege geschiedenis van de firma Insinger & Co.,” *Jaarboek Amstelodamum* 94 (2002): 110–31; Joost Jonker, “Roeien tegen de stroom, 1813–1860: De geschiedenis van Insinger & Co.,” *Jaarboek Amstelodamum* 96 (2004): 135–55.
- 13 De Kok and Brandon, *Het slavernijverleden van ABN AMRO*, 76–80.
- 14 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/9374> and <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/9376> (last accessed November 22, 2022).
- 15 Pepijn Brandon and Karin Lurvink, “With the Power of Language and the Force of Reason: An Amsterdam Banker’s Fight for Slave Owners’ Compensation,” *Navigating History. Economy, Society, Knowledge and Nature: Essays in Honour of Prof. Dr. C.A. Davids* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), 228–48.

Abstract

As early as the eighteenth century, the VOC forced the local population in Java to perform corvée labor and produce commodities. As the predecessors of the Cultivation System, these kinds of coerced labor coexisted with slavery. In the nineteenth century, colonial forced labor was vastly expanded and intensified under the authority of Governor-General Daendels. Javanese farmers fled to uncultivated areas in the hope of escaping this oppressive system, and in turn the colonial authorities tried to prevent them from leaving. After the abolition of slavery in 1860, the practice of forced labor continued.

Keywords: Dutch East Indies; Indonesia; Java; forced labor; corvée labor; Cultivation System; Netherlands Trading Society (NHM)

Colonial Unfree Labor in the Nineteenth-Century Dutch East Indies

Jan Breman

After the downfall of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1799, an administrative debate ensued in which the disagreement was not about whether colonial exploitation should continue, but in what form. The committee responsible for the administrative transfer from the VOC to the state asserted that “the colonies exist for the motherland and not the motherland for the colonies.” Governor-General Herman Willem Daendels, appointed in 1808, became the architect of the early colonial state, reorganizing the VOC system and expanding its previously limited reach. As a result, the colonial government became much more involved in local operations, intensifying the coercion of laborers in the process.

As early as the eighteenth century, the VOC forced the local population in Java into so-called *corvée* labor (compulsory labor) and the production of commodities such as coffee. These forms of forced labor were precursors to the later Cultivation System. They existed alongside slavery and differed from slavery only in the sense that the colonial subjects in question could not be sold as enslaved people. Nevertheless, the continued bondage led to extreme exploitation and systematic violence against the peasantry. Under Daendels, the early colonial state began to expand and intensify this forced labor system in the early nineteenth century. The local population was required to produce export crops like coffee, indigo, sugar, and tea for the global market. They were forced to do so by a colonial apparatus run by a small white elite, who exercised power and authority through a multilayered network of Javanese local nobility. The system was geared toward increasing production. Colonial officials—whose primary duty was to guarantee the growing, processing, and supply of cash crops—received a commission based on the quantity of produce gathered. The local nobles

had to strictly adhere to the colonial administration's instructions under penalty of dismissal or even exile for negligence or abuse of their powers. For dedicated service, the Javanese nobility received compensation for the cash crops that they supplied, while the prior obligation for farmers to give the noblemen a portion of their food produce, particularly rice, stayed in place. Under Daendels, this share was increased from one-tenth to one-fifth of the produced amount. This cost the state treasury nothing and was intended to persuade the local nobility to enforce compliance with the increased burden that they had to impose on the peasantry.

This forced labor regime in Java was not a foregone conclusion, but the subject of frequent debate. The discussion often pivoted on the question of how the system should be organized to provide the greatest benefit to the "motherland." In 1800, the main official responsible for the collection of colonial cash crops stated that the system was riddled with coercion because "the Javanese, with few exceptions, are reluctant to plant coffee and must be continuously forced to work under the threat of violence."¹ This colonial coercion was applied based on the prevailing view that the Javanese farmer had only limited needs and did not aspire to greater prosperity. However, Herman Muntinghe, a high-ranking official acting as secretary to the governor-general, held a different view. He, too, believed that every colony should "benefit the motherland," but he also thought that improving the local population's lot should be the priority, rather than blocking every incentive for progress through coercive measures. Nevertheless, in 1808, Daendels proceeded to tighten the forced labor system, decreeing that no one should be exempt from compulsory cultivation, except for the nobility and the disabled. Even village priests, the elderly, and widows were no longer exempt. From the age of fourteen, children were to be fully employed, and even before that age, they had to help their parents with the work.

The Village as the Cornerstone of Colonial Governance (1814–1830)

When the Dutch administration reassumed control of Java in 1814, Muntinghe, in his role as President of the Council of Finance, weighed the pros and cons of forced versus free labor in an advisory report. He wondered what would happen if Dutch farmers were forced to sell their crops at half, a quarter, or even a tenth of their actual value. Surely, Dutch farmers who had to work this way, on orders from above and under strict supervision, would feel every bit as reluctant and resentful as the Javanese did? Setting

labor prices too low would necessitate continued coercion, Muntinghe argued. He again disputed the idea that the Javanese lacked the virtues for any other system than forced labor and warned of the high price of coercion and supervision. Despite his plea, the new Dutch colonial administration expanded the forced labor system.

Muntinghe did not give up. In a new memo in 1817, he addressed the social organization at the lower rung of peasant society. He described village communities as homogeneous, self-governing, self-sufficient entities, cohesive in nature and only sporadically in contact with the outside world. A village council, he wrote, would elect a rotating village head to represent the community externally and manage their common interests internally. However, the tight-knit peasant community as he portrayed it never existed in reality, but was a construct created by the Dutch to promote colonial policy.² It led to the now common idea of a homogeneous peasant mass, locked in a communal existence and subjected as serfs to the nobility, who in turn answered to various monarchs across Java. Instead of perpetuating this colonial representation, it is important to emphasize the significant inequality in land usage and the population's dependence on local landowners and higher regional nobility.

In reality, peasant society was much more stratified than in Muntinghe's description. The land-poor and landless segments of the population were subject to the control of aristocratic landowners who had monopolized most of the arable land. Cultivation was carried out by households (tenant farmers) who leased fields from the owners, or by landless laborers who were part of the landowners' households. The lord-peasant relationship was one of patronage and subordination. Monopolization of land use provided the leverage to seize the labor capacity of subordinate households. In the colonial system introduced later, this complex order meant that the nobility were tasked with compelling landowning farmers to cultivate and supply crops, and the landowners in turn assigned these tasks to their tenant farmers and laborers.

The colonial administration's disregard for the stratification at the base of the peasant economy meant that the labor coercion that they imposed on landowners was passed on by the heads of these dominant households to the dependent farmers, who were largely or entirely excluded from free land access. This meant that tenant farmers and laborers, the least privileged in the Javanese population, bore the greatest burden. The obligations imposed on the population applied not only to cultivation but also to ware-

house construction, roadbuilding, and other public works. *Corvée* labor was the term for this toil for which there was little or no compensation.

The forced labor system put a tremendous burden on farmers, but colonial reports downplayed the imposed *corvée* as negligible. It was supposed to be easy to combine with the cultivation of food for their primary needs. Nevertheless, even Johannes van den Bosch, designer of the even more burdensome Cultivation System, acknowledged that *corvée* took six months of a farming family's working time rather than the projected two months.

The only way for farmers to escape enforced labor was to move away to uncultivated areas. To stop them, the colonial government restricted migration, punishing those who attempted to leave their villages. Still, the hardship caused by a lack of arable land and time to grow crops for their own sustenance drove many to attempt an escape.

The Cultivation System (1830–1870)

The Cultivation System introduced by Van den Bosch was the culmination of developments that began under VOC rule and had been expanded under Daendels' early colonial administration. Van den Bosch pushed the forced labor system even further. Farmers in Java were required to use 20 percent of their land to produce cash crops for the government. The authorities justified this with the colonial argument that it would stimulate farmers who had a supposedly "poor work ethic." The trope of the "lazy Javanese" was invoked by the colonial authorities to back their claim that the coercive Cultivation System taught the population the self-discipline it allegedly lacked. Thus, forced labor and its attendant violence and coercion were presented as a prerequisite for social progress.

The requirements to grow cash crops were continuously increased, involving ever more farming families in the Cultivation System. By 1850, the system was imposed on almost half the population in Java, who had to cultivate an expanding range of crops for the Dutch government. Coffee had been the main crop under the VOC, especially around Batavia and in the Preanger Regencies (West Java). Initially, cultivation took place close to the farming settlements, but the increasing demand for coffee necessitated the establishment of plantations in the hills and mountains, far from where the farmers lived. The greater distances between home and work significantly increased the labor burden.

Sugar cane was another key crop, mainly along the northern coastal plain of Java. European plantations had been established here early on. Colonial tax collection forced landowning farmers in these regions to give up a fifth of their fields and to provide free labor for a fifth of the working year (sixty-six days) necessary for sugar production. The sugar cane cultivation moved around in a crop rotation system. Private landlords were allowed to build sugar factories and appropriate alternating sections of the local population's farmland.

In practice, the confiscation of land and labor for coffee and sugar cane cultivation often far exceeded the officially sanctioned acreage and time. As a result, the population had insufficient time to provide for their own subsistence needs, leading to frequent food shortages and famines. Colonial reports often downplayed these issues, mentioning them only occasionally and in muted terms. The drive for ever higher production led to increasing exploitation and oppression, which sparked resistance and evasion. Resistance was eventually so widespread that it became a factor in the colonial administration's decision to abolish the Cultivation System in 1870.

Indigo cultivation was a particularly poignant example of the excesses of the Cultivation System. The European textile industry's demand for indigo (a blue dye) was nearly insatiable. In response to languishing coffee prices on the world market, Van den Bosch ordered the population in the Preanger region to replace their coffee trees with indigo plants when he introduced the Cultivation System. Extracting the blue pigment from the plants, which the Javanese farmers were also expected to do, was extremely laborious. The compulsory indigo production made it impossible for them to provide their own food. Local nobility set up surveillance to prevent a mass exodus of farmers. Unrest broke out in many districts. An inspector reported in 1835 that several thousand Javanese workers had already died of starvation in the three indigo factories he visited.³ He described encounters with walking skeletons dragging themselves from one place to another. Shocked by the experience, he advised discontinuing indigo cultivation and production. His unwelcome report led to his dismissal. Indigo cultivation continued in the eastern part of the Preanger Regencies until the mid-nineteenth century, causing massive mortality among the Javanese population of West Java due to famine and disease. These disastrous effects of the Cultivation System were almost entirely omitted from the colonial records of that era.

The Netherlands Trading Society (NHM), a Royal Company

In 1824, the Netherlands Trading Society (NHM) was established to sell the products grown under the Cultivation System. The merchant king William I invested 4 million guilders in the NHM—more than 10 percent of the start-up capital. As a major shareholder, he had the right to appoint the directors who were accountable to him annually. The NHM soon provided the Dutch treasury with a “*batig slot*” (profit) of 6 million guilders. Half of this amount was revenue from colonial commodities sold in places like the Amsterdam coffee auction. The other half was income from opium leases.⁴



Photo of a grocery store on Amsterdam's Weteringstraat. Selling products such as coffee, tea, cocoa, and sugar—all produced in the colonies by forced labor—was extremely profitable.

The lucrative sale of opium in the Dutch East Indies, which was based on addiction to the drug, was approved by the House of Orange and provided direct profits to both the royal family and the treasury. The NHM's sales became the main source of income for the Dutch government.⁵ The financial

accounts remained opaque as long as William I regarded the East Indies colonies as his personal domain. For nearly a decade after the introduction of the Cultivation System, the company did not have to report on its activities to parliament. This privilege significantly boosted the profits made during the Cultivation System; Governor-General Jean Chrétien Baud rightly stated that the Indies were the cork that kept the “motherland” afloat.

The enormous earnings from the Cultivation System were quickly spent. They financed costly colonial wars, such as the Java War between 1825 and 1830, when the Central Javanese nobility and their allies in the farming population rebelled against foreign domination. Significant amounts were also spent on the profitable subjugation of the peasantry, including payments to Javanese nobility and the *cultuurprocenten* (commission on crops) awarded to colonial officials. The meager plantation wages and compensation paid for *corvée* labor rarely reached the Javanese workers, due to skimming at all levels of the long colonial administrative chain. Embezzlement and extortion were standard practices stemming from the colonial system. Despite all this, a huge profit remained, comprising more than a third to nearly half of Dutch national income by the mid-nineteenth century.⁶

This substantial colonial surplus allowed the Netherlands to postpone the introduction of income tax, it financed the construction of railways and ports, and it subsidized the textile industry in Twente and Tilburg, which generated employment and started producing light cotton fabrics for colonial export. The funds were also used to compensate slave owners in the “West Indies” for the loss of their enslaved people in 1863. The colonial balance sheet shows that the income from the colonial territories was used to stimulate economic growth in the Netherlands and to maintain a lasting connection between the “motherland” and its colonies in the construction of an empire with overseas territories.

Political Renewal, Moral Activism, and Regime Change after 1870

The 1848 amendment of the Dutch constitution reflected a changed political mood in the Netherlands which led to initiatives to abolish slavery in Suriname and end forced labor for Javanese farmers. These initiatives did not call for an end to colonial domination but advocated for its continuation based on the belief that the supposedly helpless colonial subjects could only be elevated through their subjugation. The novel *Max Havelaar* (1860) by Multatuli exposed the hidden side of the Cultivation System.⁷ His fic-

tional story is a portrait of the colonized individual that debunks the supposed superiority of the motherland's civilization.⁸ Multatuli's diatribe led to the establishment of the Society for the Benefit of the Javanese in 1866.

Political reform in the Netherlands did not go unnoticed in the Dutch East Indies. It led to public consultations in Batavia in 1848, which called for the abolition of the Cultivation System, an end to the NHM monopoly, freedom of the press, and a ban on slavery. The dissidents within the colonial administration who appealed for these changes were ignored; slavery for domestic use was tolerated until 1860, and the Cultivation System persisted until 1870, as it was deemed indispensable for the Dutch treasury. Moral activism received little political support, was not directly reflected in colonial policy, and played no significant role in the eventual dismantling of forced crop cultivation.

The eventual abolition of the Cultivation System in 1870 was the result of political pressure from a very different direction. In the Netherlands, proponents of a free market economy won out over supporters of state intervention. At the same time, the resistance of Javanese farmers to the Cultivation System was growing. The Agrarian Law, enacted in 1870 alongside the abolition of the Cultivation System, declared all uncultivated and irregularly cultivated land property of the colonial government. This effectively deprived the Javanese population of the land around villages that had not yet been cultivated or that was used for crop rotation. The colonial government subsequently leased these areas on a long-term basis to private enterprises for large-scale agriculture.

This state-organized land grab paved the way for a capitalist production system based on colonial plantations and mining, financed by European banks.⁹ The NHM transformed into a commercial bank (now ABN AMRO) that provided loans to plantation companies and also invested its own money in plantations. The House of Orange retained a significant share, and the initial capital amassed by William I grew into an even greater fortune, particularly through significant stakes in tin, oil, and bauxite mining enterprises. In the new capitalist colonial order, unfree labor persisted. Prisoners were now widely used for forced labor. Many mega-enterprises—generously supported by the colonial state and still enjoying benefits from past colonial land grabs and labor coercion—would have a bright future ahead of them as multinationals, after decolonization.



Women harvesting coffee in Sumatra for the Deli Company, a Dutch enterprise engaged in the cultivation and trade of tobacco, tea, coffee, and rubber.

As early as 1860, Multatuli warned that the transition to a free market economy would not benefit the working population. His warning proved accurate thirty years later. The landless and land-poor classes were condemned to migratory labor. This resulted in a reservoir of migrant workers, who, forced by necessity, were shipped to new plantations on Sumatra's east coast and much farther afield, to Suriname for instance, where they did contract labor from the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

On the plantations and in the mines outside Java, these workers were subjected to penal sanctions that persisted until nearly the end of colonial rule in the Dutch East Indies.¹¹ Extremely harsh sentences were handed down for even minor offenses, and the laborers often had to work in chain gangs. Sanctions were imposed not only by employers but also by colonial officials, who sentenced "coolies" to imprisonment for inadequate work performance or acts of resistance against brutal treatment. By perpetuating unfree labor in this way despite the abolition of slavery, the colonial government was meeting the wishes of Western, mainly Dutch, businesses

to keep the workforce that they needed under the thumbscrews of extreme exploitation and oppression. This lack of freedom was justified with racist and false arguments about the local “character.”

Thus, in its heyday, imperialism deprived the subjugated peoples of more than just their view of their own past. The political and economic regime implemented by imperialism denied these societies the freedom to determine their own future. The pursuit of social and humane progress that brought a better life to some, was nipped in the bud for this majority of humanity.

Notes

- 1 Jan Breman, *Koloniaal profijt van onvrije arbeid: Het Preangerstelsel van gedwongen koffieteelt op Java* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 117.
- 2 Jan Breman, *Control of Land and Labour in Colonial Java: A Case Study of Agrarian Crisis and Reform During the First Decades of the Twentieth Century*, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 101 (Dordrecht: Foris Publications Holland, 1983), 5–22.
- 3 Breman, *Koloniaal profijt van onvrije arbeid*, 216.
- 4 The colonial authorities leased land in Java and Madura specifically for the cultivation of opium poppies and had a monopoly on the sale of the opium crop in officially licensed opium dens.
- 5 Ewald Vanvugt, *Wettig opium: 350 jaar opiumhandel in de Indische archipel* (Haarlem: Uitgeverij In de Knipscheer, 1995).
- 6 Breman, *Koloniaal profijt van onvrije arbeid*, 355 and 404, note 1.
- 7 Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820–1887), better known by his pen name, Multatuli, was a Dutch writer best known for his satirical novel *Max Havelaar*, which denounced the abuses of colonialism in the Dutch East Indies.
- 8 Maartje Janse, “Representing Distant Victims: The Emergence of an Ethical Movement in Dutch Colonial Politics, 1840–1880,” *BMGN-LCHR*, 128, no. 4 (2013): 74–75.
- 9 Cornelis van Vollenhoven, *De Indonesiër en zijn grond* (Leiden: Brill, 1932), 65–82.
- 10 Jan Breman, *Koelies, planters en koloniale politiek: Het arbeidsregime op de grootlandbouwondernemingen aan Sumatra’s oostkust in het begin van de twintigste eeuw*, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 123 (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij: 1992).
- 11 Jan Breman, *Kolonialisme en racisme: Een postkoloniale kroniek* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021); Jan Breman, “Coolie Labour and Colonial Capitalism in Asia,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 23, no. 2 (April 2022): 233–46.

Charged Colonial Past

The collection of Rotterdam's Tax and Customs Museum includes a wooden sculpture of a Javanese civil servant. His appearance reflects his ambivalent position as an employee of the Dutch colonial government. He wears a European shirt and tie, a jacket with a pocket watch, and he carries a leather briefcase. But from the waist down, he is dressed in an Indonesian sarong and slippers, and on his head is an *iket kepala*, a man's head cloth. The Dutch colonizers made extensive use of local officials and traders to staff their executive apparatus in the East Indies. The Indonesians who worked for the colonial administration were given a Western education, a salary, and a higher status in the colony's hierarchy. Although they were part of the administration, they had no power to change the colonial structure from within. This divide-and-rule strategy was successful; without the work of local tax clerks, the Dutch would never have been able to manage such an enormous area so efficiently.

Tax clerks were appointed in both the Indonesian archipelago and the Caribbean to collect head tax, transfer taxes on real estate and movable property, land tax, excise tax, stamp duty, pilotage-, port-, and anchorage fees, and import, export, and transit duties. The total registered tax revenues of the Dutch East Indies from 1848 to 1940 amounted to well above 25 billion guilders, or to be precise: 25,836,314,430 guilders.¹

Indonesian tax official, painted balsa wood, circa 1940.



The taxation nomenclature, the tax rates and the exemptions differed from island to island. Suriname, too, had its own system. Coffee, sugar and other “luxury products” produced by the enslaved were not only a source of revenue for the colony, but were also subject to impost and excise taxes. The slave trade was also a source of tax revenue for the Dutch treasury. In Curaçao and Saint Eustatius, for instance, the tax rate for the sale, import, and export of enslaved people was about 2 percent in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.² The revenues of the transatlantic slave trade can be estimated at 101 to 127 million guilders; the direct tax income would therefore have been about 2 to 2.5 million guilders.³ This is a conservative estimate, because most enslaved people changed hands several times and this amount does not include head tax either. If an enslaved person wanted to buy his or her own freedom or that of their family, they had to pay a considerably higher tax; the amounts charged ranged from 100 to 500 guilders. Further research can shed additional light on the central government’s role in taxation in the colonies and how the state profited from taxes.

Notes

- 1 Joost Mellegers, “Public Finance of Indonesia 1817–1940,” IISG datafiles, copy of revenues, <https://iisg.nl/indonesianeconomy/datafiles.php>
- 2 Faroe Metry, *De geschiedenis van de belastingen in de kolonie Curaçao en de Nederlandse Antillen*, (Curaçao: Stichting Publicaties KPMG Tax and Legal Services, 2006), 56, 77, 83, 107, 108, 110–12, 115–17, 120, 122; the taxes were called import-, export-, and transit duties, excise tax on movable property, or *50e penning* [a transfer tax on inheritances] on slaves, animals and other goods.” Taxes were calculated in percentages or in pesos.
- 3 Matthias van Rossum and Karwan FatahBlack, “Wat is winst? De economische impact van de Nederlandse transAtlantische slavenhandel,” in TSEG / *The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History*, 9, no. 1 (2012): 3–29.

Abstract

This chapter investigates the current linguistic landscape in the former Dutch colonies in the Caribbean, Indonesia, Suriname, and South Africa. Though their histories vary widely, all these countries have in common that their language context is in many respects shaped by centuries of colonialism. The colonial era influenced creolization processes and the interrelationships between languages in the former colonies. Language policies favoring Dutch reinforced colonialism, but they had a counter-effect: they boosted a strong pride in local languages, which have persisted as a result. Collaboration between researchers of different nationalities and the prioritization of research into non-dominant languages and literatures should be considered part of the Netherlands' "debt of honor."

Keywords: language; language policy; local languages; multilingualism; creolization; literatures; linguistic research

Languages and Literatures of the Former Dutch Colonies

Michiel van Kempen

Colonial Babel in Brief

Walking around in Amsterdam in 2023, one overhears conversations in numerous European languages, as well as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Persian, and Indian languages. A similar tower of Babel could be heard in the colonial centers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Batavia (present-day Jakarta), languages from all corners of the empire were spoken, along with Chinese, Tamil, Portuguese, and many other European tongues. In the same period, Paramaribo's streets rang out with the sounds of Dutch, French, German, English, Swedish, and "Negro-English." All major European languages could be heard on the quays of Saint Eustatius in the latter half of the eighteenth century, when the Windward Island known as "the Golden Rock" served as a free port and trading hub for colonial maritime nations. In the Leeward Islands, Spanish predominated, but Portuguese, French, and Dutch were also part of the linguistic palette.¹

Language, like education, was an instrument of imperial domination. Language policy took on two radically different forms in a colonial context. When language policy was aimed at assimilation, the colonized peoples were expected to adopt the language and culture of the colonial elite as thoroughly as they could. However, sometimes language policy was geared toward preserving the diversity of languages and cultures as much as possible, which could stem either from respect for those cultures or from a strategy of divide and conquer. Both language policies existed in Dutch colonial history. The East Indies is typically seen as a region where the colonizers respected cultural diversity, while the West Indies is looked upon as

an area where a divide-and-conquer policy was the rule. In reality, however, the situation was far more complex, with both types of policy being pursued in different places at different times.

Essentially, the linguistic situation in all these far-flung colonial territories was characterized by only one constant: the idea that any local language was too simplistic to adequately express complex thoughts and ideas. Dutch—however marginal in some areas—was seen as the superior language, capable of elevating the people. Local languages were generally denigrated, if not banned outright. Surinamese and Antillean students were told to “Go wash their mouth out” if they spoke Sranan Tongo or Papiamentu on school grounds, a practice which persisted until well into the twentieth century. In the late nineteenth century, when the division between the Dutch and the colonized in the Dutch East Indies became sharper, the widely spoken Malay language was suddenly stigmatized as uncivilized, a label it had not previously been given.² Due to the lack of investment in the development of local languages (with the exception of the East Indies around 1900 during the Ethical Policy era, when linguistic purity was advocated for all languages), the linguistic situation almost always confirmed the status quo: Dutch remained a pillar of colonialism and a vehicle for conveying the idea of white superiority. At the same time, this situation also reinforced the strong sense of authenticity and uniqueness of the local languages, which persisted despite neglect and repression.

Multilingualism in the Former Colonies

The presumed linguistic homogeneity of the colonial elite is questionable. To be sure, in government and the judiciary, the Dutch language played an important role, but in everyday life, multilingualism prevailed.

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the colonial elite in “the East” consisted of people of European and (to a lesser extent) non-European nationalities, and Asian languages were key in communication. Dutch barely played a role. Portuguese and Malay were the *lingua franca* between groups, classes, and islands. Asian language influences also crept into a Dutch variant known as *Petjo*, a creole language used in everyday interactions, which contained numerous grammatical and lexical elements borrowed from Malay and Indonesian-Chinese. In the twentieth century, *Petjo* was championed by writer Tjalie Robinson. The fact that Dutch never penetrated deeply into the Indonesians’ psyche, serving only

as a veneer for administration and education, became clear after the 1950 revolution when Bahasa Indonesia rapidly replaced Dutch in every area of society.

In the Cape, creolization processes (mixing of cultures and languages) were complicated by the emergence of Afrikaans—a variant of Dutch—alongside English; these two languages became dominant among the white elite by around 1900. It should be noted that over time, 90 percent of Afrikaans speakers came to be the so-called “colored” people of the Cape. The Black and Colored populations used a range of local languages, but it was not until the late twentieth century that some of these languages gained official status.

In Suriname, entirely different processes unfolded. Sranan Tongo, a lingua franca based on West African languages, English, and Dutch, emerged in the slave depots in Africa, on the slave ships, and in the colony. In the eighteenth century, the influence of Jewish planters in plantation society grew, reflected in the use of Portuguese, German, French, and, to a lesser extent, Yiddish in addition to Dutch. Dutch was the language of a minority of Dutch planters, the Church, and the law, but communication with the slave population was in “Negro-English,” or Sranan Tongo as it is known today. By the time slavery was formally abolished in 1863, two-thirds of all plantations belonged to people of mixed descent and “Negro-English” was also spoken in elite circles. When compulsory education was introduced in 1876, Sranan Tongo did not get much recognition. It was disparagingly called “taki-taki.” While twentieth-century Surinamese schoolchildren were told to go and wash their mouths out with soap for speaking it, the literature in Sranan Tongo flourished in the 1950s and 1960s. “The poets made Surinamese independence,” wrote Surinamese lawyer and writer Hugo Pos.³ A verse by one of those poets, Johanna Schouten-Elsenhout—about the strength of women—was quoted by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton in a 1999 speech.

In Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, the situation was completely different: initially, the upper crust of society used mainly Portuguese and Spanish, but from fairly early on, Papiamentu took a firm hold as a spoken language and from the late nineteenth century as a written language as well. By the twentieth century, the majority of Curaçaoans, Arubans, and Bonaireans, regardless of their social status, called Papiamentu their mother tongue; any other language would have been unthinkable. In the interbellum, an attempt was made in Curaçao to inject as much Dutch as possible into

daily life, language use, and culture. But precisely during this period of *Hollandisashon*, a pride in Papiamentu developed, culminating in the work of Curaçao's still unrivaled greatest writer: Pierre Lauffer. Repression can backfire.

The Situation in 2023

Despite all the variability, the current linguistic situation in all former Dutch colonies has one common denominator: it is in many respects the product of centuries of colonialism. This not only holds true for Indonesia, which adopted a radically anti-colonial course after World War II, but also for Ceylon (Sri Lanka), South Africa, Suriname, and the Dutch Caribbean islands. The fact that the linguistic situation is the product of colonialism does not automatically mean that Dutch is still important; that is only the case in Suriname. What it does mean is that the languages of all these countries have been shaped by the colonial era, both in their interrelations—dominant or marginal, official language, lingua franca, or minority language—and through processes of creolization. In Indonesia, Bahasa Indonesia has become the official language with many recognized major “group languages” spoken by tens of millions, such as Javanese. Dutch no longer plays any role there. Relics of *Indisch-Nederlands* can still be found in the literature of Dutch writers with Indonesian roots, such as Marion Bloem, Adriaan van Dis, Alfred Birney, and Otto de Kat.

South Africa granted official language status to no less than eleven languages in 1994, but even this was a simplified reflection of a much more complex cultural diversity that survived colonial times. Zulu and Xhosa are larger languages than Afrikaans, while English, as the fifth-largest language, trails behind the Northern Sotho language group. Tswana, Southern Sotho, Tsonga, Swazi, Venda, and Southern Ndebele complete the group of eleven. The lived experiences of brown South Africans in the Cape—which are shaped by colonialism, racism, and poverty—are articulated by young writers like Ronelda Kamfer, Nathan Trantraal, and Ashwin Arendse. Traces of colonial history can also be found in the English-language works of authors like André Brink, Dan Sleigh, Karel Schoeman, and more recently, Koleka Putuma, Yvette Abrahamse, and Rayda Jacobs.

In Suriname, Dutch is still the only official language, although it is spoken in a variant with its own vocabulary, pronunciation, and often also syntax:

Surinamese Dutch. Sranan Tongo serves as the lingua franca for all population groups, while Sarnami is the language spoken by the largest group, the Hindustanis, descendants of British-Indian contract laborers. The written variant of Sarnami only blossomed in the Dutch diaspora after Suriname's independence in 1975, particularly in The Hague, also known as "Bollywood on the North Sea." Suriname also has many other languages. The Maroons (descendants of escaped slaves) are now divided into six tribal communities, five of which have their own Maroon language, while one uses Sranan Tongo.



Surinamese artist Marcel Pinas makes use of Maroon culture in his work. This monument in Hoorn, erected in 2021, features symbols from the Afaka script, a unique early twentieth-century writing system that the Maroons used as a secret means of communication.

Additionally, outside the demographic center of Paramaribo, there are various indigenous languages like Carib, Trio, and Wayana, which continue to thrive far from the capital. Other languages include Surinamese-Javanese, two variants of Chinese, and Portuguese, which has been added to the linguistic palette in recent decades by Brazilian gold miners. The group lan-

guages used closest to the capital Paramaribo, such as Arawak and Javanese, are feeling the most pressure from urbanization and globalization processes: young people have already traded these languages in for Dutch, Sranan Tongo, and English. With the Maroons growing in every census and now forming the second-largest population group, it remains to be seen whether the status of Maroon languages like Ndyuka and Saramaccan will follow this demographic surge. The recently published *Album van de Caraïbische Poëzie* (2022) about Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean islands demonstrates the versatility of literature that stems from this multilingualism. It prominently features all folk languages, not only in old oral traditions but also in poetry, folk songs, rhymes, and contemporary rap and spoken word.

In Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, Papiamentu (spelled *Papiamento* in Aruba) has a strong position among all segments of the population. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it was recognized as an official language that can also be used within the legal system, politics, and education. However, this official status simply confirmed a long-existing *de facto* situation. Dutch is still frequently used—especially in formal situations—but is not very popular. Spanish had already gained a strong foothold in Aruba due to the influx of people from other islands, but now English is becoming more prevalent due to the influence of American tourists. The islands of Saba, Saint Martin, and Saint Eustatius have been English-speaking for a long time, with Dutch having a marginal, almost exclusively formal role there. The fact that political decisions in The Hague can still have a big impact on the linguistic situation in the islands is most evident from what happened after the Dutch government declared Bonaire a special municipality of the Netherlands on October 10, 2010. This decision was followed by a large influx of Dutch citizens in Bonaire. As a result, the Dutch language is currently gaining in importance in Bonaire, leaving many Bonaireans feeling discontented and powerless.

The State of Research

Over the last thirty to forty years, linguistic research into the Dutch colonies has surged. In Suriname, studies on creole languages, which had been shaped over centuries by the great isolation of certain population groups, have yielded interesting linguistic insights. On the islands, Papiamentu was studied as a vehicle of a developing national identity. Partly based on these

studies, the authorities in the Dutch Caribbean islands formulated a new language policy. Two framework agreements with the *Taalunie* [Dutch Language Union—an international regulatory institution that governs issues regarding the Dutch language, including spelling reforms] were drawn up. One agreement was meant to promote Dutch, which is considered important because it is the kingdom's administrative language and because Dutch fluency can improve students' future prospects. The other was aimed at promoting Papiamentu. However, due to a lack of resources and expertise, the important recommendation to promote Papiamentu has not been implemented.

Literature studies have also grown significantly, with numerous literary histories emphasizing the decolonizing power of the colonies' own literatures. Wim Rutgers wrote about the Netherlands Antilles (1996), Michiel van Kempen about Suriname (2003), and Henry Habibe (2014) about Aruba. Various studies explored the Dutch East Indies literature (Dutch-language literature of colonial and postcolonial Indonesia), and Alfred Birney provided a unique counterpoint with his selection of texts in the monumental *Oost-Indische inkt: 400 jaar Indië in de Nederlandse letteren* [Indian Ink: 400 Years of the East Indies in Dutch Literature] (1998) and his *Journael of Cyberney* (2001). The re-reading of Dutch East Indies literature from a postcolonial perspective was tested in twenty-six essays in *De Postkoloniale Spiegel* [The Postcolonial Mirror] (2021), edited by Rick Honings, Coen van 't Veer, and Jacqueline Bel. Other studies have focused on literature from specific periods, like Jan Voorhoeve's work on Dutch colonial literature of Suriname, Wim Rutgers' research on the colonial era in Curaçao, or Adrienne Zuiderweg's studies on VOC literature in Batavia. There are also histories that highlight literature in one particular language in the colonies. An impressive series of anthologies has been published, documenting texts from the earliest colonial literature to the present day. These publications hold particular significance for younger generations exploring their cultural roots.⁴

Recommendations for Further Research⁵

Since the languages of the former colonies have been shaped and influenced by centuries of colonialism, it follows that the Netherlands has a postcolonial co-responsibility for the great variety of languages and not just for Dutch, and should support research into those languages and litera-

tures. Let us first establish that there is still too little research on counter narratives. From the earliest attempts at colonization, there has always been a history of resistance and obstruction, and there have always been counter narratives to the mainstream colonial voices, often in languages other than Dutch. There is a handful of studies on how the colonized have “written back,” such as René Rosalia’s research on the repression of the dance, music, and poetry genre known as *tambú* in Curaçao and Rose Mary Allen’s study on the importance of songs and proverbs among Afro-Curaçaoans.⁶ However, there is still a disproportionate amount of research conducted by Dutch researchers compared to researchers from the former colonies.

There is an odd paradox in Dutch academia. On the one hand, Dutch universities show a great theoretical openness to the perspective of the Other and an appreciation of the added value of multiperspectivity. On the other hand, Dutch academics show little understanding for the enormous practical barriers faced by researchers in the former colonies, and have scant regard for types of research that do not align with the Dutch academic tradition (e.g., a more regional focus, inclusion of oral traditions, a less hierarchical valuation of various types of text). Dutch universities have created relatively few research chairs focused on colonial and postcolonial cultures, literatures, and history. In this regard they compare unfavorably to American universities, for instance, which have a large number of Black Studies chairs. Postcolonial readings of the literatures of the former colonies are still in their infancy in the Netherlands. Three largely overlooked areas that deserve extra resources are:

1. Processes of cultural marginalization and inclusion of colonized population groups; within this, much research still needs to be conducted on oral literatures, their significance for identity preservation and colonial resistance, and their function within national literatures;
2. There has been only sporadic research on the interactions between different colonies and almost no comparative research on language policies, forms of creolization, and the development of the literary enterprise. A significant area of focus here is the influence of West African languages on koinés, pidgins, and creole languages of the Caribbean, which obviously requires collaboration with African native speakers;

3. Research by the inhabitants of the former colonies on colonial literature in Dutch, in order to gain a different perspective on Dutch East Indies, Dutch African, and Dutch Caribbean literature, has never been conducted. Research into missionary literature as a colonial tool is still in its infancy.

The Dutch, for their part, have done little to investigate ideas born from colonial relationships and slavery, such as prejudices, misjudgments, and the inability to see the other side of the coin. Suriname and the Caribbean Islands have been researching the continued impact of Dutch colonial slavery on language and literature since the 1950s. This has resulted in many reports full of recommendations, but the implementation of these has often been thwarted by obstacles such as changing policies, lack of resources and expertise, and poor political coordination with The Hague. The Dutch are also not very supportive of innovative language policies in the Dutch Caribbean islands. It is high time to really implement the framework agreements already signed by the countries in the kingdom. This would signal real recognition of the highest cultural asset on the islands: Papiamentu as the commonly spoken language of the islands.

Understanding what impact colonialism and slavery have had on the linguistic situation and the often precarious situation of folk languages (creoles) is important. Acknowledging that fact would be a good starting point for finally supporting language policies that are often well-formulated on paper but rarely put into practice, mainly due to a lack of structural resources. In terms of literary studies, much more research is needed on the effect of literature in dominant languages (Dutch, English, Afrikaans) and in other languages on decolonization and nation-building. Perhaps collaboration between researchers of different nationalities and the prioritization of research into non-dominant languages and literatures is more important for the formerly colonized areas than for the Netherlands. But that should never be an argument for the Netherlands not to actively initiate such collaboration. Let this be part of the Netherlands' "debt of honor."

Notes

- 1 In this chapter, the term “Leeward Islands” refers to the Dutch Antillean collective name for Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (*Benedenwindse eilanden*). The Dutch Antillean distinction between *Bovenwindse eilanden* and *Benedenwindse eilanden* is generally translated as Windward and Leeward Islands, but does not coincide with the English-language distinction that goes by the same name.
- 2 Henk Maier, “Nederlands-Indië en het Maleis,” in *Koloniale taalpolitiek in Oost en West: Nederlands-Indië, Suriname, Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba*, ed. Kees Groeneboer (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997), 13–54.
- 3 Michiel van Kempen, *Surinaamse schrijvers en dichters* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1989), 80.
- 4 Rick Honings, Coen van ’t Veer, and Jacqueline Bel, eds., *De postkoloniale spiegel: De Nederlands-Indische letteren herlezen* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2021); Jan Voorhoeve and Ursy M. Lichtveld, eds., *Suriname: Spiegel der vaderlandse koopliden* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980); Wim Rutgers, *Het nulde hoofdstuk van de Antilliaanse literatuur: Koloniale poëzie in de Curaçaosche Courant* (Oranjestad: Charuba, 1988); Adrienne Zuiderweg, “Batavia berijmd: Een geschiedenis van de Compagniesliteratuur en een overzicht van de Compagniesdichters in Batavia” (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2017).
- 5 I would like to thank the following people for their input for this paragraph: Jeroen Dewulf PhD (Berkeley), Liesbeth Ehteld PhD (Curaçao), Rick Honings PhD (Leiden), Eric Mijts PhD (Aruba), Hilde Neus MA (Paramaribo), Joyce Pereira PhD (Aruba), Olf Praamstra PhD (Leiden), Wim Rutgers PhD (Aruba), Ronnie Severing PhD (Curaçao), Margriet van der Waal PhD (Amsterdam/Groningen), and Pam Zuurbier PhD (Paramaribo). Els van Diggele MA edited the entire text.
- 6 Richard Price and Sally Price, *Two evenings in Saramaka*. (Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); René V. Rosalia, *Tambú: De legale en kerkelijke repressie van Afro-Curaçaose volksuitingen* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1997); Rose Mary Allen, *Di ki manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863–1917* (Amsterdam: SWP, 2007).

Caroline Drieënhuizen

Research Method: Slavery and Visual Sources

At first glance, slavery seems almost absent from drawings, watercolors, prints, book illustrations, maps, and oil paintings. This apparent omission is remarkable, to put it mildly, because slavery was ubiquitous and, in all its violence, powerfully evocative. And yet, the early modern and nineteenth-century images of Surinamese sugar cane plantations, Indonesian households, and cityscapes from both colonies—featuring white mansions, huts, and palm trees—look positively idyllic to the casual viewer. Appearances are deceptive, however. To see the slavery, we need to look more closely, more broadly, and above all differently.

Images of the colonies are not representations of a historical reality, but derivatives of that reality. Most visual sources are the product of the mainly male, white, dominant gaze in a hegemonic colonial regime. It is through that gaze, infused with (colonial) ideas, beliefs, and desires, that we now look at the visualizations of the colonial world. These may give us some information about the living conditions and traditions of that time, but what they mainly show us is how the colonizer looked at slavery, how social class distinctions were imposed in a colonial context, and how the world was organized. Paradoxically, they tell us less about the people and the world they purport to represent. Therefore, we should be aware of our own positionality and the blind spots which go along with it. Our way of seeing is determined by a certain historical, geographical, cultural, and social (meaning class, skin color, and gender) position.

Elmer Kolfin, the first art historian to exhaustively research the imagery of slavery in Suriname, pointed out that images of the enslaved are the product of Western views of slavery and thus reinforce those views in our perceptions. Compared to Suriname, where there was an active abolitionist

debate in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was much less discussion of slavery in Asia. Images of slavery in Asia were produced, but the subject of slavery seemed less present there. Moreover, Dutch abolitionists did not make use of images of enslaved Asians. In fact, these images were used to sway public opinion in the opposite direction; just like in Suriname, the enslaved in Indonesia were turned into caricatures in ethnographic albums about the peoples of different countries, a genre that was wildly popular in the mid-nineteenth century. In some of those albums filled with representations of the various social groups in the colonies, an archetype called “the female slave” was depicted to defend the existence and continuation of slavery in Indonesia. This is how the perception of the Dutch colonies in Asia with their supposedly “mild” domestic slavery, was constructed—a perception that still exists to this day, incidentally.

To recognize Asian slavery in these images, you need to be aware of the history of slavery in Asia. If you look at these images with an understanding of the intentions and colonial ideology behind their creation, you can see that the enslaved in Asia have been portrayed numerous times. They appear as decorative elements in the margin of early modern maps of the colonies, in colonial domestic scenes, and standing in the shadows of prominent figures portrayed in early modern oil paintings. It is far less common to see the enslaved depicted as the central figure in an image, and only rarely do we learn their names.

In his 1997 book *Van de slavenzweep & de muze* [About the Slave Whip and the Muse], Kolfin compiled images of the enslaved in Suriname. He persuasively shows that there were three phases in the Dutch portrayals of slavery. In the seventeenth century, he notes, the enslaved were portrayed only in a supporting role in art. They were depicted on maps and in books as part of colonial landscapes and industrial scenes. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, they were more frequently depicted as victims, by showing them undergoing cruel punishments, for instance, or by portraying them as representatives of a social group in Suriname, such as “the slave.” Only in the course of the nineteenth century, Kolfin argues, were slaves portrayed as humans, as individuals, and were they positioned as the autonomous subject of the artwork and not merely as part of a landscape or an illustration of a text. Although it is more than a quarter century old, Kolfin’s work is still considered the standard work on the depiction of slavery in Suriname. To my knowledge, no research has been done into illustrations of the enslaved in the Dutch Caribbean colonies. Research into

the imagery of slavery in the Asian colonies is gaining momentum. In 2021, the first book on this topic was published: *Re-visualizing Slavery: Visual Sources about Slavery in Asia*.¹

If we look at images of slavery with an eye to the power relations, social differences, and representation found in this imagery, we can begin to identify the presence and character of slavery in both the Atlantic and Asian worlds. What these images of slavery and the enslaved mainly reveal, however, is the historical roots of Dutch perceptions and ideas about slavery and the enslaved, both of which continue to have an impact to this day. Research into this worldview and perception should therefore take into account not only the visual aspects of such images, but also their social aspects and effects. Why was a given image created? For whom was it created? And how was a given illustration disseminated and connoted over the course of time? To name just one example, Kolfin concluded in 1997 that sexuality and slavery frequently coincide in illustrations, but to this day, there is no thorough study of how and why these images were produced. Traditional art historical research, which pays attention to artistic styles, schools, and development in a broader international context, might generate some valuable insights. In short, by looking at images of the enslaved and their social circumstances with a critical eye, we can discover a treasure trove of new and important information.

Note

- 1 Nancy Jouwe, Wim Manuhutu, Matthias van Rossum and Merve Tosun, eds., *Re-visualizing Slavery: Visual Sources About Slavery in Asia* (Edam, LM Publishers, 2021).

Abstract

For centuries, the world order and groups within it have been visualized hierarchically in art and artifacts. In the Netherlands, this happened from the founding of the colonial trading companies in the early seventeenth century until well after slavery was abolished in 1863. While objects from the colonized world were placed in ethnographic museums, the Rijksmuseum and its collection are primarily visual carriers of ideas about Dutch power and wealth. Yet, in those ideas, one can also discern colonial constructs and the role of ethnicity. This chapter explores what art and artifacts tell us about the ideas of the colonial elites that commissioned them and about the experiences of Black individuals in the Netherlands.

Keywords: art; colonialism; slavery; the Netherlands; Rijksmuseum

“Sometimes a Moor next to Virgins”: The Colonial World Order in Dutch Art

Valika Smeulders

In the Netherlands, hierarchical depictions of the world order and the various groups that comprise it first appeared around the time that the Dutch trading companies were established in the early seventeenth century, and continued to be produced well after the abolition of slavery in 1863. In these visualizations, Europe stands at the top as the ruler, while the colonized parts of the world are assigned a role of servitude. In some cases, Europe, the white man, is depicted as an economic and technical pioneer and moral educator who offers guidance to other peoples.

The worldview underpinning these depictions remained the standard for a long time, leading to the emergence and persistence of what Gloria Wekker in 2016 called the “Dutch cultural archive.” She examined the Dutch variant of what Edward Said in 1993 described—in reference to the Western world—as a “cultural archive,” “the centrality of imperialism to western culture.” Wekker was not speaking of a physical archive, but of a complex body of knowledge and frames of reference that legitimize Europeans’ domination over a large part of the world. Her focus was on ideas, intangible heritage so to speak, and cultural production in the twenty-first century.¹ In this chapter, I will focus on the “carriers” of these ideas through the centuries: the tangible heritage, art, and artifacts produced during the colonial period. After all, the Dutch cultural archive is anchored in these visual images that were used as a means of communication, in private art collections, and, at a later stage, in art museums that reached a wider audience. I will examine the relationship between these objects, the Netherlands’ self-image as a nation in the making, and the way in which the Black presence in the Netherlands was dealt with.

From the end of the colonial period in the nineteenth century, monumental museums were established in Europe. The establishment of these institutions went hand in hand with the rise of nationalist sentiments. Young nation-states used museums to craft a narrative about themselves. Each country's museum landscape had its own characteristics and message. In the Netherlands, the museum landscape was organized along the lines of a distinction between museums for Western history and art, "ethnographic" museums, and museums for modern and contemporary art. The first category focused on European achievements and heroism. These museums' collections emphasized power, wealth, and the specific aesthetics that glorified them. Ethnographic museums directed their gaze toward the non-Western world. They told the story of the parts of the world that Europe had conquered, and did so by means of objects made by "the Other," far from the Netherlands.²

This museum classification and specialization has also influenced how museum collections are interpreted: the interpretation mirrors the dichotomy between the Netherlands and the colonized countries, between the White Dutchman and the Other. But this dichotomy belies the reality that the Netherlands was a colonial power for hundreds of years, that people from colonized areas have resided in the Netherlands for centuries, and that the Kingdom of the Netherlands is still partly situated in the Caribbean. In this chapter, I advocate the need for research into the representation of the Netherlands as a colonial and post-colonial state. By this, I mean the works of art and objects collected by museums specialized in history and Old Masters: objects that are usually not recognized and presented as part of colonial history and heritage. I do not mean the art and objects directly related to colonized countries, collected in the Dutch museums for "ethnography," now called "world cultures." In fact, the separation between these collecting areas has created a false division between the Netherlands and the colonized world, between groups of people, and between the appreciation of art by Europe's upper class and the social reality of colonialism. A deeper understanding of these art collections is needed to gain more insight into the relationship between Dutch aesthetics, the colonial system, and the presence of colonized peoples in the Netherlands. In other words, more research is needed into the colonial period's influence on Dutch art and applied art. This will give us a more complete picture of the formation of the Netherlands as it is today. It will also enhance our understanding of how representation in art and the categorization of art

helped shape notions about Dutch society and the people who "belong" in the Netherlands.

I will begin by addressing the relationship between slavery, race, and the colonial system. Race, as a social construct, legitimized the colonial economic structure and simultaneously left behind a legacy in our thinking about society which was long ignored. Next, in the section titled "Colonial Elites Commissioning Art," I will examine the group that benefited from the system, namely the affluent class that paid for the production of art and artifacts. I use eight objects to illustrate the relationship between colonial thinking and the development of visual culture. In the last section, "Belonging in the Netherlands," I will use four more objects to focus on another group: Black people in the Netherlands.

Slavery, Race, and the Imagination of a New World Order

Slavery has existed throughout history, as has discrimination on a personal, individual level. During the colonial period, these two phenomena were linked and institutionalized. "Race" was used as a social construct to facilitate a new world order. In the Middle Ages, the Iberian Peninsula (Southern Europe) was still a society where Christians, Jews, and Muslims coexisted, and where skin color did not determine a person's rank or status. The dominant group consisted of a combination of Arabs, Berbers, and West Africans, collectively called "Moors," stemming from the Greek/Roman word for black and used by Medieval Europeans to refer to Muslims. During the "Moorish rule" over Spain, there was no relationship between that term and slavery. This era ended in the year 1492, when Europe's "voyages of discovery" began. European nations started conquering parts of other continents and turned them into places to obtain products that were in demand in Europe. In pursuit of profit, many countries, including the Netherlands, took to colonizing distant territories, creating a worldwide political, economic, and social hierarchy in which part of humanity was made to serve Europe.

Colonial slavery was a multinational profit model designed to benefit Europe. The system extended around the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. Its management was handled by trading companies, whose rules varied in different parts of the world. Colonial slavery was mainly imposed under European authority in the "colonies." There, people were forced to work on large plantations, in mines and other industries, as well as in and around the homes of the colonial elite. The system was designed to ensure the con-

tinuity of power for the group that controlled the economy. Slavery evolved from a personal, arbitrary, temporary phenomenon, such as the repayment of a debt, the serving of an imposed punishment, or the fate of a prisoner of war, to the “inherent” condition of the person of color. It became a condition passed down from generation to generation, legitimized by the Bible, further anchored by government rules and laws.

By and large, legislation pertaining to racialized slavery was not implemented in Europe. After all, the plantations where slave labor was utilized were elsewhere. However, the class who profited from the colonial slavery system did live in Europe: the administrators and rulers, absentee plantation owners, and others. They had a vested interest in perpetuating and maintaining colonial relations and dominance over the Other, underpinned by a hierarchical view of the world and humanity. These rulers regarded people in the Caribbean, the Americas, Africa, and Asia as their property, which they sometimes brought to the Netherlands. They fought court cases and lobbied government to retain ownership of these enslaved individuals in the Netherlands.

The colonial period saw the emergence of a group who liked to display their newly acquired power and wealth. The international nature of this elite’s power figured prominently in their representation of themselves and the world. They could boast about their power and possessions in remote places by having an “exotic” servant physically present in their homes, and by having this “black servitude” committed to canvas. In the seventeenth century, portraits of the European elite accompanied by a colonial servant became very popular. In his painter’s manual published in 1678, Samuel van Hoogstraten wrote, on juxtaposing white and black: “the eye also delights in sometimes placing a Moor next to virgins.”³ These words have often been interpreted by art historians as an encouragement to use color contrasts on the canvas in the interests of good composition and beauty. However, the text also discusses the contrasts between people in different stages and positions in life, such as the contrast between old age and a “frolicking child” and between the “armed” and the “naked.” The choice of the word “virgin” expresses the idea that a Black man is the antithesis of a young Christian girl, in all her innocence, self-control, and virtuousness. After the Dutch threw off the Spanish yoke in 1648, “Moors,” the rulers of medieval Spain, were increasingly depicted in Dutch paintings as heathen subordinates and servants.

Hierarchical imagery was used for centuries and has proven to be extraordinarily persistent. It remained in use during the long run-up to the abolition of slavery, though it did undergo a change. Abolitionists began to emphasize their self-proclaimed role as white "saviors" of the subordinate "races." Van Hoogstraten wrote about what he regarded as the characteristic difference between "black and white people": "a Moor ... due to his flat nose, short hair, round jaws, and a certain dullness around his eyes, all of which, to the intelligent observer, readily expresses that he is a black."⁴ As the end of slavery drew near, another characteristic was attached to the depiction of Black people as "dull" and intellectually limited: the idea that Black people were incapable of being self-reliant.

The fact that racial thinking has had an impact on the representation of our reality shows the importance of epistemology: how do we arrive at our knowledge, how do we check for objectivity? In 1995, anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot demonstrated that power has an influence on the documentation of history.⁵ His work is focused on authorship and the management of archives and historiography. The same observation applies to art: by seeing art and imagery as an objective and complete basis for historiography, we overlook other realities that are better taken into account when we combine various disciplines, fields, and sources. If we include in our perspective the historical context of enslaved people's resistance and the ways in which resistance undermined the colonial economy, we will reach different conclusions about the shifting depictions of Africa and Africans than if we merely describe the images. By critically analyzing not only the depictions but also the concepts used to legitimize the system, we arrive at new, interpretative insights. Based on that interpretation, we arrive at new terminology and a new categorization.

Colonial Elites Commissioning Art

In this section, I will focus on the people that stood to gain from colonialism: the affluent class that commissioned the art and artifacts. I will use eight objects to discuss the relationship between colonial thinking and the development of visual culture.

In the colonial system, Europeans held high positions in the subjugated areas. They acquired property in the colonies which they passed on to the next generation. Through family inheritances, their children, grandchildren, and other relatives in Europe became the owners of colonial planta-

tions, including enslaved human beings. Thus, the colonial elite consisted not only of those residing in the colonized areas known to the Dutch as “the West” and “the East,” but also included the elite who lived in the Netherlands in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, because of their strong political and economic ties with the colonial system.

Traditionally, members of the royalty and nobility sought and found marriage partners elsewhere in Europe. Marriages strengthened political ties and economic positions, and built networks in which tastes, cultures, customs, and rituals were shared. The elite in various European countries were in contact with one another, and this fostered the emergence of trends. Art historians often claim that mimicry can explain the popularity of some imagery at the time. Yet, this analysis lacks specificity: what was the origin and where was an image first used? What is the relationship between that image and the area where it originated, with its local rules and economic interests? These are important questions for further research, which can provide us with more insight into the message conveyed by this imagery and the reasons why it came into being.

As I mentioned earlier, we can see a development in the imagery that has to do with the beginning and end of slavery.⁶ When slavery began, its depiction served to legitimize the practice. A hierarchical worldview was created in which race was instrumental, with references to the Bible. One example of this is the cabinet in Figure 1, made between 1670 and 1690. This piece of furniture was made using materials from the tropics and decorated with Old Testament scenes. At the bottom center, we see Noah after the flood, with the rainbow. The cabinet is supported by dark-skinned men and women. Does this depict the fate of Noah’s descendants? The figures wear headgear that resembles a “Moorish” turban, as often seen in depictions of the three wise men in the story of the birth of Jesus. The clothing and footwear resemble the attire of a Roman gladiator, a reference to slavery in antiquity. The next object in Figure 2 is a clock dating from 1715–1725, which shows evidence of a symbolism whose development is more specifically associated with transatlantic slavery: the two Black figures on top of the clock wear skirts of tobacco leaves, no shoes, and bands around their upper arms, wrists, and necks.

In addition to these rather abstract references to slavery, there were instances of applied art that included direct references to slavery. Such objects incorporated images of the labor performed by Africans, as we can see



Figure 1. Cabinet, creator unknown, ca. 1670-1690.



Figure 2. Clock, creator unknown, ca. 1715-1725.

on the commemorative drinking glass in Figure 3, for example. Commemorative glasses were specially cut for the families who managed colonial enterprises to propose a toast during festive occasions. The work depicted on this particular glass seems to be performed in a leisurely manner, while in fact the daily reality of enslaved individuals on plantations was harsh, exhausting, and exploitative. Figure 4 shows a spittoon, which also depicts plantation labor. The elite used this pot during social gatherings to spit tobacco juice in, while conversing, making music together, and playing games. The imagery on the object links the European elite's pleasurable pastimes with African servitude.



Figure 3. Commemorative glass, creator unknown, ca. 1725–1750.



Figure 4. Spittoon, creator unknown, ca. 1715–1725.



Figure 5. Portrait of Maria of Orange with an African servant, Jan Mijtens, 1665.

Objects like these make clear that to fully understand the images depicted on them, we need to know more about the interests of the clients who commissioned them. In recent years, multidisciplinary research has changed our interpretation of paintings. For a long time, art historical literature referred to the Black supporting figures in portraits of the elite, such as Figure 5, as “pages” or “tropes.” The first designation is a euphemism, as the role of page was reserved for young, upper-class men. Pages were educated and had career prospects that were unattainable for young African men living in the Netherlands. But calling these figures a trope, as in “a purely symbolic presence,” is also misleading. We now know from archival research into ship’s manifests, notarial records, and ecclesiastical sources that there was an actual Black presence in the Netherlands. In some cases, a link can be established between a painting and specific families with their Black servants.⁷ However, this does not mean that every depicted African youth is a representation of an actual person, so further research is needed to distinguish between models and imitations if we are to understand the rationale behind such portraits.

From the 1750s onward, the slavery system came under increasing pressure. The enslaved had always resisted slavery, and now various revolutions in North America, France, and Saint-Domingue (later Haiti) further undermined the European elite’s position. Gradually, a shift in thinking came to the surface, as the voice of protest within the church swelled and joined forces with a political anti-slavery lobby. The dish in Figure 6 is an example of Dutch abolitionism. The text refers to God, and slavery is given a human dimension by not showing a biblical curse or everyday work, but a mother and child. However, this new perspective does not yet put an end to the depiction of Black people as subordinate to white. The French pendulum clock from 1806 in Figure 7 shows a scene from the French novel *Paul et Virginie* (1788), in which two lost white children on the island of Mauritius are brought home by Maroons, people who have escaped slavery. Although these men are free, there is a clear and poignant contrast between them as Black porters and the children on the gilded sedan chair.⁸ Similarly, Van Hoogstraten’s idea that Black people’s eyes were “dull” would continue to be repeated until long after abolition. For example, the four directional wind gods in Figure 8 are part of the exterior of the Rijksmuseum building, which opened in 1885. Each figure has distinct features, yet the Black man is the only one blowing with his eyes wide open, a characteristic that recurs frequently in the portrayal of people of African descent.



Figure 6. Dish, Etruria Works, ca. 1853–1863.



Figure 7. Pendulum clock, depicting a scene from *Paul et Virginie*.



Figure 8. The four wind gods on Rijksmuseum's clock tower, ca. 1885.

Belonging in the Netherlands

In this last section, I will shift my focus to another group: Black people in the Netherlands. Using four art objects, I will address their position and experience in Dutch society.

A handful of studies provide us with an overview of objects depicting the Black presence in the Netherlands.⁹ This overview, in conjunction with additional archival and historical research, could reveal much more about people of color in the Netherlands from the sixteenth century onward. As interest in colonial history grows, public collections are being expanded, creating a broader basis for research. Aside from shedding light on the world of the elite, these objects can also illuminate the lives of other social classes. For example, the Jan Verheijen painting from 1820, titled *Market Scene with an Exhibition of Wonders of the New World*, in Figure 9 appears to provide new information that can help to further explore how the phenomenon of putting people of color on display at fairs and in nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial exhibitions developed.



Figure 9. *Market Scene with an Exhibition of Wonders of the New World*, Jan Verheijen, 1820.



Figure 10. *Inspection of a Cavalry Regiment*, Cornelis Troost, 1742. Note the Black drummer front right.



Figure 11. *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Count Dumonçeau with an African man*, Hennequin and Couvelet, 1809.

Another possible starting point is to zoom in on representations of the military. In these paintings, men of African descent are often depicted as drummers, sometimes with a collar, marking them as enslaved, as someone's property. At the same time, it seems that there was room for equality in the army: in the painting of a cavalry regiment from 1742 in Figure 10, the Black man is not a servant but rides on horseback ahead of the other soldiers. Shortly after slavery was abolished in French Saint Domingue, the Netherlands was placed under French rule (1795). In France, enslaved people and free Black citizens who climbed the social ladder were increasingly represented in art and artifacts.¹⁰ It would therefore be interesting to explore whether a similar shift in the representation of Black people occurred in the art of the Batavian Republic. To this end, more research needs to be conducted, using sources such as the French painting in Figure 11, depicting a Black man who resembles more of an assistant than a servant.

It is not only paintings but also other objects that can help us to re-imagine what the experience of enslaved people in the Netherlands must have entailed. Until recently, collars in Dutch museum collections, such as the one in Figure 12, were consistently classified as dog collars, even though collars frequently appear as a painted motif for African servants, and the physical objects themselves are found in various European countries. From



Figure 12. Golden collar bearing the coat of arms of Nassau, 1689.

archival research, we know that collars were made specifically to be worn by colonial servants. In 1696, for example, a reader placed a classified ad in the *Amsterdamsche Courant* for a lost gold watch with “a silver key, serving to lock a collar of a Negro.”¹¹ It would be interesting to explore how the use of these dreadful collars relates to local laws regarding the possession of enslaved people in a specific European country, and to dissect the economic and political interests of the individuals who had those collars made. Was such a collar practical or primarily symbolic? Did it represent the desire to enforce colonial slavery laws in the Netherlands? Unlike the objects in the previous section, this horrific implement brings us closer to the lived experience of colonial servants in the Netherlands. To them, it must have been deeply disturbing to see people like them depicted as inferior, on a cabinet or a spittoon. But having to wear a collar is a visible marker of personal enslavement and ownership. It is telling that an object of such deep emotional significance to both the colonial ruler and the wearer remained obscured from the public eye for so long under an incorrect designation, thus masking the true impact of colonialism in the Netherlands.

Altogether, the research that has been done elsewhere, the existing overviews of Dutch art, and the objects that I have discussed in this chapter form a basis for extensive and diverse follow-up research. Only thorough studies that bring together various disciplines, sources, and perspectives can deepen our understanding of how the Netherlands was shaped and visualized, and further broaden our views on “belonging” in this country.

Notes

- 1 Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books (Random House), 1993).
- 2 Valika Smeulders, “Postkoloniale onderhandelingen, de plaats van Antilliaans erfgoed in Nederlandse musea,” in *Antilliaans erfgoed, Vol. 2: Nu en Verder*, ed. Gert Oostindie and Alex van Stipriaan (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2021), 93–130.
- 3 Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst. Anders de zichtbaere werelt* (1678), 141.
- 4 Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 25.
- 5 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA, Beacon Press, 2015 [1995]).
- 6 David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, eds., *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume III. From the “Age of Discovery” to the Age of Abolition, Parts 1–3* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2010–2011); David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, eds., *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume IV. From the American Revolution to World*

- War I, Part 2. Black Models and White Myths.* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2012).
- 7 Esther Schreuder, *Cupido en Sideron: Twee Moren aan het hof van Oranje* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2017).
- 8 Alette Fleischer and Bart Krieger, *Gilded Splendor: The pendules au Bon Sauvage & au Noir Enchaîné. Iconography of the pendules au noir in the Parnassia Collection* (Edam: LM Publishers, 2022), 31–32.
- 9 Allison Blakely, *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, translated from the Dutch (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995 [1990]); Esther Schreuder, *Black is Beautiful: Rubens to Dumas, catalog* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2008); Elmer Kolfin and Epcó Runia, eds., *Zwart in Rembrandts tijd* (Zwolle: Wbooks, 2020).
- 10 Thomas Bender, Laurent Dubois and Richard Rabinowitz, eds., *Revolution! The Atlantic World Reborn* (London: D Giles, 2011). This was also illustrated by the 2019 exposition in Musée d'Orsay in Paris, titled *Le modèle noir: De Géricault à Matisse*.
- 11 Advertisement in the *Amsterdamsche Courant*, September 25, 1696, # 115.

Slavery in the Netherlands?

In July 1683, *De Belachelijke Jonker* (The Ridiculous Squire), a play written by Pieter Bernagie (1656–1699), premiered in Amsterdam’s Stadsschouwburg (city theater). It was an instant hit and was performed dozens of times in the years that followed. One of the protagonists is Joris, who has returned to Amsterdam after a career spanning over thirty years in Asia. In the penultimate scene, it appears that this VOC veteran has brought home more than luxury goods and beautiful Asian clothing. He has also brought back two Black servants, not for himself but for an important lord. “Well, well, brother. Did you bring along two blacks?” his sister asks him. “Yes,” he answers. “They’re for a powerful lord. They know how to fight, they can dance.”¹ While the play is fictional, it reveals that the act of bringing servants home and giving them away was a normal occurrence in the Dutch Republic. We know that several people of African descent worked for the House of Orange in The Hague, some of whom were still children when they were “gifted” to the court.² Black servants also worked in many other places in the Republic, some of them far outside of Holland, in provinces such as Guelders, Groningen, and Frisia.

In recent years, several studies have been published about slavery in the Dutch Republic, and about people from colonized territories who ended up living in the mother country. So far, this research has focused on the bigger Dutch cities. The results show that it was two-way traffic: while the Dutch were fanning out around the world, the world was also coming to the Netherlands. Although it is true that colonization, enslavement, and slave labor took place in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, it was all organized from the Republic. From the very outset, it was not just products that were brought back to the Republic, but people, too. Even on the very first VOC expedition to Asia in 1595, the crew enslaved people and brought them home with them.³

In the early seventeenth century, there was already a small, free Black community in Amsterdam. Most of the women in this community had been brought back by Dutch merchants from Spain, Portugal, and Dutch Brazil, while the men were mainly Black sailors and soldiers. But the arrival of servants who were kept in slavery rekindled the issue and prompted the city to reiterate its legislation. From 1644 onward, the Amsterdam city lawbooks included an ordinance about slavery. It was copied verbatim from a sixteenth-century legal provision from Antwerp, and stipulates that slavery was formally prohibited in Amsterdam: "Within the City of Amstelredamme [Amsterdam] ..., all people are free, and none are Slaves." This was no guarantee, however. Enslaved people had to personally claim their freedom. This meant that slavery could continue to exist in Amsterdam, just like it did in Antwerp (see Chapter 24 by Jeroen Puttevils). Recent research reveals that several enslaved women from Dutch Brazil actively invoked their right to freedom in Amsterdam in the 1650s.⁴

Dutch traders regularly brought back enslaved people from colonized areas in Asia as well as the West Indies. The VOC tried to put a stop to that. In 1636, the practice was banned, and the prohibition was frequently repeated through the years that followed. Exceptions were made for the enslaved owned by the highest officials and for enslaved women nursing infants. The Lords Seventeen, the executive board of the VOC, decreed that the owner of the enslaved had to pay a deposit in advance to cover the cost of the enslaved person's return trip. The enslaved people who made the voyage were formally free the moment they set foot in the Republic. But that does not mean that they were immediately able to leave their "masters." Usually, they continued to serve and thus remained in a completely dependent position for an extended period of time.

The eighteenth century saw an increase in travel to the Dutch Republic by merchants and plantation owners from the Caribbean plantation colonies of Suriname, Berbice, and Demerara. Some came on business, others to settle permanently. Often, they brought over enslaved servants, driving a sharp increase in arrivals of enslaved people over the course of the century. The Surinamese colonial governor's log shows the frequent arrivals and departures of plantation owners and other wealthy people along with their enslaved servants.

Until the late eighteenth century, little changed in terms of the status of the enslaved on Dutch soil or after their return to the colony. The opacity of city laws and the lack of enforcement meant that slavery was de facto continued in the Republic. Two Afro-Surinamese women, Marijtje Criool and her daughter Jacoba Leilad, forced a change in that situation in 1771, when they personally went to the States General to claim freedom papers so they could return to Suriname as free people. Based on the old seventeenth-century laws, the States General decided that slavery did not exist in the Republic and that freedom papers were therefore unnecessary. That decision caused consternation among planters in Suriname and investors in Amsterdam, who were worried that they would lose their “investments.” The States General allayed their fears by amending the laws, such that from 1776, “slaves” who arrived in the Republic were not freed on arrival but only after a six-month period which could be extended to a year. If an enslaved person was not sent back to Suriname within that time limit, they were automatically considered free, even if they returned to the colony. But even after this amendment, slave owners successfully challenged the new law. This situation continued until slavery was formally abolished, in the Dutch East Indies in 1860 and in the Caribbean in 1863.

Notes

- 1 Pieter Bernagie, *De belachelijke jonker en Studente-leven* (Doetinchem: Misset, 1882 [1683]).
- 2 Esther Schreuder, *Cupido en Sideron: Twee Moren aan het hof van Oranje* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2017).
- 3 Leendert van der Valk, “Jongens van goeden begriipe,” *Groene Amsterdammer*, 146, no. 25, June 23, 2022.
- 4 Mark Ponte, “Zwarte vrouwen in het midden van de zeventiende eeuw,” in *Jaarboek van het Genootschap Amstelodamum: Alle Amsterdamse Akten: Ruzie, rouw en roddels bij de notaris, 1578–1915*, Jaarboek van het Genootschap Amstelodamum 114, ed. Judith Brouwer et al., 114 (Amsterdam: Virtumedia, 2022), 130–143; Mark Ponte, “Black in Amsterdam around 1650,” in *Black in Rembrandt’s Time*, eds. Elmer Kolfin and Epcó Runia (Zwolle: W Books, 2020); Mark Ponte, “Al de swarten die hier ter stede comen’: Een Afro-Atlantische gemeenschap in zeventiende-eeuws Amsterdam,” *TSEG / The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History*, 15, no. 4 (2019): 33–62. <https://doi.org/10.18352/tseg.995>.



Section 3

Dutch Colonial Slavery Worldwide



Theo Frids Hutabarat

"This work depicts an anonymous worker who is picking a tea leaf. It is an homage to her, a remnant that confirms her existence. The image comes from a photo taken between 1921 and 1926, when slavery had already been abolished in Indonesia. But its legacy continued in many ways, including racism, inequality, and the low wages that this laborer toiled for under harsh conditions. I created this image by superimposing the damaged photograph from my family collection with a photo from the KITLV archive. The missing parts of the damaged photo symbolize the political erasure of certain aspects of history. How should we respond to this incomplete image and do justice to the lives of the enslaved and their descendants? To see the original photo from the KITLV collection, visit the digital collection of Leiden University Libraries: KITLV A891 - Theepluk op een onderneming van het Nederlandsch-Indisch Land Syndikaat in de Oostkust van Sumatra."

Ibu Pemetik Teh [Mother Tea Picker] (2023)

photo montage and print on paper, 13 x 9 cm

Abstract

Throughout the Dutch Caribbean, enslaved people were required to undergo a transformation and submit to the wishes of their “owners.” Their fate was absolute subjugation to the master’s authority and forced conformity to the structure and culture of daily life on plantations and in stately homes. Habituation, accommodation, alienation, and resistance were all part of enslaved people’s existence. Driven by the desire to be free, to be liberated from oppression, exploitation, and humiliation, many fled to the South American mainland and nearby islands. Such migration became a normal part of life in the region and later took the shape of seasonal migrant labor and large-scale immigration to economic hotspots such as the Aruban and Curaçaoan oil refineries.

Keywords: Dutch Caribbean; WIC; Royal Dutch Shell, forced labor; shortages; labor migration

Commodity, Forced Labor, and Rebellion: On Slavery and Post-Slavery in the Dutch Caribbean Islands

Charles do Rego

Slavery was a social and economic system that turned enslaved individuals into commodities, to be used or traded according to their owner's desires. In the Dutch Caribbean islands, Atlantic slavery was introduced in the seventeenth century under the administration of the Dutch West India Company (WIC). The WIC and the Dutch State deliberately established and maintained hierarchical and repressive societal structures through their regulations and religious policies. An important element in this was the land policy, under which initially only company employees could obtain land. This laid the foundation for selective economic development characterized by wide social disparities.

Transatlantic slavery played an important role on all the Antillean islands. African slaves planted the crops on the plantations and built the necessary physical infrastructure; they were a cornerstone of the economy. In Aruba, the land was not properly cultivated until the second half of the eighteenth century, when the colonists were allowed to import slaves.¹ In Bonaire, slaves were employed in salt mining and logging as early as the seventeenth century. On both islands, the Indigenous population mixed with both colonists and enslaved Africans.² In addition to geographical segregation, there was a division of labor in which the Indigenous population was also exploited and had to perform *corvée* labor. In Saint Martin, Africans were put to work, not only in salt mining but also growing sugar cane and tobacco for export. In Saba, the focus had been on small-scale agriculture from the outset, and later, small groups of enslaved individuals were imported to work the land. Just like Curaçao, Saint Eustatius became an important transit and distribution center for goods and slaves during the

eighteenth century. Saint Eustatius also had an export-oriented agricultural sector. Plantation agriculture using African slave labor was most developed in Curaçao, but trade remained central to the island. Enslaved people who were forced to work on the various islands had no choice but to obey under all circumstances, but many did not accept their situation without resistance, flight, or rebellion.

Human Trade and Exploitation

Wherever enslaved people ended up after being traded, they had to undergo a transformation. The first goal was to make them submit absolutely to the authority of the master and to adapt to the structure and culture of daily life on the plantations and in the manor houses. The enslaved had to learn to live in an environment with deviant social norms and values and gradually shape and define their new existence. Although it can be argued that after a few generations, the enslaved found themselves in a more or less recognizable social environment, it must have been a surreal situation that affected their well-being and identity. The realization that once enslaved, they were nothing more than a commodity must have been particularly stinging. When tensions rose and revolts erupted, their deeply ingrained distrust toward the masters came to the surface, but it was also directed toward other enslaved people, due to internal divisions and the severe punishments they underwent.

From 1633, the WIC conquered Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire, Saint Eustatius, Saba, and Saint Martin, and soon began to transport enslaved individuals to this area. In 1662, the WIC also signed an *asiento* with the Spanish Crown, granting the WIC the exclusive right to supply the Spanish colonies with enslaved individuals in the Caribbean. During this period, Curaçao, and later for a brief time, Saint Eustatius, became the main distribution centers for enslaved people in the region. When the WIC lost the *asiento* in 1713, Curaçao immediately lost its position as a trading hub for Africans. However, this did not put a complete stop to the trade in the enslaved; many archived documents mention ships carrying enslaved people in their cargo. Even after the abolition of the slave trade in 1814, when the Netherlands ceased such trade under pressure from Britain, a few slave ships arrived in Willemstad.³ Curaçao also remained an important trading hub for other products. This trade depended in large part on the labor of enslaved people who grew the crops and worked on the docks and merchant ships. By the

end of the eighteenth century, Saint Eustatius lost its position as a distribution center for the enslaved.

The *shons*—Papiamentu for masters or plantation owners—continued to trade their human goods whenever it suited them. The placards used to check the purchase of so-called “French negroes” after the uprisings in the French colony of Haiti in 1791 and 1793 indicate that they also bought and sold enslaved people from other transatlantic colonies. In the early nineteenth century, the trade in people from Curaçao to other Atlantic colonies spiked because of a general economic downturn in Curaçao, while the plantation economy elsewhere flourished.⁴ This regional trade became popular when various European powers abolished the slave trade. Virtually no human merchandise could be brought from Africa, but regional sales were allowed. From 1831 to 1847, no less than 1,883 enslaved individuals were exported from Curaçao. Research into the Santa Martha plantation in Curaçao reveals that one or more members of nearly every family were sold.⁵

A Highly Stratified Society

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the island societies slowly developed a more consistent social structure. After several generations, the enslaved’s kinship relations became stronger, and they had developed their own languages (Papiamentu and Creole English), social customs, and cultural expressions. However, these also reflected the internal divisions among the enslaved. Men and women had different roles to play in society and were accorded a different status. Within the communities of the enslaved, mothers and children determined family relations. They were the ones registered in transport deeds and inventories, while fathers were hardly ever mentioned. Nevertheless, it is important to note that some men did act as fathers, but were never recognized by colonial authorities and therefore cannot be traced in the archives of the Dutch colonizers.

Some children were born from relationships between a Black (enslaved) mother and a white father. These “colored” descendants of the *shon* usually held more prestigious positions, and daughters in particular were often sent to the *shon*’s urban residences. This led to a concentration of such colored people in the city. However, they were not the only people living there. Statistics from the late eighteenth century show that 5,539 enslaved people lived in Willemstad, while 7,445 enslaved people lived in the sur-

rounding areas. Other statistics show that the city also housed many free Black people, Dutch administrators, and traders from various regions who either lived there permanently or periodically. This meant that the unfree people in Willemstad came into contact with a wide variety of people from various backgrounds on a daily basis.

This reveals the complicated stratification of societies on the Antillean islands. Color, gender, and social and economic status not only dictated the type of work that people were allowed to do, but also where they lived. Multiple social layers developed that varied in socioeconomic position, origin, status, and race, with every possible shade of color. As a result, people were constantly preoccupied with their position in society and with ways to preserve or improve it. This preoccupation, that was born from colonialism and slavery, took root in Antillean societies, remained there for many generations and was not exactly conducive to social cohesion.

Living with Shortages

A report from 1791 indicates that “the slaves on this island (Curaçao) are in a much direr condition than the slaves [...] of Guyana, due to the inadequate food supply.”⁶ In rainy areas, the enslaved could usually produce enough food for their own consumption on their small plots of land. In Curaçao, the crops never thrived, and the plantation’s yields were marginal.⁷ The island was dependent on imported food, so the food supply was threatened whenever trade dwindled. When this happened in the late eighteenth century, for instance, shortages grew widespread. In 1795, the absence of food imports led to hunger and drove many to despair and rebellion. Materially and socially speaking, the enslaved were extremely marginalized and suffered the most from scarcity. The barren and dry surroundings offered few additional food sources. Fishing at sea was tightly regulated by the plantation owners to minimize the risk of flight.

The Windward Islands were situated in a more favorable climate for growing food crops.⁸ However, these very small islands had limited arable acreage and this weakness was exacerbated by frequent hurricanes. The proximity of other islands was a constant temptation for those with an urge to escape; from the early nineteenth century many enslaved individuals fled to islands and areas already liberated from slavery, or where paid work was available, such as Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, and the United States. This mobility was formative for the Windwardian people’s character: always on

the lookout for better conditions elsewhere. Another consequence is that the Windwardians have family ties throughout the Caribbean.

In Bonaire, the undiversified economy and the highly unfavorable distribution of land forced the free, Black, and colored residents to seek refuge at sea. General scarcity remained a determining factor on all the Dutch Caribbean islands for a long time and is reflected in lifestyles, tales, and deeply rooted dietary habits. On the arid islands, the basic diet was characterized by corn as a staple food and very few fresh vegetables.

Uprisings and Flight

From historical sources and oral traditions, we can surmise that the enslaved never fully accepted their situation. Attesting to this are various forms of violent resistance, which occurred at Rif St. Marie in 1716, in Hato in 1750, and during the major uprising led by Tula in 1795.

Several thousand people took part in the 1795 revolt, which raged across the entire western side of Curaçao and posed a significant threat to the colonial order. This struggle for freedom was particularly ideological in nature and had the support of some republicans from the upper classes, such as Johanna Lesire, owner of Porto Marie, and the light-skinned Jean de Fourcade.⁹ The revolt was premeditated, which is evident from the court documents and the fact that immediately after the work stoppage on August 17, 1795, insurgents from all nearby plantations gathered at the assembly point in Santa Cruz. The revolt was inspired in part by the French Revolution and the 1791 and 1793 uprisings in Haiti.

There are also reports of other disturbances, such as in Santa Catharina (Curaçao) in early 1795, and isolated acts of violence in Aruba. Even after Tula's failed uprising and severe reprisals by the rulers, a desire for freedom persisted, as evidenced by the support given to the French invasion in 1800. Escape attempts continued, with many fleeing to the South American mainland, to Coro (Venezuela) for example, where escaped slaves who converted to Catholicism could live in freedom. On the Windward Islands, especially Saint Martin, escapes by enslaved people surged like never before after the French and English territories were declared free of slavery while the Netherlands had not yet abolished it. Even on the small island of Saba, where land was so scarce that owners and the enslaved lived in close proximity, and which consequently had a less repressive slavery regime, there were confrontations and escapes during this pre-emancipation period.

The restrictions and inferior position that many refused to put up with any longer fueled the desire for freedom.

In two present-day neighborhoods of Willemstad, Punda and Otrobanda, where there was less direct surveillance, combined with a large population of free inhabitants and connections with the outside world, the discontent and anger more readily led to rebellious behavior. Blacks and “coloreds” were regularly flogged as punishment. Tula testified before Pastor Schinck that he was beaten until he bled. Ultimately, this became an important cause for his rebellion.

Outbreaks of violence and escape attempts were not the only expressions of resistance. Far more often, the enslaved in Curaçao temporarily ran away and hid in the dense *mondi* (a wilderness full of thorny bushes and cacti) and caves, or sailed with small vessels to another territory. Due to natural limitations, these escapes were usually short-lived. Other forms of less overt resistance included the deliberate obstruction of overseers, doing shoddy work, and pretending to respect the master but mocking him behind his back in *tambu* songs and stories of *Kompa Nanzi* (called *Anansi Stories* in Saint Martin). Covert or latent resistance also included stories about favors from kings, “flying back” to the country of origin, and the use of *guené* as a secret language—all of which, taken together, displays a tremendous cultural complexity. The colonizers answered the enslaved’s latent resistance with repression, by means of harsh punishments meted out by the overseers. Owners and administrators feared not only violence, but also poison and black magic, and hence took even stricter measures to control the Black population.

Freedom in Dependency and Poverty

In the nineteenth century, it became increasingly clear that slavery in the Antilles could not last. After slavery was abolished in the British and French colonies (in 1834 and 1848, respectively), the Dutch government had no choice but to act. After lengthy deliberations over a financial compensation scheme, the Second Chamber passed the Emancipation Act on July 9, 1862. This law stated that the enslaved in all Dutch colonies would be free as of July 1, 1863. To compensate the slave owners in the Antilles for their loss, each owner received 200 guilders per enslaved person. In Saint Martin, where the enslaved had effectively been living as free people for some time, the compensation was only 100 guilders per person.

The social divide between landowners and freed individuals that already existed during slavery was consolidated by the decision to compensate slaveholders but not the formerly enslaved. To make a living, many newly freed people in Curaçao took part in the *paga tera* system. Under the terms of this agreement, they were given a plot of land on the plantation to grow their own food and, in return, were obliged to work for the plantation owner at no pay for a certain number of days a year. They were also required to provide their cornstalks as feed for the plantation owner's cattle, and there were restrictions on the number of goats and sheep they could keep. It is therefore questionable whether the abolition of slavery left them materially better off.¹⁰ Reports of deep poverty, malnutrition, illness, and despair rather suggest the opposite. Moreover, colonialism is responsible for a social structure in which the Black descendants of the enslaved are at the bottom rungs of the ladder. In Aruba, the Indigenous groups occupied a similar position, although many residents considered them "higher" in status due to their lighter skin color and their indigenous Venezuelan descent.¹¹

Even after Emancipation, the feeling of subjugation and constant control prevailed on the plantations. Maria Celestijn-Eustatius, born in 1919 in Porto Marie (Curaçao), recounted during an interview that her father "decided to move away from the plantation because he could no longer accept the shon's arbitrariness and humiliations. Father was given a patch of land on the pastor of Willibrordus's property. We were certainly not well off, but at least we retained our dignity. As he put it, 'it's better to be poor than to live in slavery'."¹²

Life was hard on the so-called *sabanas*, grazing lands between the plantations, which were usually not very fertile. Those who lived there were poor and had little prospect of a better life. They remained dependent on the shons for permission to draw water from the plantation wells or access to the coast where they could fish or gather salt.

From oral tradition and interviews, it is evident how powerful the shons remained until the 1950s.¹³ For example, one shon had the habit of releasing his cows onto the tenants' fields before they had finished harvesting; another allowed his cows to drink from the water trough first, which left it badly polluted. There were stories of shons who believed that they could take liberties with women, which exemplified their condescension and sense of superiority toward Blacks and coloreds. This attitude toward women was echoed in male-female relationships within the Black

community. Women were subject to the whims of men, even though they played a central role in plantation society. They were important not only as mothers but also in small-scale trade in the city as the sellers of all kinds of products.

To escape the poverty and hopelessness that persisted after Emancipation, many formerly enslaved people, especially on the Windward Islands, found work as seasonal laborers in the cultivation of sugar cane and various other jobs on neighboring islands and in the United States. There, too, they were often poorly paid, marginalized, and discriminated against. The workers felt helpless in the face of existing race relations and often lacked the motivation to put their best foot forward.

The Oil Industry and Autonomy

The year 1918, when Shell opened a large refinery in Curaçao, marks the beginning of significant changes on the island. Although the oil industry was not devoid of new forms of discrimination and prejudice, it did offer the workers—mainly descendants of formerly enslaved people—a chance to finally break free from the constraints of the plantations. In 1924, Esso (later Exxon) built an oil refinery in Aruba. Many people on both islands were employed by the big oil companies, and the lure of jobs attracted people from the other Antillean islands, too. The migration to Curaçao and Aruba even led to a far-reaching depopulation of the Windward Islands.

From the 1950s onward, workers were empowered by the large number of factory laborers and the rise of nationalist politics. They were better able to take a stand and, aided by the labor movement, to demand more rights and a voice in decision making. This had a strong emancipatory effect. Decisive factors in this development were the autonomy movement, widespread education, and the increase in cultural awareness from the 1930s onward. The oil companies strongly encouraged segregation in the workplace and in social life (e.g., in residential neighborhoods, separate sports facilities). The large number of immigrants employed in this period was often seen as a threat by local workers, who felt marginalized. At the same time, better wages promoted self-awareness and pride among these workers, who could finally afford a relatively affluent lifestyle. The strong guilder helped reduce color barriers, but partly due to selective personnel policies in the oil industry, ethnic distinctions and racial differences remained important for a long time. Until the 1960s, Black English speakers from the Caribbean

were (doubly) excluded: “*ta nán ta pretu*” (they are black).¹⁴ Racial and ethnic tensions were also exacerbated by the flat denial (until recently) by certain groups in Aruba that the island had ever known slavery.

In Curaçao, much has changed for the better in terms of racial and ethnic acceptance, particularly since the 1970s. Social relations in Aruba were long characterized by marked racial separation due to the concentration of black oil workers in San Nicolaas, which lasted through the 1970s. Since the 1980s, tourism has had an effect on Aruba and Saint Martin similar to that of the oil industry.



A separate residential neighborhood was built for the Dutch, European, and American employees of the oil refinery in Aruba. Its social center, called the Esso Club, boasted all sorts of facilities, including an ice cream parlor. The photo shows Black employees serving the children of Esso’s white employees.

Political, demographic, and sociocultural changes also took place on the Windward Islands. In Saba, due to the absence of large-scale plantation agriculture, the group descending from Africans remained small and, until the 1970s, spatially and socially separate from the white settler population. The colored minority population resided mainly in the capital, The Bottom, while the other locales remained virtually the exclusive domain of the white population, a fact which remained visible for a long time. It was not until Antillean democracy really took hold in the 1970s that this racial segregation in Saba and Saint Martin began to disappear.

In conclusion

In Curaçao, most political positions have gradually—over the course of decades—been taken over by the descendants of Black enslaved people; this change was fueled by political emancipation in the 1940s and 1950s, Antillean autonomy in 1954, and the uprising of May 30, 1969 in Curaçao.

Similar developments have taken place on the other islands. Islanders' quest to find their own identity and the "rediscovery of creole cultural expressions" has ultimately led to greater acceptance of their African roots and culture. Much valuable research has been conducted, partly thanks to the increased availability of (digital) sources and to academic and public debate. Greater national consciousness has also produced more local researchers. These researchers should explore, among other things, the role of the enslaved in the seventeenth century and try to find missing documents that expose the relationships between the local elite and the freedom fighters in 1795. Another topic that deserves further exploration is the position of women and family formation in slavery.

Notes

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Abstract

For nearly four centuries, Suriname was part of a European economic system that brought more than 300,000 people from various parts of Africa and forced them to do physical labor, robbing them of their humanity and dignity. Slavery severed the Africans' vital links to their Creator, ancestors, natural environment, family and tribal traditions, children, and themselves. However, they continued to yearn for freedom and strive for independence, establishing communities after successful marronages and the purchase of plantations. Many factors still impede the descendants of enslaved Africans from pursuing well-being and prosperity.

Keywords: Wild Coast; envelopment; freedom; continued impact/afterlives; community development; sustainable development

From Suffering and Resistance to Resilience: Slavery in Suriname

Helmut Gezius

The era of colonization, and within that, the period of slavery, has to a large extent shaped Suriname's demographic composition and socioeconomic production structure. The Republic of Suriname and Surinamese society did not develop naturally, from within, based on the needs, desires, and aspirations of its Indigenous populations. Instead of "development," the slavery system that the Netherlands implemented in its drive to colonize Suriname laid the main foundation for what Surinamese sociologist Glenn Sankatsing calls "envelopment." By this he means a "project" in which Surinamese society was largely structured by external forces through permanent subjugation, by means of economic structures, trade, laws, technology, education, development aid, infrastructure, media, political governance, religion, and science. What did Suriname look like before the Europeans arrived? What kind of economic system did the Dutch establish in the colony of Suriname? And how did the Indigenous people and enslaved Africans respond to the system of oppression during slavery and the ensuing ten-year period of state supervision?

Suriname Before Colonization

It is well known that Suriname is cartographically and demographically a product of colonial intervention. On the map drawn by Portuguese cartographer Diego Ribeiro in 1529, Suriname and neighboring Guyana were labeled the "Wild Coast," a region perceived as having little value, stretching from the Orinoco River and the Rio Negro, which are connected to each other, to the Amazon. This vast Guyana, also known as Great Guyana due to its geographical and ecological characteristics, is now divided into

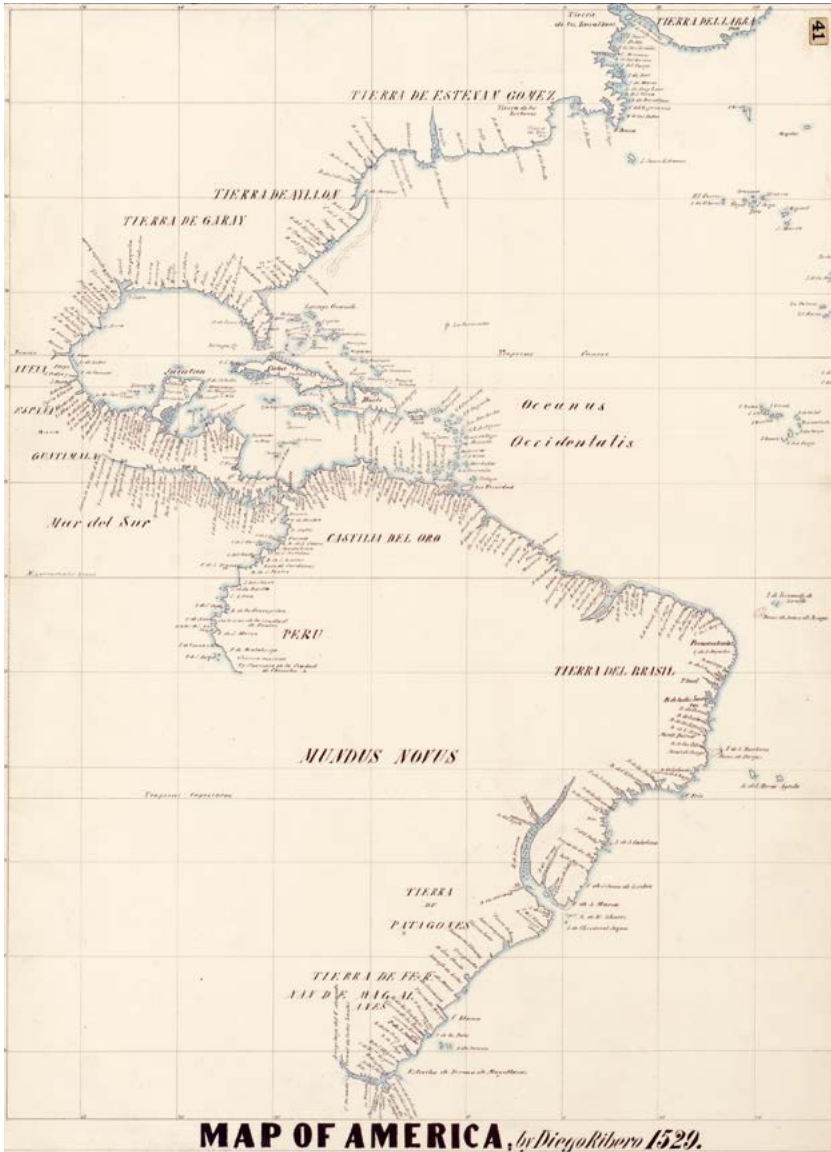
five republics. At the time, Suriname, one of these republics, was just the coastline between the Rio Braxo (now known as the Marowijne River) and the Rio de Placel (nowadays the Corantijn River). The Guianas are a region with great biodiversity and are known for the many waterways managed by various Indigenous peoples through a network of dikes, dams, canals, berms, and hills. Before colonization, large forest areas where many palm species grew were managed for the production of fruit, oil, starch, wine, fuel, and building materials. Cassava was planted between the palms.¹

Major John Scott, a British military man and planter appointed as a geographer by the British king, Charles II, noted in his travel logs that in the seventeenth century, about 700 Caribs and 1,400 Paracutto families lived along the Marowijne River and about 5,000 Caribs along the Suriname, Commewijne, Saramacca, Coppename, and Corantijn rivers.² Along the upper reaches of the Suriname River and the Saramacca River lived another 1,400 Tuuromakkas and over 1,200 Sapayos along the upper reaches of the Corantijn. Arawaks settled in the Guyana region around the year 500, likely driving out other peoples. In turn, they were driven out by the Caribs around 1100. While they were embroiled in conflict with each other, the Europeans invaded the western hemisphere.³

When these European occupiers arrived, Great Guyana underwent significant changes. The Europeans brought tomatoes, chocolate, grains, tobacco, sugar cane, and coffee, but also mosquitoes, cockroaches, honey bees, rats, and epidemic diseases such as smallpox, influenza, hepatitis, tuberculosis, diphtheria, cholera, and typhus, which were common in Europe and Asia. In less than a decade, these diseases killed huge numbers of Indigenous people, an unprecedented catastrophe.⁴ Europeans also introduced pigs and chickens, which are still an important part of many Afro-Surinamese people's protein intake.

European economic interest in Suriname began in 1630, when British expansionists started cultivating tobacco and harvesting timber. Under Sir Francis Willoughby, Governor-General of the West Indies, the first enslaved Africans were brought to Suriname over 370 years ago to cultivate sugar cane. To protect their economic interests, the British built a fort not far from present-day Paramaribo. Attracted by the economic successes of the British, the Dutch—notably the Zeelanders—led by Abraham Crijnsen, conquered the colony of Suriname in 1667. Under the Treaty of Breda, Suriname fell into Dutch hands that same year. The total population of Suriname came to around 4,000 and was made up of white colonists (in-

cluding about 500 families), Jewish planters, and enslaved people (about 2,500). Of those white colonists, approximately 1,200 were British; they left for Jamaica after the Dutch conquest.⁵



On the map of America drawn by Portuguese cartographer Diego Ribero in 1529, Suriname, like adjacent Guyana, is labeled the “Wild Coast.”

In the period from 1499 to 1650, the local inhabitants of Great Guyana faced relentless attempts by European expansionists to take over the area. Between 1678 and 1684, the Caribs and Arawaks in the coastal area of Suriname fiercely resisted the European military invaders.⁶ They fought not only to retain their land, but also their freedom, as the enslavement of Indigenous people had already been legitimized when Suriname fell to the Dutch in 1667. Priary, a captain of the Caribs, declared war on the Dutch occupiers in 1678. With support from the Arawaks, the Caribs fought the Dutch for six years, until the then rulers finally made peace with them in 1684. The Dutch were forced to do so, because the Caribs and Arawaks were attacking plantations all the way from Perica, in the present-day Marowijne district, to the Para Creek in what is now the Para district. The Caribs also encouraged enslaved Africans to flee the plantations. The European occupiers used a divide-and-conquer strategy to play the Caribs of the west (Corantijn River) off against the Caribs in the east (Marowijne River). Eventually, the Caribs, Arawaks, and Warraus, with the help of enslaved Africans, forced peace in 1686, regaining some fundamental freedoms, such as the recognition of their habitats and leaders, and the cessation of the enslavement of their members.⁷

Beset by the departure of British planters and the Carib attacks, the Zee-landers abandoned the colony. They officially handed it over in 1683 to the Dutch West India Company (WIC), which in turn transferred control a few months later to the chartered Society of Suriname. The latter association was a partnership between the Amsterdam city council, the WIC, and the Aerssen van Sommelsdijck family. From that moment on, these three parties governed Suriname, and the Indigenous people no longer had any say over the land of their ancestors. The divisions among them, and between them and the enslaved people who had freed themselves from the plantation system, enabled the Dutch occupiers to maintain their grip on the colony.

Suriname was no longer the “Wild Coast” but part of an economic system designed to serve the interests of wealthy private individuals and statesmen in both England (for a short period) and the Netherlands (for three centuries). The political-administrative control of the colony was in the hands of the Dutch States General. The governors were the highest authority in political and military matters. Economic interests were defended by a police and military apparatus; the legal system was also used to defend, protect, and regulate economic interests where necessary.⁸

Keti Koti: Broken Chains and Severed Links

Over 300,000 Africans were forcibly—under duress and flogging—brought to Suriname between 1650 and 1810 from areas that we now know as Congo, Cameroon, Togo, Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, and Ivory Coast. They were forced, against all principles of equality, humanity, and human dignity, to cultivate swamp and forest areas. These heterogeneous Africans were stripped of their identity and humanity and became the “property” of the plantation owners. Under inhumane conditions, the enslaved established about seven hundred plantations, primarily in low-lying (swamp) areas. After clearing the land, the enslaved were forced to work on these plantations, which were usually rectangular parcels of land ranging from 100 to 1,000 hectares (250–2,500 acres).

The drive for survival and freedom united them and compelled them to flee. Some found this freedom and formed new communities in the forested areas around the plantations. These Maroons, as they were called, fought to achieve a certain independence and integrity for their community. They had their own habitat, authority structure, and justice system. The Dutch colonial government continuously tried to gain control over the Maroon communities through peace treaties. These treaties granted the Maroons the right to live independently in certain areas, in exchange for not forming alliances among themselves, and for promising to return freedom-seeking enslaved people to the Dutch government. In resistance, they did not always comply with these demands. Around 1837, renewed peace treaties, known as the *Akte van Verband* [Act of Allegiance], were signed by the Maroons’ highest traditional authority and the colonial government. This attempt to make the Maroon communities subservient to the plantation colony remained largely unsuccessful. After the emancipation of the enslaved people in 1863, the government no longer had to fear Maroon attacks, so it was not necessary to continue restricting their freedoms.⁹

For about four hundred years, colonial powers severed, through slavery and the slave trade, the links in the evolutionary chain that Africans had with their Creator, ancestors, natural environment, family and tribal traditions, children, and themselves. On July 1, 1863, the enslaved broke free from their iron chains, but they remained psychologically shackled because the vital links in their personal, spiritual, social, and cultural lives had been destroyed. The effects of this disruption are now called “continued impact” or “afterlives.” Despite this, the enslaved rebounded. With resilience and

renewed energy, they secured certain collective rights for themselves and their descendants. One of these is communal land ownership: the collective proprietorship of land in the districts of Coronie and Para, and shared rights to land in the Surinamese interior.

Afro-Surinamese Tribal Communities in the Interior

Unlike other countries in the Caribbean, the Maroons in Suriname had access to a relatively large area of land. The communities established by Maroons who had succeeded in escaping the slavery system were founded in remote, hard-to-reach areas, outside the areas controlled by the colonial powers, often near riverbanks and far beyond the challenging rapids (*sula*) in those rivers. However, these villages could be attacked by military expeditions at any moment.

In the sixteenth century, the Saamaka and the Matawai formed tribes, while the Ndyuka, Aluku, Paamaka, and Kwinti banded together as tribes in the eighteenth century. At the time of the peace treaties in the mid-nineteenth century, the two largest Maroon tribes, the Ndyuka and the Saamaka, had between 2,500 and 3,000 members each; the other Maroon tribes consisted of no more than 300 people each. The Maroon communities were able to survive as tribes by developing communication and authority structures such as the *krutu* (a public meeting to deal with administrative matters and legal disputes), traditional authority and family structures, their own language and judicial systems, and shifting cultivation, all of which reflect their African heritage. These Afro-Surinamese tribal communities in the interior knew how to survive in the tropical forest by combining knowledge brought from Africa with what they learned from the local peoples. The approximately 175 maroon villages that remain today are surrounded by natural resources. Additionally, many Afro-Surinamese men from the interior have been active in gold mining. However, the standard of living in the village communities has not improved much over the past sixty years. There are many reasons for this. These include the reluctance of banks to grant loans, the physical distance from the markets of Paramaribo where they can sell their products, and the impact of the Surinamese Internal War from 1986 to 1992. The Afro-Surinamese village communities have developed a tribal way of life and have been fighting for the recognition of their collective rights for years. This struggle must be waged within a legal system that originated in the colonial era and maintains the principle

of domain, which prioritizes individual land ownership and does not yet recognize or regulate collective land possession. The fact that land in Suriname has become a commodity definitely has colonial roots that go back to feudalism in Europe. The Spanish colonizers introduced the *nulle terre sans seigneur* principle, which meant that land could not be acquired without a landlord. The domain principle dates back to this time; in modern Surinamese law, the domain principle entails that all land is the domain of the state unless other ownership rights can be proven (Art. 1 of the Surinamese Decreet Beginselen Grondbeleid [Decree on Land Policy Principles]).¹⁰



Various Maroon tribes lived in the interior of Suriname. This photo was taken around 1910.

Afro-Surinamese Communities in Paramaribo, Coronie, and Para

The geographic organization of Suriname into districts was directly related to the abolition of slavery, or more precisely, it was related to the introduction of state supervision on July 1, 1863. The country was divided into fifteen outer districts and one city district (Paramaribo), which fell under colonial authority and were governed by appointed commissioners from the Netherlands. The boundaries of these districts have since been redrawn

numerous times, most recently in 1985. Suriname presently has ten districts, all with the same administrative structure. The colonial “footprint” is still visible in Paramaribo in terms of its geographical location, layout and spatial arrangement (the fort, the church, and the government buildings and their location in the city), the names of its streets, its infrastructure, and the composition of its population.

Planters who did not return to the Netherlands and could no longer make a living on the plantations moved to Paramaribo, where they became the colony’s economic and political elite. In the nineteenth century, a separate civil servant class emerged, and after 1863, Paramaribo also saw the rise of a merchant elite. The city did not have many craftsmen; those who did master a craft were mostly enslaved people who lived on the plantations, where they worked for the plantation owners. As the number of free colored people increased, so did the number of people skilled in a craft (such as cobblers, bakers, and carpenters). The formerly enslaved offered their services to city residents or cultivated crops on small plots to meet their needs. House servants and craftsmen who were not obligated to contract labor during the ten-year period of state supervision moved to Paramaribo to work, offer their services, or sell their goods. Around the time when slavery was abolished, Paramaribo had about 20,000 inhabitants; today, there are over 250,000.¹¹ During and after abolition, the descendants of the enslaved Africans settled mainly in and around the city center of Paramaribo, in the suburbs, and in areas located in the districts of Coronie, Para, Marowijne, Brokopondo, and Sipaliwini. Those who moved to Paramaribo after emancipation tended to settle in and around the city center on long plots, where they built several wooden houses for multiple families. These were called *prasi-oso* (multifamily lot).¹² This changed only in the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s when large numbers of identical public housing units were built, such as Beekhuizen, Tammenga, Flora A and B, Geyersvlijt, Hanna’s Lust, and Latour. Many of these working-class neighborhoods are predominantly inhabited by Afro-Surinamese of a more or less equal socio-economic status and social position. The homes in new subdivisions like Ramgoelam, Menkendam, Pontbuiten, Wintiwai, and Ephraimzegen also house Afro-Surinamese from the interior.

The district of Coronie, with its capital, Totness, was the oldest colonial settlement in Suriname. It has a fertile coastal plain with sand and shell ridges and flourished in the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s, when the production of honey, coconut oil, livestock, and rice reached its peak. The population of

Coronie numbers about 4,000, 90 percent of whom are Afro-Surinamese. Traditionally, there were no Maroons in the district because the enslaved who sought freedom fled the other way, deep into the interior. After the abolition of slavery, plantation owners had to pay freed people wages for their labor. This proved economically unfeasible, so instead the plantation owners parceled out most of the plantations to the workers. Jurists tend to attribute the ensuing lack of economic development on these plantations to inheritance issues, specifically the existence of unpartitioned inheritance, i.e., the fact that real estate was not split up among individual heirs for the last 150 years.¹³ However, dividing the land among individuals would ignore “the aspirations of the ancestors,” whose aim in purchasing the plantations was to secure lifelong and collective subsistence for themselves and their descendants.¹⁴ The 1970s construction of a dam has had a very negative impact on the coastal ecosystem, according to local farmers. It has so badly disrupted the natural balance between fresh swamp water and salty seawater that the fields and coconut palms (the symbol of Coronie) are no longer naturally irrigated and nourished.¹⁵ The seawater encroached on the plantations and killed the Parwa trees (mangroves). The government considered it necessary to build a sea wall to protect the East–West Link (one of the main traffic arteries in Suriname, along which most Afro-Surinamese Coronians live). The fisheries sector, which was an important livelihood for the Coronians, has also been affected by man-made changes to the freshwater table, as have rice cultivation and the honeybees that live in the Parwa trees.

The district of Para, named after the Para River, was established in 1968 with its capital in Onverwacht. Para became five times larger as the result of redistricting in 1982. It now has over 25,000 inhabitants and the Afro-Surinamese comprise its largest ethnic group. It has Suriname’s only international airport and until 2014, it was home to the country’s biggest income source: a fully integrated aluminum industry (bauxite–alumina–aluminum). Para is also the source of Paramaribo’s drinking water supply and has the most popular tourist resorts in the country. After the abolition of slavery and the end of state supervision, many plantation owners in Para were strapped for cash. They sold their plantations either at auctions or to freed people. The plantations were then managed by teams in which the purchasing families were represented. These managing teams had no legal status but were recognized by the government when the state wanted to purchase land for the construction of the railway, the district commis-

sioner's office, and bauxite mining. Previously, the plantations also had a traditional authority structure (with village heads, *basyas*, and village elders linked to each purchasing family) similar to the power structure still found in the interior. The community followed West African religious traditions and cultural practices. The government of Suriname did not interfere with the internal functioning of such plantation societies.

After the abolition of slavery, the freed people were subject to tax obligations calculated on household items, rental value, and other personal possessions. They resisted taxation for two years and did not pay the tax increase of 1886. The fight continues, as the Federation of Para Plantations declared in a document dated March 13, 2016. With the suffering and resistance of their ancestors during slavery in mind, Afro-Surinamese should be aware of the factors that weaken or disqualify their efforts to achieve prosperity and well-being. The same goes for the afterlives of slavery in all its manifestations, but also for the strengths, achievements, wealth, knowledge, experiences, wisdom, traditions, and practices that promote intangible and sustainable material well-being. They also need to define the strategies, goals, and main activities required to achieve that purpose.

Notes

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Traces of Slavery in Foreign Archives

In February 1685, something extraordinary happened: a Dutchman named Balthasar Coymans (1652–1686) secured the Spanish *asiento de negros*, a contract granting him the exclusive right to introduce enslaved people into the Spanish Americas. Coymans subcontracted the WIC to purchase enslaved people and sent several employees to the Caribbean region and South America to supervise the implementation of the *asiento*.

Coymans is one of the many Dutchmen in the early modern period who were active in the colonial areas ruled by other European powers like Spain, France, and England. Those Dutchmen left traces all over the world in the shape of archival records. Coymans' involvement in the Spanish slave trade is documented not only in Dutch archives but also in archives in Spain, England, Curaçao, Jamaica, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Panama, and probably elsewhere, too. The sources consist of collections of letters, notarial deeds, court and inquisitorial reports, contracts, and state documents.

Just as foreign archives contain a lot of information about Dutch colonial actors, archives in the Netherlands are a treasure trove of details about wealthy foreigners and their activities in the Dutch colonies. These figures include English merchants who engaged in smuggling in eighteenth-century Suriname, foreign traders who did business in the Dutch Gold Coast in West Africa, and so on.

Dutch and foreign archives regularly reveal the perspectives of Indigenous and enslaved people, too. In the Jakarta archives, for instance, we find information about relationships between European men and Indonesian women, and in the Seville archive, there are stories of enslaved people from Curaçao who fled and found freedom in Venezuela.

More and more historians are conducting research using archives outside their own country. Yet, this is not without its difficulties. Foreign archives are not always accessible and user friendly, for example, because of missing catalogs or lack of digitization. As a result, historians often have to physically go into the archives and personally transcribe what they find—a challenging, time-consuming, and costly process. Fortunately, a growing number of archives are cataloging and digitizing their collections. This is making archives worldwide generally more accessible to researchers. Documents that remained hidden for centuries are finally seeing the light of day again.

Abstract

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch exploited three colonies, Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara on the so-called Wild Coast of South America. Originally organized as commercial posts to trade with Indigenous people for annatto and native slaves, eventually all three settlements became plantation colonies in which enslaved West Africans grew sugar, coffee, and cotton. Indigenous allies aided the Europeans, who were a tiny minority in each colony, in keeping control of their plantation workers by hunting runaways or putting down uprisings. Yet enslaved people resisted slavery in many ways. In 1763, the largest armed rebellion in the Caribbean before the Haitian Revolution broke out in Berbice. It took more than a year to break the nearly successful rebellion.

Keywords: slavery; slave resistance; Carib; Dutch Atlantic; Berbice; Essequibo; Demerara

Colonialism, Slavery, and the Slave Trade in Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo

Marjoleine Kars

In the early seventeenth century, the Dutch established small settlements and trading posts in the northern coastal region of South America with support from the local Carib and Arawak peoples. This tropical area, known to the Europeans at the time as the Wild Coast, lay between Venezuela and the Amazon Delta. Life in these outposts was precarious. Most settlements succumbed to disease, disputes, or attacks by Indigenous inhabitants or European rivals. Only two of them grew into sustainable colonies: Essequibo (established in 1617) and Berbice (1627). Both were named after the rivers that they were situated on, which flowed northward from the interior to the Atlantic Ocean. A third colony, Demerara, located between Berbice and Essequibo along the river of the same name, was established in 1746. In all three colonies, society was built on slavery, practically from the start.

The Beginning of the Colonies

Essequibo was managed by the Chamber of Zeeland, one of the administrative branches of the Dutch West India Company (WIC), a state enterprise founded in 1621. Berbice was controlled by the influential Van Pere merchant family from Zeeland, who had been granted a charter by the WIC. Despite these administrative differences, the two colonies developed along the same lines. Both grew slowly. Initially, the colonists focused on trade with Indigenous peoples, dealing in wood and annatto, a plant-based orange-red dye produced by South American women and used to color foodstuffs, including butter and cheese, in the Republic. Colonists also grew tobacco, an addictive crop that quickly gained popularity in Europe. By the

mid-seventeenth century, both colonies had their first plantations where, like in the rest of the Caribbean, enslaved West Africans were forced to cultivate sugar cane. The number of enslaved people was still very small at that time. Although the Dutch slave trade grew steadily in the latter half of the seventeenth century, few slave ships set course for the small colonies.

The colonists also immediately started purchasing enslaved South Americans. The deceitful trading practices of the Dutch and the random enslavement of individuals from “befriended” peoples antagonized the Caribs, Arawaks, and Waraos. In the 1670s, they attacked the Dutch in Suriname, and, ten years later, in Berbice and Essequibo. The fact that they conspired with enslaved Africans worried the colonists deeply. Ultimately, however, the colonists broke the resistance in all three colonies by gradually driving a wedge between the South Americans and the Africans. From then on, the colonists promised they would never enslave their allies. This did not put a stop to the lucrative trade in South Americans, however; it merely meant that the Dutch only traded in people who they had no agreements with. In return, the South American allies were expected to help the colonists suppress uprisings by enslaved Africans and to capture those who fled. The colonists were completely dependent on their help as the Dutch had no authority over the vast areas of jungle and savannah that lay beyond the cultivated zone. In the eighteenth century, Indigenous peoples effectively helped the Dutch to maintain and expand the number of Africans whom they kept in slavery on the Wild Coast.¹ The strategy that achieved this, in which colonial rulers used local populations to exert power and thus made them to some extent complicit, is a feature of nearly all European overseas colonies in the early modern period. Of course, local elites had their own political and economic reasons to cooperate with the Europeans.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, both Essequibo and Berbice were attacked by French privateers who demanded ransoms. For lack of cash, the Dutch paid these ransoms partly in enslaved people, who were torn from their families and communities and probably ended up being sold by the French in the Caribbean islands.² In Berbice, the French shake-down attempt led to a change of government because the Van Pere family refused to pay the ransom and opted to transfer the colony to a group of investors in Amsterdam. The buyers founded the Society of Berbice, which managed the colony under a charter from the States General until the end of the eighteenth century. On the Wild Coast, the Dutch state outsourced executive management, the cultivation of export products by enslaved

people, and the violence needed to maintain social order to institutions like the WIC and the Society of Berbice.

Berbice and Essequibo transformed over the course of the eighteenth century from trading posts into plantation colonies that were part of the Atlantic economy connecting Europe, West Africa, and the Americas. Relying on Dutch capital, trade goods, and government support, the colonists focused on growing export crops such as coffee, cotton, cocoa, and sugar, all cultivated by enslaved laborers. In Essequibo, the main products were sugar and later cotton. In Berbice, coffee, cotton, and cocoa predominated. Sugar was only produced on Society plantations in Berbice. For private planters, cultivating sugar cane and turning it into sugar was too expensive due to the technology and large numbers of enslaved workers required. Sugar cultivation demanded even more labor from enslaved people than coffee, cocoa, or cotton, and posed greater risks, especially during the milling and boiling of sugar cane.

Because the Dutch wanted to protect the Republic from foreign competition, colonists had to sell their products in the Republic. For the same reason, the Wild Coast colonies could only purchase what they needed from Dutch traders, resulting in high prices and constant shortages. To make matters worse, the European colonial powers in the area were constantly at war, and internal disputes within the WIC reduced the supplies from the Republic. All in all, this led to hunger among the enslaved people and a significant amount of smuggling; the contraband trade was mainly carried on with the British and Americans.³

The sugar industry in Essequibo and Demerara (after 1746) received a boost from the departure of Britons from Caribbean islands such as Barbados and Antigua, where the soil was growing depleted. At the invitation of the governor of Essequibo, many of the British started sugar plantations along the Demerara River. Initially, Demerara was governed by Essequibo, but in 1750, a separate “commander” was appointed to run the colony, and in 1772 it got its own governor and council. The colony, blessed with fertile soil, grew rapidly with British capital and eventually overshadowed both Essequibo and Berbice. Just as in Essequibo, the new plantations in Demerara were mainly established along the river delta, which meant that the enslaved not only had to clear forests and plow fields but also build dikes and dig canals to protect the land against the tides.⁴ This grueling work drastically transformed the landscape.

A Growing Population

From 1730, the population of the colonies grew. An overwhelming majority of the inhabitants were of West African descent. Precise figures are not available, but in 1735, Essequibo counted around 2,700 enslaved people and fewer than 150 Europeans. A few years later, Berbice had a similar ratio: 2,200 to 2,500 Africans to 135 Europeans. After the mid-eighteenth century, the population grew more rapidly. In 1763, on the eve of the major slave uprising, 350 Europeans in Berbice kept 300 South Americans and 4,500 to 5,000 Africans in slavery. By 1785, the combined population of Essequibo and Demerara included 2,000 colonists and a staggering 42,000 enslaved people. This demographic composition, with an overwhelming Black majority, was typical of most plantation colonies in the Caribbean, to which the Wild Coast also belonged. There were also many people of mixed ancestry, most of whom were enslaved. They were either the offspring of European men and enslaved African or South American women (usually conceived through non-consensual sex), or they had a combination of African and Indigenous parentage (these were more often consensual relationships).⁵

The appalling living and working conditions, harsh punishments, and constant food shortages among the Black population led to high mortality rates. Only a constant flow of new captives from West Africa could maintain and grow the Black population. The Slave Voyages project website documents over 36,000 Atlantic slave voyages. From this project, we now know that in the seventeenth century, most captives were shipped from the Slave Coast (present-day Togo and Benin) and the Loango Coast (which stretched from present-day South Cameroon to the Congo River). In the eighteenth century, the main shipping points were the Loango Coast, the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), and after 1740, increasingly the Windward Coast (present-day Liberia and Ivory Coast).⁶

Initially, the WIC had a monopoly on the transport of new captives to the Wild Coast colonies, but after 1738, slave traders from Amsterdam and Zeeland took over. Many planters, deeply in debt, lacked the credit to acquire as many new workers as they wanted. Especially in Essequibo and Demerara, many captives were acquired through illicit channels, obviously making it difficult for historians to trace. Hardly any research has been conducted on the impact of this experience on slaves.

The forced journey from West Africa to the “New World” was called the Middle Passage.⁷ About 13 percent of the captured Africans did not survive this inhumane journey on the overcrowded Dutch slave ships. The longer they remained on the ship (many spent months on board before the crossing even began), the greater the chance they would not survive. Those who did survive often regarded their fellow “shipmates” as family. Once in the Wild Coast colonies, they were again separated. Some were delivered and allotted to planters who had ordered enslaved individuals before the journey, while others were transported on speculation and sold on the spot. Thus, people were yet again brutally separated from their (new) families.

Life on the Plantation

Upon arrival, the newcomers had to rebuild their lives. Plantations on the Wild Coast were not as large as elsewhere in the Caribbean. Here, they ranged from five to 150 people. Africans had to adapt to a new working regime, forge new social ties, and find their place within the existing plantation hierarchy. Rankings were based on gender, work, and origin. Creoles (those born in the colony) often looked down on people newly arrived from Africa. If Africans could not find enough people on a plantation who spoke their native language, they had to learn the local creole language. This came on top of having to process the trauma of the Middle Passage and the heart-breaking loss of family, homeland, and future prospects. Generally, people adapted their African customs and practices to their new situation, creating flexible diaspora cultures that were modified and adapted further by each new generation. The Dutch did not make it a priority to convert the enslaved to Christianity, so the enslaved could retain their own religions.

While some enslaved men were trained as coopers and carpenters, and other men and women worked as household servants, the majority of adult enslaved people toiled in the fields under the blazing sun for six long days a week. The hard work, severe punishments, and regular hunger took their toll. One-sixth of the adults were consistently unable to work due to illness, injury, or permanent disability. Sugar cane was predominantly grown in Essequibo and Demerara, while Berbice mainly produced coffee. In Berbice, plantations were established closer to the coast only in the late eighteenth century, while in Essequibo and Demerara this had already been common practice earlier in the century. These coastal areas were tide sensitive and prone to flooding, so the enslaved had to dig canals and ditches and build

dikes to protect the fields from seawater, which was grueling and back-breaking work. Women also took care of their children as well as they could while working in the fields, in line with West African gender norms that remained prevalent in the New World. The planters had little consideration for pregnant women. Child mortality was high, and parents had little say in childrearing. Creoles had a better chance of starting a family than first-generation Africans.



Drawing of an African woman holding a tree trunk and carrying a toddler in a sling on her back. This illustrates the caregiving role of African women that continued in Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara.

In the evenings and on Sundays, enslaved people worked on their own little plots of land. Planters in the Caribbean cut costs for maintaining enslaved people by allotting them a plot of land to grow their own food. Although this effectively meant a second *corvée*, historians argue that many enslaved people liked having these plots. They could grow crops that they were accustomed to from their home countries—many enslaved people had been farmers in West Africa—and the plots were often far from the plantation house, providing a degree of autonomy. The produce could be eaten or traded, as could the products of hunting and fishing, or the chickens and ducks some kept. The “underground” economy that arose from this trade is worthy of further research.

Newcomers learned what it meant to be enslaved in a Dutch colony. In their home countries, slavery existed too, but generally in less rigid forms than Atlantic chattel slavery, in which slaves, along with their children, were the absolute property of the slaveholders and could be treated and traded as any other commodity.

Unlike the Spanish and French authorities, the Dutch state never drew up central legislation about slavery to deal with pertinent questions like: Did enslaved people have rights, such as the right to marriage, children, or possessions? Were there rules for slaveholders regarding the treatment of enslaved people? How could enslaved people be punished, and were there consequences if a punishment resulted in death? Was it possible to gain freedom, and if so, how? Every individual Dutch colony regulated such matters in an ad hoc manner by means of ordinances drawn up by the governor and his council of local planters. These so-called *plakkaten* (acts) were then approved by officials of the WIC and the Society of Berbice in the Republic. The regulations legalized the violence and dehumanization on which slavery was based. In this way, slavery, which had existed in much of the world since time immemorial, also became a Dutch phenomenon.

While the majority of enslaved people reluctantly resigned themselves to their existence and focused on the day-to-day, there was also resistance. The conflict between slaveholders and enslaved people took various forms. People pretended not to understand orders, did their work half-heartedly, or broke their tools. They feigned illness and mocked their slaveholders behind their backs. Some, mainly young African men, ran away, sometimes for short periods, to blow off steam or visit a loved one on another plantation, and sometimes for good. They hoped to build an independent life

in the jungle, like the Maroons in Suriname, or to flee to the Spaniards in Venezuela, who promised freedom to escaped enslaved people who converted to Catholicism.

As mentioned earlier, Indigenous South American allies often made short shrift of this. Slave hunters brought back the chopped-off and roasted left hands of their victims to the colonial authorities for payment. Those who escaped from Essequibo had the best chance of reaching the Spaniards in Venezuela. In 1772, the governor of Essequibo complained that the Spaniards were harboring so many enslaved people from his colony. “The numbers of runaways increasing daily,” he wrote, “this matter will end in the total ruin of a great many plantations.”⁸ Freedom seekers from Demerara or Berbice had to travel much farther to reach the Spanish, and it seems likely that they sought to establish an independent existence locally, like the Maroons in Suriname.



A painted papier-mâché diorama of a celebration on a Surinamese plantation, created by Gerrit Schouten (1779–1839). Under a canopy, enslaved people are performing a *Du*, a role play in which music and dance are used to express criticism of life in slavery. Such expressions undoubtedly also occurred in the colonies of Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara.

Organized Resistance

There were also large-scale, collective forms of resistance. Regularly, a group of people or even an entire plantation community left their labor camp. For example, in 1741, thirty-eight Creole enslaved people fled the WIC plantations Poelwijk and Duinenberg in Essequibo. The WIC had put them to work digging silver mines. At some point, the enslaved people decided that they no longer wanted to do this exhausting and dangerous work and fled to an island in the Cayuni River. Only after seven months of negotiation did they agree to return in exchange for a pardon and exemption from mining labor.⁹

Most revolts had less favorable outcomes. In 1772 and 1789, small uprisings in Demerara were suppressed with the help of South Americans.¹⁰ In Berbice, collective attempts to seek freedom occurred in every decade of the eighteenth century, but the escapees were usually tracked down and captured or killed by South American commandos or fellow enslaved people sent out by the planters. Such methods ensured that only a few free Maroon communities were established in Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara, although that began to change in the late eighteenth century. Additional research is needed to map out the extent and full range of resistance that took place.

The political struggle between enslaved people and slaveholders rarely resulted in armed conflict. Large-scale armed resistance was difficult to organize, and except in Haiti, it never succeeded. The most successful uprising in the three colonies occurred in Berbice in 1763. In fact, it was the longest and largest revolt in the entire Caribbean in the eighteenth century before the revolution in Saint Domingue (Haiti) in 1791. The freedom fighters, a coalition of Africans and Creoles, took over the entire colony for more than a year. Their leader, who called himself Governor Kofi, aimed to create his own state alongside a Dutch colony. He probably planned to continue growing sugar cane in his new country using forced labor, as he did during the uprising. After a few months of fighting, he even proposed to divide Berbice in two. The southern part would be for him and his people, and the other half for the Europeans. This diplomatic initiative led to an exchange of letters between Governor Kofi and the Dutch governor, but the negotiations broke down. Eventually, the Dutch suppressed the revolt with the help of soldiers from the Republic and with crucial assistance from Caribs and Arawaks. Many people of African descent in Berbice tried to avoid in-

volvement in the war. They preferred self-determination over serving a new regime, in this case ruled by the rebels.

The States General spent large sums of money to suppress the revolt by force, for two reasons. One was to protect the financial interests of the Dutch elite; the other was that they feared the freedom struggle would spread to the much larger colony of neighboring Suriname. The rebels lost the fight mainly due to a lack of allies and a supply line. The Dutch colonists could obtain food, medicines, and military assistance from their neighbors and the Republic. Moreover, they received crucial help from their South American allies. The rebels, on the other hand, had no one to provide them with new guns and more fighters. Nevertheless, it took until the summer of 1764 for the Dutch to regain full control of their battered colony. By that time, from one-fifth to possibly as many as one-third of the enslaved people had perished.¹¹ We do not know how the survivors processed the trauma of this war.

Had the rebels won—which they nearly did—the history of the Atlantic area would have looked very different. Instead, the Dutch government began to realize how much it cost the state to fight revolts and Maroons for the benefit of private enterprises like the Society of Suriname and the Society of Berbice. In 1795, the state therefore took direct control of the colonies on the Wild Coast, including Suriname. Within a few years, Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara passed into British hands. Many planters in those colonies were British or pro-British. They were dissatisfied with the inability of Dutch enterprise to provide them with sufficient capital and enslaved people. The British poured a lot of money into the colonies and brought in large numbers of enslaved people. In the nineteenth century, the three settlements briefly joined the ranks of Great Britain's most profitable Caribbean possessions.

The Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice archives have been explored only piecemeal. For a long time, historians were more focused on Suriname and the Dutch possessions in Asia, and if they showed an interest in these three small colonies, they tended to focus on the European minority rather than the large majority of people of color. This is changing, however. The National Archives in The Hague has digitized many of the sources on the three colonies, including documents from the Guyana Archive in Georgetown and The National Archives in Kew (UK). This will facilitate further ex-

ploration of topics such as the role of enslaved people in the underground economy, gender relations, interactions between Africans and South Americans, the trade in locally enslaved individuals, the outlook on life of the enslaved people, and daily life on the plantations. Only then will a “history of colonialism” emerge that does justice to all involved and addresses today’s urgent questions about the afterlives of slavery.

Notes

- 1 Marjoleine Kars, *Blood on the River: A Chronicle of Mutiny and Freedom on the Wild Coast* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2020), 44–48.
- 2 P.M. Netscher, *Geschiedenis van de koloniën Essequibo, Demerary, en Berbice, van de vestiging der Nederlanders aldaar tot op onzen tijd* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1888), 159.
- 3 Bram Hoonhout, *Borderless Empire: Dutch Guiana in the Atlantic World, 1750–1800* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2020), 112–15.
- 4 E.W. van der Oest, “The Forgotten Colonies of Essequibo and Demerara, 1700–1814,” in *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585–1817*, eds. Victor Enthoven and Johannes Postma (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 323–61.
- 5 Netscher, *Geschiedenis*, 108; “Notitien der Plantagien in Rio Berbice,” NA, Oude West-Indische Compagnie Archives, 1.05.05, Inv. no. 72; Hoonhout, *Borderless Empire*, 3; Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie, *Realm between Empires: The Second Dutch Atlantic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 131.
- 6 Kars, *Blood on the River*, 54.
- 7 The Middle Passage was one leg of the triangular trade route that took manufactured goods (such as tools, guns, ammunition, cloth) from Europe to Africa, African captives to work in the Americas and West Indies, and products and raw materials produced on the plantations (sugar, rice, tobacco, indigo, rum, and cotton) back to Europe.
- 8 Hoonhout, *Borderless Empire*, 90–91.
- 9 Netscher, *Geschiedenis*, 112, 381 (note 48).
- 10 Hoonhout, *Borderless Empire*.
- 11 Kars, *Blood on the River*.

Abstract

The Dutch West India Company introduced enslaved Africans into its North American colony of New Netherland soon after the first European families settled in the region. These enslaved men, women, and children helped build the Dutch colony. Indeed, slavery proved instrumental to the development of New Netherland. But Dutch slavery in North America did not end when the WIC lost New Netherland to the English in 1664. North America's Dutch descendants continued to enslave Black and Indigenous peoples. This chapter explores Dutch slavery, the lives of the enslaved, and Dutch slavery's legacy in what is now the United States.

Keywords: African-American history; Dutch slavery; New Netherland; Dutch New York; slavery in New York

Slavery in Dutch North America

Andrea Mosterman

On May 29, 1664, twenty men, nine women, and one child were sold to the highest bidders at an auction in New Amsterdam. Two days earlier, they had arrived there along with eleven others who, according to Peter Stuyvesant, director-general of the New Netherland colony, were too old and weak to be sold. Their voyage to the Dutch colony in North America on a ship named *De Musch* had begun a month earlier in Curaçao. Among those auctioned off were a mother and child who were bought for 360 guilders by one Nicolas Verleth. Who was this woman? Where did she come from? How old was her child? And what became of them in New Netherland? We will probably never find the answers to these questions. Dutch documents from that time merely refer to them as “a negress with a child.”¹

Dutch slavery, the slave trade, and enslaved people had an immense influence on the development of New Netherland and, later on, New York and New Jersey. Enslaved Africans were brought to the Dutch colony only a few years after the first European families settled there in 1624. So clearly, slavery was introduced by the Dutch West India Company (WIC) at an early stage. It remained a visible presence in the region, in Dutch American communities too, even long after the WIC had ceded the territory to the English. In New York, slavery was not abolished until 1827. In New Jersey, where generations of descendants of Dutch colonists kept people in slavery, it happened only after many years of gradual emancipation; the process was not completed until the end of the Civil War in 1865.

Slavery in New Netherland

Recent research shows that enslaved Africans played an important role in the Dutch colonization of North America. To effectively colonize the area, the WIC needed people from a non-Indigenous population, but it was not always easy to attract European colonists for this purpose. Therefore, enslaved Africans were used to populate the land, and then to develop and defend it.



Map drawn by Nicolaas Visscher II with a view of New Amsterdam (Manhattan) in the foreground.

As enslaved laborers, they contributed to the building of the colony's infrastructure, the clearing of woodlands, and farming. They did some of their work in chains, sometimes side by side with prisoners. Enslaved Africans represented a certain capital value and were regularly rented out or sold. During the seventeenth century, an increasing number of individuals purchased enslaved people to put them to work in households, in workplaces, and on farms and plantations. Although they were forced to labor in many places, from Fort Casimir on the Delaware River to Huys de Hoop in what is now Connecticut, most enslaved people in the North American

colony resided in New Amsterdam, the settlement at the southern tip of Manhattan.

The WIC claimed an enormous area in North America, but in reality, it controlled only a small number of settlements. Most of the land remained in the hands of the original inhabitants. Relations with these Indigenous populations were often tense in the immediate surroundings of the Dutch settlements. That was especially so, of course, wherever settlers or the WIC tried to expand their area of control. Near Manhattan, the belligerence of New Netherland Director-General Willem Kieft led to open warfare with the Munsee-speaking Lenape population. Hundreds of settlers and Munsee were killed in that two-year-long conflict, which has gone down in history as Kieft's War. One of the most notorious and brutal attacks that the Dutch launched on the Munsee was the Pavonia Massacre (1643).

During Kieft's War, enslaved Africans were armed and deployed in battle. Some of them were given land north of New Amsterdam, in an area used as a buffer to protect the colony from Munsee attacks. Another example of the involvement of the enslaved occurred during a war against the Esopus people near what was then known as Wiltwijck, a settlement in the Hudson Valley. To protect the Dutch colonists, the WIC deployed these enslaved men. The Esopus men who were taken prisoner in that conflict were shipped to Curaçao to work for the Company "alongside the negros."²

Historians have mainly written about the enslaved men and women who worked for the WIC. Some of them earned conditional freedom, also known as half-freedom. They were often required to work for the Company on a regular basis, and in several cases, their children remained the property of the WIC. It is not surprising that these enslaved Africans have been highlighted in historiography; unlike others who were enslaved in the Dutch colony, their names appear in surviving documents. We find documentation, for instance, of Sijmon Congo, Manuel de Gerrit de Reus, Domingo van Angola, Cleijn Manuel, and Marijken van Angola. Manuel de Gerrit de Reus van Angola is even mentioned in several documents. Thus, we know that he was a member of the New Amsterdam Dutch Reformed Church and that his son Michiel was baptized there on March 16, 1642. He also appeared several times before the director-general and the council of New Amsterdam, the colony's executive and legislative body. In the council minutes from 1641, De Reus is named as one of nine suspects in the murder of Jan Premero, another man kept in slavery by the WIC. De Reus

was eventually found guilty of the murder, but miraculously survived his hanging, after which he was granted amnesty. Three years later, he and ten other enslaved men and their wives earned half-freedom. They were freed on two conditions: that they annually paid the WIC dues and that they assisted the Company whenever called upon. Their children (including any future offspring) would remain Company property.³ The married couples were given land north of New Amsterdam, where a growing number of Black New Netherlanders settled.

From the names of the men and women who lived in this community, such as Paulo Angola, Reytory van Angola, Sijmon Congo, Pieter Santomee, and Antonij Portugies, it appears that a large number of them hailed from São Tomé, Congo, and Angola. The Iberian-Catholic first names also indicate that they came from areas strongly influenced by Portugal and the Roman Catholic Church, which was the case in a large part of western central Africa. Their Christian background may have led them to attend Dutch Reformed churches. However, they were a minority. Just like the mother and child sold to Nicolas Verleth in 1664, we know little about the enslaved people whose names do not appear in the documents.

According to the Slave Voyages database, about one thousand enslaved people were brought to New Netherland by means of the intercolonial and transatlantic slave trade between 1627 and 1664. They were often transported on ships like *De Musch*, which brought a range of cargo from the Caribbean to New Netherland. The only ships that were specifically used to bring people from Africa to North America were *'t Witte Paert* (1655) and the *Gideon* (1664). Enslaved men, women, and children were often held captive on these vessels for months in horrifying conditions. Many of them did not survive the voyage, and those who did disembark in New Netherland were often sick, malnourished, and traumatized. In New Netherland, these men, women, and children were put to work by the WIC or publicly auctioned off. Some of those who arrived in New Amsterdam on board the *Gideon* were taken to New Amstel, a colony in present-day Delaware controlled by the city of Amsterdam. In a number of cases, enslaved men, women, and children were sold off in the English colonies of Virginia and Maryland.

When the English took over New Netherland in 1664, their control of the territory was not (yet) permanent. In the Treaty of Breda (1667), the Dutch and the English agreed that England would retain this part of North America, while Suriname, previously an English colony that had been captured by the Dutch earlier that same year, would remain under Dutch

control. However, this agreement was broken when the Netherlands recaptured the North American colony in August 1673. It was then renamed New Orange, but it did not stay Dutch for long. Within a year, in the Treaty of Westminster (1674), the two sides agreed that the Netherlands could keep Suriname in return for a permanent surrender of the North American colony.

Developments after the Loss of New Netherland

After the Netherlands lost the colony to the English, the Dutch settlers and their descendants remained influential in the area. Many of them continued to enslave people, and in many cases, the enslaved spoke Dutch, prepared Dutch dishes, and celebrated Dutch holidays such as “Pinkster,” a term derived from the Dutch word for Pentecost or Whitsuntide. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many enslaved New Yorkers celebrated this holiday in grand fashion.

Although the enslaved people in New York on average comprised less than 15 percent of the total population, there were places where their presence was greater. In 1790, enslaved people made up about 30 percent of the population in parts of Dutch-American Kings County, present-day Brooklyn. In those communities, nearly three-quarters of all households enslaved people. The Van Brunt family, for instance, were prominent slaveholders. According to the 1755 Census of Slaves, which was based on a count of adults only, Rutgert van Brunt Jr. enslaved six men and four women.⁴ Dutch descendants in North America also often had connections with the Caribbean, and in some cases they owned plantations there.

The Dutch Reformed Church originally played an important role in many of these Dutch-American communities. However, in the eighteenth century, significantly fewer enslaved people attended these churches. Some documents suggest that this is partly due to opposition from white churchgoers who did not want to share “their” church with enslaved Black people. These opponents saw the people whom they enslaved as cursed and soulless, among other things. This was compounded by the fact that many preachers, such as Theodardus Polhelmus and Martinus Schoonmaker, were themselves enslavers.⁵

Slavery could only be sustained by means of violence, legislation, surveillance, and intimidation. Enslaved women, men, and children always fought for their freedom. Although they were not allowed to travel or trade without special permission, they regularly broke the many rules that were intended to restrict their activities. They found alternative ways of navigating the cities and the countryside. Often, they did this for temporary visits to family or friends, but they also sought to escape slavery more permanently, which is evident from the many advertisements enslavers placed in the hope of recovering enslaved people who self-liberated. But not all resistance to slavery was individual in nature. In 1712, for example, enslaved New Yorkers collectively stood up to the authorities. According to Governor Robert Hunter, the uprising began when a building was set on fire. When white New Yorkers came to see the fire, they were kept away by enslaved New Yorkers armed with axes, knives, pistols, and other weapons. Nine white people, including Dutch descendants, were killed during the uprising and others were injured. When the governor deployed a militia, the rebels fled to the woods north of the city. Several were arrested. Six committed suicide before they could be caught. Eventually, 21 enslaved New Yorkers were brutally executed in public. The outward display of cruelty was an attempt by the authorities to discourage any further resistance.



Photo of Sojourner Truth in 1864.

Probably the best known enslaved New Yorker was Sojourner Truth, also known as Isabella Baumfree (1797–1883). She was renowned for her work as an abolitionist and women’s rights activist. Her speech during the 1851 Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio became world famous. Truth was born at the end of the eighteenth century in a Dutch-American community in the Hudson Valley. She, her brother, and her parents were enslaved by the Hardenbergh family until the death of Charles Hardenbergh in 1806. At an auction, the then nine-year-old Truth, who only spoke Dutch at the time, was sold to an English-speaking family. Years later, she

recounted her experiences in *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*, one of the few books that describe slavery in the Dutch-American communities from the perspective of the enslaved.⁶ Her story shows that the descendants of Dutch settlers continued to enslave people well into the nineteenth century, when slavery was gradually abolished in New York.

Research on Dutch Slavery in North America

Although slavery was practiced for more than 200 years in New York and New Jersey, historians have written relatively little about this history. North American slavery was (and still is) seen as something that happened in the American South. Publications that do deal with slavery in New York tend to focus on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, paying little attention to the slavery that existed during the Dutch period. Joyce Goodfriend was one of the few historians who—in the 1970s—wrote extensively about the enslaved population of New Netherland.⁷

In the early twenty-first century, slavery in New York received much more attention in the United States, largely due to the 1991 discovery in Manhattan of what is now called the African Burial Ground. The finding sparked various publications about slavery, especially as it existed in New York City, and in 2004, the New York Historical Society opened the Slavery in New York exhibition, an eye-opening event for a public that was largely unaware of the local slavery history.⁸

In the meantime, much more has been written, particularly in the US, about Dutch slavery in New York and New Netherland. In the last ten years alone, historians Jeroen Dewulf, Nicole Maskiell, and I have written books about slavery in Dutch-American families and communities. In 2017, historians Dienke Hondius, Nancy Jouwe, Dineke Stam, and Jennifer Tosch authored a bilingual Dutch-English guidebook on the locations that played an important role in New York's Dutch slavery history.⁹ There are several reasons why this topic is receiving more attention. One is certainly that a larger number of historians in the US now learn to read seventeenth-century Dutch. Another is that many of the New Netherland Project's documents have been translated and are increasingly available in digital form. Finally, such studies more frequently receive financial support from bodies such as the New Netherland Institute (NNI), the Netherland-American Foundation (NAF), the Gilder Lehrman Institute, and the Dutch consulate in New York.

Much more research is needed to gain a more complete picture of Dutch slavery in North America. Until recently, this history was mainly studied without comparing it to similar systems that occurred elsewhere. As a result, some historians made it seem as if slavery in New Netherland was unique. In recent years, studies have shown that that was not the case. Research has also revealed transatlantic connections integral to the Dutch practice of slavery. For instance, we now know that eighteenth-century descendants of Dutch colonists in North America often still had strong ties with other Dutch territories and that some of them possessed plantations in the Caribbean.

Research on other parts of what is now the United States has made clear that Indigenous peoples were also regularly enslaved. That happened in New York as well, but this is an area of research that has not yet been thoroughly explored (although “Indian slaves” are regularly mentioned in documents). Enslavement of Indigenous peoples appears to have been less common during the Dutch colonial period, but that does not mean it did not happen. To name one such occurrence, the WIC sent a group of Esopus into slavery in Curaçao.

More scholarship is needed in regard to the Dutch role in human trafficking within North America and between that continent and other areas. Further research can establish how important the Dutch slave trade with North America was for the Dutch and English colonies. It can also shed more light on the development of Curaçao into a “slave depot” during the period when it was governed by Peter Stuyvesant from his post in New Netherland. In addition, more publications should focus on the enslaved. Historians have shown in recent years that despite the scarcity of documents that reflect their perspectives, it is possible to offer a more complete view of their history.

New Netherland was an integral part of the seventeenth-century Dutch slave trade, and slavery was important for the development of the colony. Dutch descendants in this area remained prominent enslavers and slave traders well into the nineteenth century. It is essential that the Netherlands pay more attention to slavery in North America in the context of Dutch slavery worldwide.

Notes

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- 2 NYSA, Dutch colonial council minutes, Court Proceedings, September 8, 1644, Inv. no. 4, 202; NYSA, Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York, "Journal of Esopus War" by Capt. Martin Cregier, Inv.13, trans. E. B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company 1853), 328, 330, 338, NYSA_A1810-78_V15_0085; NYSA, Dutch colonial administrative correspondence, Stuyvesant to the vice director of Curaçao, July 12, 1660, Inv. no. 13, 117, 10.
- 3 The New Amsterdam baptism lists are published in Francis Sypher, *Liber A of the Collegiate Churches of New York, part 2* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 2015). For more on Manuel de Gerrit de Reus, see NYSA, Dutch colonial council minutes, Court Proceedings, January 17, 1641, Inv. no. 4, 83; NYSA, Dutch colonial council minutes, Sentence of Manuel de Gerrit de Reus, January 24, 1641, Inv. no. 4, 84; NYSA, Dutch colonial council minutes, January 24, 1641, Inv. no. 4, 85; NYSA, Dutch colonial council minutes, Minutes, February 25, 1644, Inv. no. 4, 183; A. J. Van Laer, trans. and ed., *Council Minutes 1638–1649* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1974), 213.
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Abstract

The Dutch West India Company's colony in northeastern Brazil (1630–1654) was the first non-Iberian slave society and plantation economy in the Americas. The conquest of Brazil led the Company to engage in the slave trade, and—in an attempt to control the slave market—to conquer Elmina in 1637 and Luanda in 1641. In Brazil, the Company was confronted for the first time with the practicalities of governing a New World plantation colony. The WIC had to deal with new questions relating to the legal rights of Indigenous inhabitants and slaves in a Dutch colonial context. After the loss of Brazil effectively bankrupted the WIC, the inhabitants of the colony dispersed to Dutch, French, and English colonies.

Keywords: Dutch Brazil; West India Company; slave trade; slavery; sugar; Indigenous Brazilians

Dutch Brazil 19. from 1630 to 1654

Erik Odegard

From 1630 to 1654, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) conquered part of the existing Portuguese colony in northeastern Brazil. This colony comprised (parts of) the coastal areas of what are now Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Alagoas, Ceará, Piauí, and Maranhão states, and was the first slave society ruled by the Dutch in the Atlantic world. Dutch Brazil was the cradle of systematic Dutch complicity in the trading of people and keeping Africans in slavery in the New World. The Gold Coast forts in present-day Ghana, headquartered in Elmina, are the only physical remains of the short-lived South Atlantic empire that the WIC managed to build in the period 1630–1645 and then lost in the subsequent decade. In addition to the colony in Brazil and the forts in Ghana, the other parts of this empire were the island of São Tomé and parts of Angola.

Ambitious Plans in the South Atlantic

As early as the 1590s, there had been plans in the Dutch Republic to establish an Atlantic company, but it was not until June 1621 that the States General granted the WIC a charter. From the outset, it was more than just a trading company. The Dutch government expected the WIC to attack Spanish and Portuguese colonies and ships in the Atlantic and thus gave the Company wide powers to do so. The WIC was allowed to establish forts, recruit troops, and arm warships. It was also given jurisdiction over the colonies that it would establish or conquer.

A wide range of Dutch merchant groups had long been active in various markets in the Atlantic world. Clustering their diverse interests and activ-

ities in a single company was no easy task. Once the Company was founded and a share capital of 7.7 million guilders was issued, it was time to decide on the best strategy. How should this enormous share capital be invested? The Company set its sights on conquering the Portuguese colony in Brazil.

Sugar and Slavery in Brazil

The directors' decision to conquer Brazil automatically implied a decision to engage in slavery. The Dutch were well aware of the fact that Brazilian sugar cane was planted and harvested by slave labor. Before the creation of the WIC, Northern Netherlandic propagandists had pointed to the enslavement of both Africans and Indigenous American peoples in places like Brazil as proof of "Spanish" tyranny. Still, the directors chose to take Brazil, which entailed participating in slavery. To be sure, the Republic itself no longer had clean hands at that point; the earliest record of a Dutch ship's involvement in the trade of humans between Angola and Brazil dates from the late sixteenth century.

Conquering part of Brazil required an enormous military operation. It took years of fighting before there was a viable colony under Dutch control. Only by 1635 was the area under WIC control safe enough to resume sugar production. Burnt-down and ransacked sugar mills were restored to working order and put into operation.

During the war, the Company had confiscated abandoned mills. These were auctioned off to the highest-bidding private investors, at prices that could be quite steep. Isaac de Rasière bought the Gargaou mill in Paraíba in June 1637 for 110,000 guilders—roughly equivalent to 1.4 million euros today.¹ Some of the investors were inhabitants of the colony or WIC personnel, but often those who bought the mills lived in the Dutch Republic. A number of Portuguese planters had sworn allegiance to the Company and the Republic and thus were allowed to keep their property. It is often difficult to determine what motivated investors to sink their capital into sugar production. In some cases, it appears that the mills were seen as speculative investments; they were bought and then quickly resold. In those cases, the mills were often purchased back by the very Portuguese from whom they had been taken.

In the past, it has been suggested that WIC officials only resorted to participating in slavery and human trafficking after finding themselves confronted with a labor shortage in Brazil.² The reality was quite different, however. The Dutch knew full well how sugar was produced and processed in Brazil and had no intention of changing these methods once they had conquered the area. As early as 1624, after the successful conquest of Bahia, a squadron led by Piet Hein was sent to capture Luanda, Angola. Historian Kees Ratelband argued that the expedition was primarily intended to deny the Portuguese access to the slave trade, but his claim seems hardly realistic.³ The WIC tried to conquer Brazil in order to gain control of sugar production so they could determine the price of this commodity in Europe. They wanted to seize Portugal's South Atlantic empire in as intact a condition as possible, which meant that they needed to gain control of Luanda. It was not until 1637 that the Dutch managed to capture the first important Portuguese foothold in Africa, when Elmina fell to the WIC. Four years later, the Company took Luanda. During the Dutch period in Brazil, some 31,000 people would be trafficked from Africa to the colony.

This does not mean that slavery and human trafficking were uncontroversial. The appeal for slavery to be seen "in the context of its time" actually compels us to look critically at the significant shift that took place between roughly 1600 and 1640. Before this period, slavery was still described as an excess of the typically Iberian, "papist" tyranny that the Netherlands had also fallen victim to. In this view, both enslaved Africans and the Indigenous population of the Americas were seen as natural allies of the Dutch Republic. By 1640, however, slavery and human trafficking had become an integral part of the WIC's corporate policy.

Yet, there were still people who opposed slavery. Willem Usselincx, who for years had lobbied for the establishment of a West India Company, forcefully denounced slavery in a letter to the States General in 1644.⁴ However, this sort of criticism was not heard in Brazil itself, where the colonial administrators claimed that enslaved Africans were crucial to the colony's economic success. At the same time, the same administrators, including Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen (governor-general from 1637 to 1644), received diplomats of the slave-exporting states of Kongo and Ndongo-Matamba with a great show of respect.

The enslaved in Dutch Brazil were, with just a few exceptions, Africans. But this did not mean that the Dutch saw all Africans as slaves. Particularly in this period, colonial administrators on either side of the Atlantic met

with African diplomats, trade partners, and allies. In this period, justifications for enslaving Africans were mainly based on the feeling that they were an economic necessity and the idea that Africans were better suited to hard work in the tropics. Religious and racial justifications were not yet part of the debate on slavery at this time.

Attitudes toward slavery changed in the Netherlands, too. In 1621, the city government of Hoorn asked the States General for instructions on what to do with a group of enslaved people who were on board a captured Portuguese ship. By 1650, the Admiralty of Amsterdam had no compunctions about ordering a group of "Moorish" prisoners—in this case North Africans—to be sent to Spain and sold. Halfway through the 1630s, the States General asked the WIC leadership whether the Company would be interested in putting captured "Barbary" corsairs to work in Brazil as slaves. The WIC eventually declined the offer because they felt that Muslim corsairs would constitute a danger to the colony. Thus, it was not only the WIC leaders, but also the States General and the Admiralties who were making decisions about slavery.

Brasilianen and Tapuyas: the WIC and the Indigenous Population

Under Portuguese rule (before the Dutch conquest in 1630), it was common practice to enslave groups of people from the local population. This happened mainly in areas where ships from Luanda called less regularly, such as the southern and northern parts of the colony. But in Pernambuco, too, local populations were kept in slavery. Portuguese policy was to christen the locals whenever possible and to house them in missionary villages run by Jesuits. There, people (usually) ran no risk of being enslaved, but they were not really free to do as they pleased either.

The Dutch invasion offered the local population an opportunity to rise up against the Portuguese, align themselves with the Dutch and ingratiate themselves with the new colonial government. The WIC saw Indigenous populations as a key source of military support, so maintaining good ties with them was considered very important. As early as 1625, diplomats representing the Potiguar, an Indigenous community who had sworn allegiance to the Dutch, traveled to the Netherlands. They were to help prepare the 1630 invasion and would subsequently assist the WIC in establishing lasting ties with the Potiguar.



Pernambuco was the heart of the Dutch colony in Brazil.

The WIC's relations with local populations varied greatly from group to group. The Dutch made distinctions between Indigenous peoples based on the languages they spoke. Groups that spoke Tupi languages, such as the Potiguar and Tupinamba, were called *Brasilianen*. These were the very people who were housed in the *aldeias*, or missionary villages, under Portuguese rule. Living farther inland in Pernambuco, and to the northwest, were other nomadic and seminomadic groups whom the Dutch described as Tapuyas.

The distinction between these groups was of real importance to the Dutch. The *Brasilianen* were seen as more civilized and it was therefore forbidden to enslave them. The Dutch regarded the Tapuyas as savage cannibals and, after the conquest of Maranhão, sought justifications for allowing colonists to keep these people in slavery.

Once the Dutch had conquered Pernambuco and the other northeastern *Capitanias* (captaincies; administrative divisions) in 1630, the WIC banned the enslavement of Indigenous people. This was an important pre-

condition for preserving the locals' loyalty, not that relations with the Indigenous people were always smooth. In 1641, Company officials decided to start educating Potiguar children. They set up a kind of boarding school in a monastery in Paraíba, but notified neither the village elders nor the parents. Unsurprisingly, the parents were not exactly eager to have their children brought up and educated by strangers, and the plan was abandoned.

The WIC's use of Indigenous people as military allies also proved contentious. A contingent of Indigenous troops was part of the expedition to Luanda and Sao Tomé in 1641. But when the mortality among Indigenous soldiers rose even higher than the already alarming number of European casualties, *De Heren XIX* (the WIC executive board), called on the Company leadership in Brazil to stop deploying Indigenous allies outside of Brazil.⁵

In Maranhão, which was conquered in 1641, Indigenous people were enslaved more often than elsewhere in Brazil because slave ships from Africa rarely called there. The Portuguese colony was sparsely populated and unprofitable for the WIC, which was already struggling financially. Various groups in Maranhão practiced ritual cannibalism, and it was this custom that was used to justify the enslavement of Indians in Maranhão. The argument went as follows: if people were put up for sale, but not bought by the Dutch, they would be eaten. Was it not better to save their lives by buying them? In all likelihood, this rationale was no more than an excuse for allowing Indigenous slavery in Maranhão, despite the ban on this practice in Dutch Brazil. Similar arguments were used in the Spanish colonies after it was forbidden in 1512 to enslave the native population. However, by enslaving Indigenous people, the Dutch also angered local allies in Maranhão. These allies would eventually go so far as to switch sides and align themselves with the Portuguese. Their support was decisive in the success of a Portuguese rebellion in the area in 1642–1643.

Elsewhere, relations were far friendlier in this period. The local allies of the Dutch in Pernambuco saw their rights vis-à-vis the Dutch colonial administration put down in writing. The *Brasilianen* were granted the right to keep their own leaders and laws and would be treated as equals to the Dutch. This formal recognition of the Indigenous population's rights came in 1644, before the start of the Portuguese rebellion in 1645 that would eventually put an end to the Dutch colony. It strengthened ties with the allies and guaranteed the WIC strong support from them for the last ten years of its rule.

For the Indigenous people of Brazil, the conflict between the Portuguese and the Dutch became a civil war in which some groups sided with the Dutch, and others were loyal to the Portuguese.⁶ After the eventual defeat of the Dutch, there was an exodus of their former allies to the northwest of Brazil. Some fled the country altogether; documentation from the 1660s lists a few *Brasilianen* among the inhabitants of a Dutch colony in Tobago.



The two paintings by Albert Eckhout show how differently the Dutch viewed various local population groups. Left: a portrait of a “civilized” *Brasiliaan*. Right: a “less civilized” Tapuya.

A Slave Society

Dutch Brazil marks the beginning of the systematic Dutch complicity in the trade in humans. The colony was the first slave society under the Dutch flag in the Atlantic world. A slave society is a society in which all social and economic relations are determined by the practice of slavery. Social

relations such as those between husband and wife, parent and child, and employer and employee were perceived in terms of master and slave. Free labor had to compete with slavery, and if it was too expensive, it would be replaced by slave labor. We know that the WIC specifically tried to train the enslaved as shipbuilders and gun carriage makers with the aim of replacing such specialized and costly labor.

In the Dutch period, more than 31,000 Africans were enslaved and sent to Brazil. More than 26,000 of them survived the voyage.⁷ They were sold at auctions in Recife to the highest bidders. These were often sugar mill owners, but the enslaved were also forced to work in homes.

Among the colonial elite, status was in large measure determined by the possession of enslaved people. The same held true for people in the highest echelons of the WIC, such as Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen. In diplomatic contacts with various African kingdoms such as Kongo and Ndongo-Matamba, humans were exchanged as gifts. In one such instance, the Kongolesse king gave 200 people to Johan Maurits who promptly sold them on to the WIC.

Yet, there are some differences between Brazil and the later Dutch slave societies like Suriname. This is because the Dutch, with no previous slavery experience of their own, had only the Portuguese example to model their slave society after. There were no comparable English or French colonies that could serve as a template. And yet, the Dutch did not follow the Portuguese model in all respects. Unlike the Portuguese, they hardly bothered to convert the enslaved to Christianity. This meant that the Dutch had to solve some problems in Brazil that were inherent to slave societies and for which they had no ready-made solutions.

One of the weightiest issues slave societies faced was the legal position of the enslaved. Could enslaved people testify against those who held them in slavery? Later experiences in the Caribbean and North America showed that this was utterly impossible. If enslaved people could testify against their masters, social control would become unmanageable. By the eighteenth century, the idea that the enslaved were not real human beings was voiced more frequently, which was merely a justification for denying them their legal rights.

This was different in Brazil. Not much systematic archival material from the courts and notaries has survived, but there are a few documents that shed light on slavery and the law as it was practiced and perceived. A good example is the 1652 adultery case of Maria Wens and Caspar Henricus Tor-

quinius. The case hinged on the question whether two women, Wens and Torquinius's "house slaves," should be allowed to testify. The public prosecutor, Jacob le Maire, argued that this was permissible. The legal system of the Republic was based on Roman law, in which there were numerous precedents for testimony by the enslaved, particularly in cases of adultery. The fall of Dutch Brazil meant that the ruling did not become a precedent in Dutch colonial law. This legal question would be treated quite differently in the later Dutch slave society of Suriname.⁸

Looking for a New Brazil

In 1645, Portuguese planters rose up against the WIC. The writing was on the wall; rumors of a rebellion had begun circulating two years earlier, and even the captain of Johan Maurits's guard had been imprisoned for treason. In the course of 1645, the Portuguese seized control of the inland areas, leaving the Company with only a few forts on the coast. Attempts to recapture lost territory from the rebels ended in even greater defeat. However, the Republic still maintained naval superiority and only when both privateers and Admiralty warships were withdrawn from the coast during the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654) did Recife fall into Portuguese hands. The Portuguese allowed the inhabitants of the colony to leave. Documents from subsequent years show that former colonists from Dutch Brazil left for the Dutch, English, and French colonies in the Caribbean and North America. Their role in promoting sugar cultivation in these colonies deserves more attention in future research.

One of the groups from Brazil that had to seek refuge after 1654 was the Sephardic Jewish community. During the Dutch period, they had been able to build a synagogue in Recife, and Jews enjoyed even greater freedoms in Brazil than in Amsterdam. The Jewish communities that sprung up after 1654 in places such as New Amsterdam, Barbados, Curaçao, Cayenne, Suriname, and Jamaica all had links to Brazil (see Chapter 26 by Jeanne Henriquez).

In the Netherlands, former inhabitants of the Dutch colony in Brazil, and people who had invested in it, called on several occasions for the conquest of new plantation colonies. Suriname, too, was seen as a "new Brazil." Historians still debate the extent to which the Dutch colony in Brazil influenced the spread of sugar cane cultivation and slavery.

Research into the former inhabitants of the Dutch colony can shed more light on their role in financing slavery in the Caribbean after 1654. In this context, Amsterdam's position as the center of sugar refinery is key. Moreover, research into the Dutch sugar cane planters in Brazil could also shed light on how and why people in the Netherlands decided in the 1630s to invest in sugar and slavery.

The fall of Brazil in 1654 effectively meant the bankruptcy of the first WIC. Despite its short existence, the colony's importance for the later development of the Dutch Atlantic world can hardly be overstated.

Notes

- 1 NA, Archives of the Oude WestIndische Compagnie, 1.05.01.01, Inv. no. 68, scan 533. The current value was calculated using the following website: <https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php>.
- 2 In 2019, for instance, this claim was made in an old film produced by the Mauritshuis about Johan Maurits and Brazil, which was screened at an exhibition on cartographer Cornelis Golijath in Middelburg, the Netherlands.
- 3 K. Ratelband, *De Westafrikaanse reis van Piet Heyn, 1624–1625* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2006), XXI–XXVII.
- 4 NA, Archives of the States General, 1.01.02, Inv. no. 5757, scan 113, Usselinx to the States General, October 15, 1644.
- 5 D. L. Noorlander, "Reformers in the Land of the Holy Cross: The Calvinist Mission in Dutch Brazil and the Portuguese Uprising of 1645," *Journal of Early American History* 6, no. 2 (2016): 180–181. For more on the relations with the local population, see also Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade: Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595–1674* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2012).
- 6 For more on the formal recognition of rights, see NA, Archives of the States General, 1.01.02, Inv. no. 5757, scans 561–63. For more on the conflict between the allies of the Dutch and the Portuguese, see Carolina Monteiro, "'Verlos ons van deze verdorven mensen,' schreven de oorspronkelijke inwoners van Brazilië," *de Volkskrant*, August 15, 2022, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/kijkverder/2022/onskolonialeverleden/verlosonsvandezeverdorvenmensen-schreventeoorpronkelijkebewonersvan-brazilie~v546010/>.
- 7 Erik Odegard, *Graaf en Gouverneur: Nederlands-Brazilië onder het bewind van Johan-Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, 1636–1644* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2022), 132–33.
- 8 Erik Odegard, "1652: Het overspel van Henricus Torquinius en Maria Wens," *Nog meer wereldgeschiedenis van Nederland* (Amsterdam: Ambo Anthos, 2022).

The Dutch in Atlantic Africa Prior to 1800: Past, Present, and Future

To date, most scholarship on the Dutch in Atlantic Africa has focused mainly on the West India Company (WIC) and the Middelburg Commercial Company (MCC). The bulk of our knowledge concerns the headquarters of the WIC on the Gold Coast (Elmina, Ghana), and the engagement of this company as well as the MCC in the transatlantic slave trade. However, the Dutch presence in Africa did not start with the WIC, commerce in enslaved Africans was not the only core business of the Dutch in Africa, and Elmina was not the only important outpost of the Dutch Republic.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the 300-year anniversary of the WIC led to an upsurge in the studies on Dutch maritime expansion and the Dutch presence in the Atlantic and Africa. But it was only after the 1950s and in the context of African decolonization and the development of Area Studies, that the study of Dutch maritime expansion truly started to gain momentum both in the Netherlands and abroad. African Studies, in particular its concern with assessing the impact of the slave trade on African societies and their contribution to the rise of the West, played a significant role in the advancement of academic knowledge about the Dutch in Atlantic Africa. These studies focused on the Dutch trading companies' trade in commodities and their involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. By the turn of the twenty-first century, scholarship on the Dutch in Africa came under the influence of Atlantic and Global History. This fostered a new wave of studies. Once again the trade in commodities and in enslaved Africans took center stage. But there were also studies that examined new questions, new actors, and new regions, such as the role of private merchants and their business practices in various African regions like Senegambia, Dutch Angola (1640s), the Loango Coast, and the region north of Angola.

This last wave of publications showed that the first contacts between the Dutch Republic and Atlantic Africa date back to the 1590s, when private

merchants of different ethnogeographic and religious backgrounds based in the main port cities (Amsterdam and Rotterdam) started to trade with this region. Both single-handedly and in small partnerships, these merchants traded in various commodities including gold, ivory, hides, beeswax, and African pepper. This commerce was conducted in various ports located in Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and the Grain, Gold, and Slave Coasts. Back then, merchants were already involved in the slave trade, but this trade was very small in scale, limited to the Angolan Coast, and catered to the demand for labor in Spanish colonies in the Americas.

To develop commerce with Atlantic Africa, the Republic's merchants relied solely on long-distance voyages and on prefabricated sloops that they transported on board and used for coastal and riverine trade. Over time, these merchants sought a more permanent presence. Initially, they opted to leave commercial agents in small lodges on shore, or aboard lighter vessels along the coast. However, in specific regions such as the Gold Coast and Gulf of Guinea, Portuguese commercial competition and military opposition were strong. Merchants operating there petitioned the Dutch authorities to take measures. They requested military expeditions to conquer territory held by the Portuguese, and the authorities responded with actions such as the attack on São Tomé in 1599. When the merchants asked for the construction of a stronghold on the Gold Coast, Fort Nassau was built at Mouri in 1612. The merchants also wanted a commercial company established, and this led to the creation of the WIC in 1621. In all these responses, the States General, the Admiralty of Amsterdam, and the city of Amsterdam played a key role.

In 1624, the beginning of the WIC operations brought about important changes. Private merchants were no longer allowed to trade. The Company took over Portuguese possessions, including the Gold Coast forts (Elmina, Axim, and Shama), as well as Fort Arguin (Mauritania), Fort Gorée (Senegal), São Tomé, and Luanda (Angola). In connection with the conquest of Dutch Brazil, the WIC also began to engage in slave trading. In the 1640s, Luanda became the main port for Dutch slave trade, but from the 1650s until the late eighteenth century, Ardra (Bight of Benin), Loango, and ports north of the River Congo fulfilled that role.

Yet, few studies have delved deeply into the Dutch activities in these regions and the role of Africans in this history. More research is needed on the Dutch relationship with African authorities, economic elites, and local populations living around Dutch strongholds and posts, the impact of Dutch activities on local societies, and Dutch slave ownership on the African coasts.

Black Hollanders

The British government was suspicious when it discovered, in 1836, that the Dutch general Jan Verveer had traveled to West Africa to recruit men for the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL). He went to Kumasi of all places, the capital of the Ashanti kingdom, which was infamous for its slave hunting and human sacrifice. It was unthinkable that the recruits were volunteers, concluded Lord Palmerston, the British minister of foreign affairs. This had to be slave trade. London protested the Dutch mission in no uncertain terms.

The British had both the right to speak and the power to do so. Ever since they had abolished the slave trade (1807) and slavery (1834) in their overseas empire, they had used gunboat diplomacy to put increasing pressure on other countries to follow their humanitarian example. The Netherlands had already agreed to cease trading in enslaved Africans. Was The Hague now trying to sneakily go back on its own promise?

King William I hastily tried to ease British suspicions. After the Dutch victory in the Java War (1825–1830), he had set his sights on expanding the empire's authority in Sumatra. His right-hand man, Johannes van den Bosch, had a plan: reinforce the KNIL with companies of Swiss and African soldiers. But even though this merchant king was now also a conqueror, William knew that he could not afford a conflict with powerful Great Britain.

So, the Dutch foreign minister, Verstolk van Soelen, pulled out all the stops on the king's behalf, sending a flurry of communiqués to reassure Palmerston. Time and again, he stressed that General Verveer had been sent to Africa with clear instructions. The recruitment was indeed aimed at enslaved Africans with origins in Ashanti's neighboring countries, but these potential recruits were given a free choice. If they wished to sign on with the Dutch colonial army, they would first be bought free for eighty to one hundred guilders each. They would then pay back that amount in installments during their fifteen years of military service.

After their first contract expired, they could again decide for themselves whether to sign up for another tour of duty in the Dutch East Indies or to return to the Gold Coast. In short, Verstolk van Soelen argued, this was not slave trade but contract labor, and actually even philanthropic in nature. Thanks to the KNIL, the African recruits would escape a miserable existence as slaves followed by a certain death by sacrifice.

Palmerston was not truly convinced, but he decided to give the Netherlands the benefit of the doubt, and by 1841, two thousand Africans had been enlisted in the Dutch colonial army. The British continued to regularly sound the alarm, however. When in that same year, African units in Sumatra staged a mutiny, William I's son and successor, William II, decided to abandon the experiment.

Recruitment was resumed in 1860. Over the next eleven years, another thousand Africans joined the KNIL. The recruitment ended for good in 1872, when the Dutch ceded the Gold Coast to Great Britain. This was much to the chagrin of the army command in the East Indies, because, with the exception of that one mutiny, the *Belanda Hitam*, or Black Hollanders, had built up an outstanding reputation. They had proven themselves to be suitable colonial troops; they were able to handle the climate and the exhausting day marches, they were fearless in battle, and they did not fraternize with the Indonesian population, with the exception of local women, that is, with whom some of them started families.

About six hundred Africans settled permanently in Java after their service in the KNIL. They became the progenitors of the tight-knit Indo-African communities that supplied generations of enlisted men to the KNIL. After decolonization, most of their descendants sought refuge in the Netherlands. Some stayed there, while others moved on, to live in the United States, Canada, Suriname, or Brazil.¹

Notes

- 1 Martin Bossenbroek, *Volk voor Indië: De werving van Europese militairen voor de Nederlandse koloniale dienst 1814–1909* (Amsterdam: Van Soeren, 1992); Ineke van Kessel, *Zwarte Hollanders: Afrikaanse soldaten in Nederlands-Indië* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2005); Griselda Molemans and Armando Ello, *Zwarte huid, Oranje hart: Afrikaanse KNIL-nazaten in de diaspora* (Amsterdam: Quasar Books & Multimedia, 2010).

Tipping Point: 1873

The tipping point was a package deal with far-reaching consequences on three continents. In 1873, when the Netherlands started the Aceh War in north Sumatra, Great Britain launched a punitive expedition against the Ashanti kingdom on the African Gold Coast, and the first Hindustani contract laborers from British India arrived in Suriname. At first glance, these events seemed to be unrelated, but they were in fact the coordinated parts of a diplomatic master plan.

The plan was devised by Dutch Minister of Colonies Engelbertus de Waal. During his short term in office (1868–1870), he set in motion a radical change of course in Dutch colonial policy. His agrarian law and sugar law put a stop to the Cultivation System, the colonial government's monopoly on growing and trading tropical produce, especially coffee, sugar, tea, and indigo. From that point on, private companies were free to enter the market and could also introduce new crops such as tobacco and rubber.

Just as important as these legislative changes was De Waal's diplomatic contribution. There had been talks for some time with Great Britain about three separate issues. Of those three, the Aceh question was the most urgent for the Netherlands. In 1824, The Hague had committed to protecting the shipping route through the Strait of Malacca from piracy without infringing on the independence of the Sultanate of Johor, which ruled over the region encompassing the Strait. That had always been a difficult task, but the opening of the Suez Canal (1869) and the resulting intensification of shipping along the Acehnese coast had made it next to impossible. In its ambition to prove itself as a true colonial power, the Netherlands now urged Britain to give it free rein in suppressing the "den of thieves" that was Aceh.

That was not De Waal's only worrisome dossier. After the abolition of slavery in Suriname and the Antilles on July 1, 1863, a ten-year period of state supervision was imposed. As that period approached its conclusion in July 1873, fears grew in The Hague that there would be an exodus from Suriname's plantations. The Netherlands sought a replacement for the anticipated loss of workers and hoped to draw new ones from the large pool of potential labor in British India. But that, too, would require London's permission.

Despite strong objections in military and mercantile circles, De Waal saw the Dutch forts on the Gold Coast as a bargaining chip. He considered the colonial interests in Southeast Asia and Latin America more important than West Africa. The British were interested in an exchange that could strengthen their position on the Gold Coast, so they accepted The Hague's proposal. Both the Dutch and British parliaments objected, but in the end, the deal was cemented in 1871 in the Anglo-Dutch Treaties on Sumatra, the Gold Coast, and the recruitment of British-Indian contract workers for Suriname.

The inhabitants of the regions affected quickly learned what the two colonial powers had cooked up. On April 8, 1873, a Dutch expeditionary force landed on the coast of Aceh. The quick victory that the Dutch expected did not materialize. This "disciplinary" operation descended into a protracted war that cost both sides tens of thousands of lives. The "pacification" of Aceh was not completed until 1914. According to the Acehnese, the war did not end until 1942, when the Japanese occupied the Dutch East Indies.

For the Gold Coast, too, the plan had violent consequences. There, it was the Ashanti who bore the brunt of it. A British military unit landed on September 27, 1873, to make the 250-kilometer trek to the capital, Kumasi, passable for the main force. The operation succeeded. Kumasi was razed to the ground, and the Ashanti were presented with a bill for the costs of the expedition, to the amount of 1,500 kilograms of gold. They were also forbidden to do any further slave hunting among neighboring populations or to ritually sacrifice their enslaved victims—measures that served as the humanitarian justification for the British operation.

The outcome for Suriname was less violent, but just as consequential. On June 5, 1873, the *Lalla Rookh* docked at Paramaribo with the first 399 migrant workers on board from British India. From that moment until 1916, more than 34,000 Hindustanis arrived in Suriname to work on the

plantations. Most of their descendants settled in Suriname, and later many left for the Netherlands. While today's descendants of the enslaved in both Suriname and the Netherlands mark the end of slavery with the July 1 commemoration called *Keti Koti* (broken chains), the Hindustani Surinamese community, which is now fourteen times bigger than it originally was, commemorates June 5, a day which they call *Prawas Din* (The Day of Immigration).¹

Notes

- 1 Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme: Koloniën en buitenlandse politiek 1870–1902* (Amsterdam: Bataafsche leeuw, 1985); Paul van 't Veer, *De Atjeh-oorlog* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1980); J. Woltring, *Bescheiden betreffende de buitenlandse politiek van Nederland 1848–1919. Tweede periode, eerste deel, 1871–1874* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962).

Abstract

Slavery and colonialism have left a lasting impact in South Africa. From the 1650s on, approximately 63,000 enslaved people from around the Indian Ocean were shipped to the Cape of Good Hope, where their descendants were born into slavery. They worked alongside Khoisan forced laborers who were dispossessed by colonial expansion. The enslaved at the Cape resisted from the outset. Khoi-khoi and San peoples fought against expansion in a series of violent conflicts; the enslaved resisted the conditions of slavery in many ways, including by fleeing. Colonization and slavery impacted the environment as land was carved up for private ownership and used to cultivate foreign crops. The voices of the enslaved resonate today as research unearths this painful past.

Keywords: slavery; coercion; environment; resistance; silence; settler colonialism

20. “I do not want to be silent”: Slavery and Colonialism in South Africa and the Southwest Indian Ocean

Kate Ekama

One winter’s evening in 1793, on a farm near Tulbagh in the southwestern Cape, an enslaved man named Caesar van Madagascar spoke the words “I do not want to be silent, and I must retain my right to speak.” He made this deeply resonant statement in the midst of a heated and violent argument with the man who claimed ownership over him, burgher (settler), Daniel Malan. Caesar and two other enslaved men were sitting in the farmhouse kitchen when Malan entered, at around 8:30 pm, and asked them why they had not yet gone to bed, considering that there was so much work to do in the morning. Caesar responded that he could organize his own time. When Malan repeatedly instructed him to be silent, Caesar refused. And when Malan struck him with a *sjambok* (leather whip), the symbol of violent oppression at the Cape, Caesar literally broke the whip.¹

At the time, Caesar van Madagascar was one of thousands of enslaved people at the Cape of Good Hope. Networks of forced migration through which enslaved men, women, and children were transported alongside convicts and exiles, tied the Cape of Good Hope to the Indian Ocean world. In this chapter, I highlight some aspects of the impact of Dutch slavery, slave trading, and colonialism at the Cape of Good Hope in relation to the southwest Indian Ocean. The enslaved people at the Cape of Good Hope were brought from elsewhere to the Cape to labor on farms; as farming expanded, more and more local Khoikhoi and San communities were afflicted by this Dutch presence. Thus, as I will discuss in the second part of this chapter, both enslaved people and the Khoisan (the collective name for the Khoikhoi and San populations) resisted. The landscape in which this Dutch colonial expansion took place was radically altered by the introduction of settled, extractive agriculture, based on foreign crops, which in turn had an

impact on resistance. Finally, I return to Caesar's profound words and point to some of the questions that remain to be answered on the history and legacies of Dutch slavery, slave trading, and colonialism in the southwest Indian Ocean.

Slavery and Slave Trading

The VOC settlement at the Cape started in 1652 as no more than a wilting garden and a rickety wooden fort with the dual purpose of keeping English rivals out and resupplying the ships that sailed around the treacherous Cape that linked the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. Between 1638 and 1710, Mauritius played a similar role for the Dutch. The VOC settlement in Mauritius worked as a supplying station, proved a source of ebony, and functioned as a base from which to extend ties with Madagascar, which was an important node for the Dutch slave trade in the region. In Madagascar, the Dutch encountered strong polities with long-standing European and Asian trade connections. The Dutch did not establish a lasting presence on the island but the Company and private ships visited its ports to purchase enslaved people to supply the Cape with laborers. The Dutch were one of several European powers that purchased enslaved people on the coast; European demand for slaves changed the enslavement methods on the island, fueling political rivalries and war. As the Cape Colony grew, the role of Mauritius in the VOC world faded and Cape Governor Jan van Riebeeck ordered the island abandoned in 1658.² The Company decided to rebuild the settlement in the 1660s, but over the following decades, the vision of thriving agriculture on the island failed to materialize, and in 1710, the VOC again withdrew from the island. In 1715 the French took possession of Mauritius and renamed it Isle de France.

As the Dutch gained more power in the Cape, slave trading with the colony increased, bringing tens of thousands of enslaved people there, including Caesar van Madagascar. Initially, the VOC was involved in slave trading along the west coast of Africa. The first slave ships that arrived at the Cape in 1658 brought people from Dahomey and Angola. Subsequently, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, enslaved men, women, and children were transported to the Cape as forced migrants from South and Southeast Asia (India, Sri Lanka), the Indian Ocean islands of Madagascar and Mauritius, and Mozambique on the east coast of Africa. The Company established slaving links with Madagascar as early as 1654, with

Delagoa Bay (Mozambique) in the 1720s and 1730s, and later in the eighteenth century with areas on Africa's east coast and in Zanzibar. The origins of enslaved workers—or their points of embarkation—are visible in the way in which their names were recorded, like Caesar van Madagascar. While the importance of one region of origin relative to another shifted over time, the Cape's slave population was always ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse.

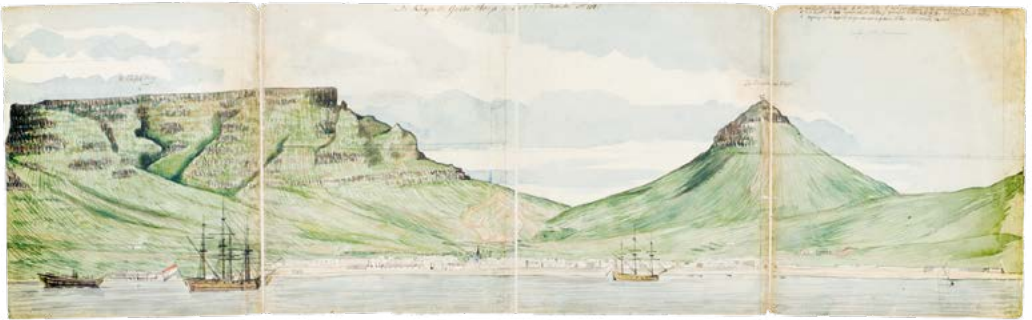
In addition to the VOC trade, enslaved people were brought to the Cape on passing ships, both Company and foreign vessels, which stopped at the Cape during their voyage. Company officials who had completed their duty for the VOC sold slaves on the repatriation journey and ships' crews ran small-scale slave trade to the Cape, purchasing enslaved people themselves and on behalf of others and transporting them as trade goods to be sold at the Cape. Foreign slave ships also sold off parts of their human cargo there while en route to colonies in the Americas. It was through such imports that the slave population grew. But over time there was another increasingly important source of slaves for the Cape: children born into slavery.

Historical demographer Robert Shell estimates that 63,000 enslaved men, women, and children were brought to the Cape Colony between 1652 and 1808.³ They were the property of the burghers. At the Cape, slaveholdings tended to be small-scale. But there were significant regional differences; most enslaved people were concentrated in Cape Town and the wine and wheat farming districts in the vicinity (Cape District, Stellenbosch, and Swellendam); pastoralist farmers in the interior relied more heavily on Khoisan labor with fewer enslaved people. In 1773, no individual slave owner anywhere in the colony owned more than 101 enslaved people and only 10 individuals owned more than 50 enslaved people. In addition to private ownership, the Dutch East India Company owned enslaved people who lived in the Slave Lodge in central Cape Town. With a population averaging 467 over the period 1658–1828, the Lodge was the single largest slaveholding in the colony and the exact opposite of the small, dispersed slaveholdings which typified private ownership.⁴

Starting in the 1710s, there were more enslaved people than free burghers at the Cape for the rest of the eighteenth century. In 1711, the enslaved population numbered 1,771, only slightly more than the burghers. By the 1730s, the gap had widened considerably, with 4,709 enslaved people and 3,074 burghers. By the end of the century, both groups were far more numerous, and again closer in number with 14,747 enslaved people and

13,830 burghers. The slave population had more than doubled in size by the 1830s when the British—who had taken the colony from the VOC in 1795—abolished slavery across their empire.

The impact of slavery, slave trade, and colonization was pervasive. Historian Robert Ross points out that South Africa today is the “constitutional continuation of the colonies” that had been dominated by settlers from Europe, whose descendants, while no longer politically dominant (since 1994), still “play a major role in its economic and social life.” The impact of Dutch colonization can be heard in the language spoken by some South Africans (Afrikaans), experienced in the law under which South Africans live (Roman-Dutch law), felt in the religion of the majority of the population (Christianity), and seen in the landscape that was transformed by imported crops.



A seascape of Table Mountain and Cape Town by the Dutch artist Jan Brandes from 1787. He painted this during his stay in the Cape Colony. The Dutch flag represents the Dutch presence in the area.

The Disintegration of Khoisan Societies

The land to which the enslaved were transported and which was granted by the Company to free burghers to farm, was not empty. The Dutch East India Company assumed the right to grant land to free burghers in a dual tenure system that included freehold (ownership) and loan farms (yearly payment for use). Exclusive rights of ownership and use that underpinned the land tenure systems stood in opposition to Khoisan customs of communal use of land and its resources. The increasing European occupation of land led to growing Khoikhoi and San dispossession. Their response

was resistance, which erupted into a series of wars with the Dutch. As the Khoisan societies lost their land, and their way of life was disrupted, more and more individuals were incorporated into colonial society in servile positions. Others fled beyond the colonial frontier.

The histories of Dutch encounters with the Khoisan communities of southern Africa have been written in terms of dispossession, disintegration, and murderous violence. Before the VOC established a long-term presence at the Cape of Good Hope, Dutch, English, and Portuguese ships stopped at points along the coastline and encountered Khoikhoi communities with whom they traded. Dutch colonial expansion from 1652 onward caused conflict that continued at varying intensities deep into the eighteenth century. The First and Second Khoikhoi-Dutch Wars (1659–1660, 1673–1677) left the Khoikhoi of the Cape peninsula and its surroundings defeated. The economic consequences of the loss of cattle and sheep were accompanied by political and social disintegration. Colonial expansion emanating from Table Valley gathered pace after 1700. The expansion of farming into areas farther from the Castle of Good Hope, combined with the opening of the meat trade between burghers and Khoikhoi, precipitated renewed violence between the Dutch and the Khoisan. The raiding and counterraiding of 1700–1708 involved almost all Khoisan groups on the Cape frontier, evidence of how widespread the impact of colonial expansion was. When an uneasy peace was restored, the Company recognized new Khoikhoi captains, giving them copper-headed canes to symbolize that they ruled under the authority of the Company.

Nevertheless, the upheaval continued throughout the eighteenth century, with the frontier shifting unevenly as the colony expanded. The *comando* became the most important frontier institution. Commandos were groups of armed civilians who rode out against the Khoisan. From 1715 onward, these burgher units were legitimized and supported by the Company officials at the Cape. The 1760s saw a resurgence of resistance from independent San as well as other Khoisan who had been incorporated into the colonial labor force. In response, burghers organized the General *Comando* in 1774 to crush the resistance and acquire labor. The commandos killed San men and captured women and children. San children were indentured as unfree laborers and forced to work alongside enslaved people and ostensibly free Khoikhoi on the farms.⁵ Historian Mohamed Adhikari traced the use of terms like “extermination,” “destruction,” and “genocide” in histories that address the experience of the San. He shows that while

there is consensus about the violence and mass killing inflicted upon San people, opinions differ as to whether this constituted genocide because historians disagree on the question of intent that is part of some definitions of genocide: did the Dutch intend to exterminate the people? Adhikari's own position, however, is clear from the very title of his book: *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide* (2010).

Enslaved Resistance

From the time that the VOC introduced slavery at the Cape of Good Hope, enslaved people resisted their bondage. This manifested itself in various ways, including mutinies on slave ships destined for the Cape, running away from slave owners, attempted poisonings, attacks, arson, theft, and suicide. Caesar's defiant words reveal a rare, or perhaps rarely preserved, form of resistance: an outright overturning of the master-slave relationship in which the enslaved person was expected to be obedient, compliant, and silent. Over the course of the 1700s, the most common crime committed by enslaved people was desertion. The Council of Justice records are full of episodes of unsuccessful escapes, where enslaved people who ran away to escape punishment or flee the colony were recaptured, tried, and punished as deserters. In the court testimonies of the enslaved, we catch glimpses of those who were successful in evading recapture, sometimes for years, like Reijnier van Madagascar, and sometimes for good, like Balij, who was last seen escaping a commando. That at least some enslaved people at the Cape maintained a vision of a world beyond the colony is clear in the places that they mentioned as their desired destinations: the land of the Portuguese, the Namaqua people (San) beyond the colony, or "home" across the sea.⁶

Remarkably, there were no major slave rebellions at the Cape, at least not before the nineteenth century. The reason for this, argues historian Robert Ross, is that enslaved people were isolated, in small-scale slaveholdings, of diverse origins, and in close contact with resident owners. The characteristics of Cape slavery thus limited the development of a slave community cooperating in large-scale, organized uprisings. The revolutionary ideas circulating in the late eighteenth century and waves of abolitionism swelling at the time did, however, influence a shift from individual to more collective forms of resistance at the Cape. The 1808 and 1825 rebellions—one a peaceful march and the other a killing spree—were marked by enslaved people "directly challenging the colonial system."⁷

Environmental Impact

Dutch colonization had a profound impact on the environment. At the same time, colonial expansion and slave and Khoisan resistance were partly shaped by the Cape environment and geography. In Mauritius, the ecological impact of extracting ebony, a sought-after hardwood, was enormous. After the Cape settlement was established in 1652, the role of Mauritius in the Company's world declined, fueled in part by falling ebony prices. When the Dutch returned to Mauritius in 1664, they resumed the extraction of timber, which they exported to the Cape. At the Cape, wood was the only available fuel for burning. The role of the Cape settlement in provisioning ships was principally about supplying fresh water—which was abundant in the natural streams and rivers of Table Valley in the 1650s—and firewood to the passing ships. The task of cutting wood was given to enslaved people who had to venture further and further to find trees to cut as the areas around Cape Town were cleared. By the 1740s, there apparently were no trees left in Table Valley to cut down.⁸

Additionally, the Dutch imported new plants into the colony, changing the landscape and altering the habitat of the indigenous flora and fauna. In the 1650s, they also introduced horses, which Commander Van Riebeeck saw as crucial to both the development of the settlement and exploration beyond. From the 1670s, horses played a military role as they were used by the commandos against the Khoisan. Horses became important markers of difference used by settlers to affirm their European identity as separate and distinct from enslaved people and Khoisan.⁹

The introduction in 1657 of settler farming—of imported crops, principally vines and wheat in the southwestern Cape—reshaped the landscape of the Cape Colony and carved up the land in new ways. While some deserters, including enslaved runaways, tried to flee the colony entirely and reach the independent Khoisan groups and the AmaXhosa beyond the frontier, others used the liminal spaces between the farms as sites of refuge. Runaways also frequently used mountains as a refuge and as corridors through which they could share information. Such facts led historian Nigel Worden to argue that enslaved people at the Cape perceived and used the environment in different ways than colonizers. For them, the environment was conducive to individual resistance. The 1808 rebellion marked a change toward collective resistance; rather than escape the slave owner-dominated environment, enslaved workers attempted to conquer it.¹⁰

Slavery, Voices, and the Voiceless

Caesar van Madagascar's statement that he would not be silent resonates with the approaches taken by historians to recover the voices of enslaved people at the Cape. There are few historical records created by enslaved people to record their own thoughts and experiences. Moreover, as Nigel Worden points out, while enslaved people are omnipresent in old documents, they were never of great interest to either archivists or historians before the 1980s.¹¹ Only in the heyday of anti-Apartheid activism was there a growing interest among scholars in slave resistance and in the openness of early Cape society specifically regarding race relations, as well as a recognition of the need to write histories of marginalized groups, including the enslaved. The field has continued to grow since then. Court records continue to be a focal point for recovering these histories of the enslaved, through the many layers that muffle them. In studying these records, historians take into account the power relations that were at play when enslaved people gave court testimony, the threat and reality of torture to extract confessions, and the role of the translators and scribes who recorded the accounts given by enslaved people in court. It is through these challenging and fascinating records that Caesar's voice, demanding that he be heard, rings out more than 200 years after he spoke.

Many questions remain. While social histories of slavery at the Cape have been especially strong, the financial side of slavery under the VOC remains an area for researchers to explore. For instance, what did it mean for owners and enslaved people themselves that enslaved individuals, as assets, were acceptable collateral on loans? What was the extent and impact of wages earned by enslaved people? Other areas of research can be linked to the material culture of the enslaved and formerly enslaved: What did they own, and what did those objects mean? Information networks in the colony and beyond are another avenue to pursue, from the points of view of both the enslaved and slave owners. Among the descendants of enslaved people in South Africa today, there are divergent views: some pore over historical sources doing genealogical research while others intentionally avoid digging up slave roots. For those who want to know, much work still needs to be carried out to recover their ancestors' stories.

Notes

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- 2 Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–19.
- 3 Robert C.-H. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1838* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994), 40.
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Sophie Rose

Court Cases as a Source

The colonial authorities and their administrative staff who were responsible for most of the written sources from the time of slavery generally had little interest in the daily lives of enslaved people. This is why it is difficult to find detailed information about the relations between enslaved men, women, and children. One exception to this rule is court records. Court cases, and particularly legal investigations following a slave revolt or another instance of violence or insubordination, often offer surprisingly detailed information about the lives of enslaved people. The National Archives in The Hague houses a large collection of such court reports, many of which have been digitized. Most of them are from the courts in Batavia (Java) and Suriname, but there are also smaller series of Dutch-language court documents from the Caribbean islands, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Elmina (Ghana), southern India, Essequibo, Berbice, and Demerara (Guyana).

When there was a disturbance of the peace among the enslaved (a violent incident or a revolt, for instance), the colonial authorities usually began an inquiry in which those involved were interrogated. The transcripts of these interrogations often contain information that was otherwise rarely written down, about social contacts, childcare, dietary patterns, festivities, and other aspects of daily life. In cases of plantation revolts, the colonial authorities were noticeably interested in sexual relations. They probed witnesses not only about the sexual relations among the enslaved, but also about sexual abuse perpetrated by plantation overseers. The latter was seen, and often rightfully so, as a risk factor that significantly increased the chances of a rebellion. Several investigations of revolts in Suriname, Berbice, and Demerara-Essequibo focused on the role of plantation directors in sexual violence, jealousy, and forced sexual relations between enslaved men and women. In any other context, such intimacies were seldom made explicit.

Caution must be applied when using court records as a historical source, because the trial documents saved in colonial court archives had a singular purpose: to gather evidence that the public prosecutor could use as evidence against suspects. Enslaved defendants had no right to defense counsel, and torture was permitted as a means of extracting a confession. As a result, the documents recorded during these criminal cases were strongly biased towards the particular narrative that the prosecution wished to build. Likewise, witness testimonies and interrogations did not represent the individual enslaved person's perspective. Not only are their statements often translated and paraphrased, but it is also likely that the answers they gave were calculated to protect themselves and those close to them. For this reason, court reports seldom provide an unambiguous picture of the truth in individual cases. However, by comparing the many details they contain (which are often told in passing), it is still possible to acquire a varied image of life in slavery. This is why these sources are very valuable for historical research, but only if read critically and put in a wider context wherever possible.

Abstract

Movement of enslaved people formed an important link to all the crucial nodes of the VOC empire. Judging from its most prominent possessions—Batavia, Ceylon, and the Cape colony—the VOC empire can be considered one massive slave society. Within this slavery network, the Indian subcontinent played a crucial, yet virtually unknown role. This chapter will delineate the subcontinent's place in the Asian networks of the VOC empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, summarizing the research produced in the past three and a half decades. The chapter will take stock of what is known, identify blind spots, and recommend lines of future research.

Keywords: VOC; South Asia; slave trade; Jakarta; Sri Lanka; South Africa

Dutch Slavery in South Asia

Titas Chakraborty

By the late seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) had become the first European political force to carve out a substantial empire in Asia. In contrast to the sometimes even larger contiguous land-based empires in Asia at the time, the VOC empire was made up of islands and a widely dispersed conglomeration of lands bordering an extensive coastline. The VOC organized its imperial bureaucracy as a connected but deeply hierarchical network of all these places, within which people with very different statuses were constantly on the move. Movement of enslaved people formed an important link to all the crucial nodes of the VOC empire. Judging from its most prominent possessions, namely Batavia, Ceylon, and the Cape Colony, which are present-day Jakarta, Sri Lanka, and South Africa, the VOC empire can be seen as one massive slave society. Within this network of slavery, the Indian subcontinent played a crucial, yet virtually unknown role. This chapter will delineate the place of the Indian subcontinent in the VOC's Asian networks, summarizing the research produced in the past three and a half decades. In doing so, the chapter will take stock of what is known, identify blind spots, and recommend avenues of future research.

Dutch Slave Trade in South Asia

As the VOC emerged in the seventeenth century as a major slaveholding power in the Indian Ocean world, the Indian subcontinent provided much of its enslaved population. These slaves came primarily, though not exclusively, from the Arakan-Bengal, Coromandel, and Malabar coasts of the Indian subcontinent. In moving slaves from these regions to its different

settlements across the Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago, the VOC had created a functional linkage within its Asian empire. The VOC utilized these enslaved people for all forms of labor in the making of their colonial enterprise in Asia—as craftsmen and menial workers on waterfronts, as agricultural workers on plantations and privately held farms, and as domestic workers in households.

The Bay of Bengal region, with the Arakan, Bengal, and Coromandel coasts, formed the earliest and steadiest supplier of slaves up until the late seventeenth century. The VOC had arrived in the Arakanese kingdom of Mrauk U (modern-day Myanmar), as early as 1608, and by 1635, had established a permanent factory in Arakan. From the early 1620s onward, the VOC bought large numbers of enslaved people from there, especially for export to Batavia and Banda. Arakan satisfied the VOC demand for slaves from the ports of Chittagong and Dianga, the island of Sandwip, and the coastal zamindaris of Bhalua and Hijli. The number of slaves that the VOC could procure from Arakan varied vastly. Some years, the VOC procured over a thousand slaves, but in other years, as few as one hundred. The Arakanese rulers relied on Portuguese independent merchants or pirates, with whom they had a long-standing relationship, for bringing slaves to the market. In the years 1647–1653, when the relationship between Arakan and the VOC had soured, leading the Company to abandon its trading post, the Portuguese slave traders directly sold slaves to the VOC in the Company's Bengal settlement. Just as the VOC roiled its relationship with Mrauk U in 1647, they found a second important source of slaves from the Bay of Bengal region, the southeastern coast of peninsular India, or the Coromandel coast.¹

Throughout the seventeenth century, the VOC bought slaves at several ports all along the Coromandel coast. The VOC's main interest in the Coromandel coast was commodities, and especially cotton textiles, which they could use in the spice trade in the Indonesian archipelago. Following the foundation of Batavia in 1619, however, slave trade too emerged as an important interest in this region. A shipment of one thousand enslaved people from the Coromandel ports arrived in Batavia as early as 1622, followed by seven hundred the next year and then two hundred the year after. These earliest recorded slave exports coincided with the major famine in South Central India. Cycles of warfare and famines ensured that there was a spasmodic supply of slaves from the Coromandel coast. Thus, in 1646, the revolt of the Nayaka rulers of Thanjavur, Senji, and Madurai against

the overlordship of Vijayanagar resulted in an agrarian crisis and led to a steady supply of slaves. This conflict was especially auspicious for the VOC as they began seeking an alternative source of slaves due to their conflict with the Arakanese ruler from 1647. Although these slaves were initially taken to Batavia, after the 1650s, they were increasingly sent to Ceylon and the Cape Colony. In Ceylon, these slaves performed a whole range of tasks from extremely skilled work to the most menial labor. Entire enslaved families of weavers and cloth painters were deployed to set up a weaving and cloth dyeing center in Jaffna. Many worked in agriculture, construction in Colombo, Galle, and Jaffna, and in the households of Dutch free burghers and wealthy Indigenous people.²

The southwest coastline of India, the Malabar coast, formed another important source of slaves for the VOC. The VOC possessions in the Malabar coast were arguably the most prominent of all Company territories in the subcontinent. In 1663, the VOC had defeated the Portuguese at Cochin, whereupon it transformed their lands on the Malabar coast into the third-largest possession in Asia with its center in Fort Cochin. For the few years for which we have demographic information, slaves comprised between 35 and 42 percent of the population at Fort Cochin, an overwhelming majority of whom were men.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the VOC discontinued its trade in slaves from Arakan under pressure from the governor of Bengal, a province of the Mughal empire bordering on Arakan. This also coincided with the VOC's new source of large-scale slave trading from the Makassar region (South Sulawesi) of the Indonesian archipelago from the 1660s onward. The Mughals were keen on ending the slave trade on their eastern frontier, which, amongst other things, challenged their sovereignty in a politically highly volatile region. This ultimately forced the VOC to leave its trading post in Mrauk U and assist the Mughal governor in its military expedition against Mrauk U. Despite all these shifts, the slave trade from Bengal did not completely dry up as new research on slave sales in Chinsurah from the eighteenth century suggests. Even though the VOC had retracted from this business, private merchants associated with the VOC regularly bought and sold slaves in Bengal. In the 1740s and 1750s, the overwhelming majority of slaves sold in Chinsurah came from the Bengal hinterland.³

An increase in the number of European private traders engaged in slave trading should not come as a surprise if one takes into account the major shifts in the mercantile world of the Indian Ocean starting in the latter half

of the seventeenth century. The VOC's position within this Bengal–Coromandel–Southeast Asia trade improved dramatically following its string of territorial conquests in the Indonesian archipelago, especially its victory in the Makassar war in 1666. This victory principally affected Asian traders from Bengal and the Coromandel as they had to re-direct their trade from these eastern ports to elsewhere. The beneficiaries of these changes were not just the VOC but also a whole host of European private traders. It is in this context that the Coromandel ports had seen a total of 3,859 slaves traded in the period 1694–1696, all by private traders. Almost nothing is known of the condition of slave trading from the Coromandel coast in the eighteenth century. Only new research can reveal what the dominant form of slave trading was there and whether it was private or company controlled. New research from Cochin, however, clearly shows that private merchants were the dominant force behind the slave traffic from the Indian subcontinent to other parts of the VOC empire. Their private trade was not clandestine, as the VOC authorities provided the necessary registration for these transactions. In all likelihood, these intra-Asiatic slave sales were a permitted means of supplementing their wages.⁴

This private trade demonstrates perhaps one of the most neglected aspects of slave movements in the VOC empire in the Indian Ocean world: the multiple directions of slave movements. The Indian subcontinent was not just a place from where the VOC sourced and transported their slaves but was also a destination to which the VOC brought slaves from multiple outposts. Even though most VOC settlements and slave holdings in the Indian subcontinent paled in comparison to the slave holdings in Batavia, Ceylon, or the Cape, these smaller or subordinate outposts had considerable numbers of slaves, especially within the households of the VOC officials. The majority of these slaves were women from other parts of the VOC empire. Thus, in Bengal, a VOC directorate, court records and slave transfer deeds from the eighteenth century mention slaves coming from places such as Batavia, Makassar, Bali, and Padang.



An etching made by Wouter Schouten in 1676, depicting Bengalese captives in Pipely, Orissa (Baliapal, Odisha). Arakanese captors sold these Bengalese to VOC representatives. Most of the captives were probably women.

Slave Trading and Enslavement in a Complex Political Landscape

Slave trading was crucial to the VOC, but was also deeply influenced by political and diplomatic relations. Transactions in relation to slaves structured the diplomacy between the European powers and Indigenous states in the Indian Ocean world, for example. In 1653, when the Arakanese king, Candasudhammaraja, invited the VOC back to Mrauk U after a period of

tensions, he drew up a treaty for both parties detailing the several forms of protection that the VOC could expect. Royal officials of Mrauk U systematically supervised the slave sales to ensure these clauses. A few years down the line, the VOC was again drawn into an agreement with the Mughal officials in Bengal, but this time it was only to relinquish its slave trade in Arakan, a demand to which it reluctantly acceded.⁵

The relationships between the VOC and the surrounding Indigenous polities determined who could be enslaved and traded. The Arakanese state had put in place a complex system of registration dividing the population into free people excluded from slavery, royal slaves working for the Arakanese king, all skilled slaves, and the slaves meant for sale to the VOC. The VOC could not buy slaves identified as royal or skilled. Additionally, the 1653 treaty between Arakan and the VOC stipulated that people who either spoke Arakanese or had lived in Arakan for at least seven years could not be sold. Similarly, the Mughal provincial governor of Bengal repeatedly issued orders prohibiting European companies from enslaving Muslim subjects. The Mughal governor also intervened in cases where high-caste Hindus were sold into slavery. To what extent the local rulers in Coromandel intervened in the slave trade is unknown. All we know is that in northern Coromandel, the sultans of Golconda shielded Muslim subjects from enslavement. Further information from the Coromandel coast is scarce. Farther south, as the Maratha ruler, Shivaji, expanded his territory into the Eastern Carnatic, he issued an edict in 1678 prohibiting Europeans from slave trading in the region.⁶

In Cochin, slave sales required a special certificate or *ola* that the King of Cochin issued to slaves available for sale. Apart from the Raja of Cochin, the VOC maintained working relationships with all other rulers in the region, especially the Kolathiri raja, the Ali rajas of Cannanore, and the rulers of Calicut and Travancore. The mutuality was also reflected in the legal system within the Malabar command. It was mandatory to have the *ola* for all slaves captured from the Malabar hinterland and sold on VOC territory. These certificates mirrored the caste hierarchy of the Malabar society; the elites were the Brahmins and the Nairs, the primary landholders of Malabari society who lorded over a vast array of lower castes, such as Pulayas and Parayars. These people, who were attached to lands belonging to the elites and obligated to provide all forms of labor, were available for sale. Muslims of Malabar, it seems, could not be sold as slaves. Any transaction without an *ola* was illegal and the buyer and seller were subject to

prosecution in a VOC court if they were Christians, or otherwise handed over to the local rulers for appropriate punishments. In VOC courts, such offenses were punishable by death or other severe sentences.⁷

Slave transfers not only articulated the legal connections among the various far-flung corners of the VOC's Asian empire, but also connections between the various legal domains within one region. Thus slave transfers in Bengal show the legal nexus of private merchants of Chinsurah, the headquarters of the VOC, and the headquarters of the British East India Company in Calcutta. In Cochin, these documents, which clearly stated the caste status of the enslaved and the sellers, articulated the legitimate forms of slave transfers that all legal authorities in the region had agreed upon. Thus, in 1743, when the VOC intervened to declare null and void an attempted sale of a slave girl named Cali by an Indo-Portuguese soldier (toepass) named Joan Dias, the Court of Justice refused to hand the slave girl over to the owner, a Payancheri Nair, to whom Cali initially belonged. By the time she had appeared in court, Cali had converted to Roman Catholicism under the supervision of a Jesuit priest, thereby dissolving her slave status. The indigenous non-Christian population could not keep a Christian slave; caste-based slavery did not extend to Christians. The VOC thus decided not to return Cali to her owner but to keep her within the bounds of Cochin. Even the property rights of the Payancheri Nairs, who were influential local landlords and would later become the VOC's tax collectors on the Company's lands in the Malabar, were undermined to uphold the VOC's jurisdictions over Christians and a key pillar of the Dutch colonial order, namely the immunity of Christians from enslavement by non-Christians.⁸

The Social World of Enslaved Workers

Slaves intimately understood the legal maze within which the VOC was imbricated and navigated it to their own benefit with remarkable dexterity. In all its settlements in the Indian subcontinent, the VOC constantly had to contend with various legal jurisdictions of Indigenous rulers or even rival European powers. As Cali's case indicates, conversion was an important strategy taken to alter one's status with the caste-religion nexus of legal rights, privileges, and taboos in and around VOC settlements. At the first threat of being sold off to a new buyer, a common threat that masters used to discipline their slaves, she took the necessary step of running away to the

Jesuit priest of Puthechira. The VOC was deeply unhappy with the situation. The Jesuit priest who converted Cali not only disinherited her Nayar owner, but also subverted the VOC's ability to uphold the property rights of its most important partners in Cochin. A similar case arose in Bengal in 1729, when Jaget van Bali and Anjou van Mandhaar ran away with a freed man, Tambi van Macassar. Caught with stolen goods, all three were mercilessly whipped and sentenced to 25 years of hard labor in chains in Batavia. They were to be taken to Batavia aboard the VOC ship *De Putter*, but they escaped and took refuge with the local government. VOC officials then found that they had all converted to Islam, thereby making it impossible for the VOC director to cajole the Mughal officials into returning the slaves to Company territory, as the sale of Muslim subjects was not permissible. Often, slaves moved to areas under the jurisdiction of the VOC's rivals, including the British and French East India Companies, to evade recapture.⁹

Court records and even the periodical letters sent from the various outposts to Batavia reveal important glimpses of the slaves' social world. Resistance played an important part in this. The social history of slavery and the slave trade in European settlements in South Asia is still in its infancy, and only recently have historians begun reconstructing it in detail. One important aspect of this social world was the extent to which slaves were permitted to move around. In Bengal, slaves could move unfettered within each settlement and interact with a whole host of working people, both free and unfree. In an attempt to flee from his master in 1739, Simon van Orissa received crucial help from a mason at work at his master's home at the time. While the mason was working in the master's house, he asked Simon multiple times, "Why are you still here?" As part of a workforce which exchanged labor for money and moved in and out of the settlements, it was probably evident to the mason that household slaves comprised only a fraction of the workforce in Bengal. He thus planted in Simon's mind the idea that the condition of slavery was an unnatural one. In the words of the VOC prosecutor, the mason had "corrupted" Simon.

In Cochin, too, slaves were allowed to move around. Often, they performed hired labor, but sometimes they even visited their family members. Cali, the slave owned by Ittij Laien Nairo in 1743, for instance, had worked for eight years for the soldier, Joan Dias, with her master's permission. Cali also received a meager bit of compensation for her work, which she apparently did not share with her Nair master. Not only did Cali move in and out of the walled city of Fort Cochin for her work, but she also regularly kept

in touch with her family, especially her mother. This arrangement worked perfectly well for both masters until Dias threatened to sell her off to some far-away place.

The coerced movements set in motion by the slave trade and slavery deeply impacted social relations across the Dutch empire and in the societies which it touched. It led to the creation of new identities and communities, such as the Portuguese and Free Christian communities in Bengal. Similarly, the Dutch colonial slave trade and regulation influenced how local regimes of slavery were shaped on the Malabar coast; masters of assumed land-bound slaves could legitimately sell off their slaves on far-away overseas markets.¹⁰

Conclusions

Slavery and slave trade in the Indian subcontinent were cornerstones of the VOC empire in Asia. Immediately after the foundation of Batavia, the VOC organized large-scale export slave trade from South Asia to its new colonies in Southeast Asia. Under the umbrella of the VOC's colonial empire, the VOC as a corporate entity, along with a host of actors with varied mercantile and political interests, kept this traffic alive and profited from it. The institution of slavery was shaped in colonial and local contexts. In their interactions, the VOC and various Indigenous polities articulated what they understood as slavery, who could be enslaved, who could be exported, and what the permissible and transgressive elements of this institution were. Significantly for the history of South Asia, slavery in these settlements formed new identities that left lasting marks on the Indian subcontinent. The social world of slaves in these colonial settlements reveals the possible life trajectories for enslaved people at the different ends of the VOC's Asian empire. Although we can see the first contours of slavery and Dutch colonialism in South Asia, much of these histories and their legacies remain underexplored, from the large-scale export slave trade from South Asia to Southeast Asia and the Cape, to the entanglements between local and colonial regimes of slavery, to the lived experiences of the enslaved.

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- 10 Titas Chakraborty, "The Household Workers of the East India Company Ports of Pre-Colonial Bengal," *International Review of Social History* 64 no. S27 (2019): 1–23; Van Rossum, et al., "Enslaveability."

Abstract

This chapter is an introduction to the history of Dutch slavery in colonial Indonesia. It questions the long-standing perception that colonial and local forms of slavery were distinct from one another. An analysis of the enslavement practices in the eighteenth century reveals that colonial and local slavery were in fact entangled, and that Dutch colonialism shaped the local practices of enslavement, while the Dutch legal apparatus was used to conceal this complicity.

Keywords: Indonesia; slavery; enslavement; colonialism

Slavery in Colonial Indonesia

Alicia Schrikker

Azia van Batavia, Pasop van Timor, and Paloepose van Makassar are just a few of the names that appear in the archives of Huize Buitenzorg, now known as Istana Bogor, the administrative palace of the Dutch East Indies governor-general. Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose were enslaved people who were forced to work in the palace. They worked there from 1808 to 1811, as we know from the notarial deeds, which specified the sale history and legal ownership of these people. They were the property of Herman Willem Daendels, governor-general and field marshal of the Dutch East Indies. Daendels assumed ownership of Azia van Batavia immediately upon his arrival at Buitenzorg, on January 1, 1808, from his predecessor Albertus Henricus Wiese (1805–1808), who had kept Azia in slavery as a “tea maid.” Later that year, Daendels acquired Pasop and Paloepose, along with some thirty others, at auctions in Batavia and put them to work in his palace.¹

How people like Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose ended up in slavery is not always clear. The slave transports documented the moment that the enslaved arrived in the colony, but not how they had actually been enslaved. There were many avenues to slavery in the Indonesian archipelago.

This island group covers an enormous area of approximately 5,000 kilometers from Banda Aceh in the far west to Jayapura (Papua) in the east. It is also enormously diverse, both geographically and culturally. Aside from the five biggest islands of Java, Kalimantan, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and the western part of Papua, there are another 6,000 or so smaller inhabited islands where over 150 languages are spoken. This variety existed in the past, too, so it should come as no surprise that the nature and practice of slavery

differed from region to region. Historians prefer to speak of a spectrum of unfreedom that ranges from people who were required to farm land for the elite (serfdom) to those who were truly handled as property and a commodity (chattel slavery).



Willem Troost's depiction of Buitenzorg Palace before the earthquake of October 10, 1834.

Colonial slavery fell into the latter category. In colonial society, enslaved people were used for hard physical labor for the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in and around the ports and forts, as well as on plantations and in private homes. To keep this system working, colonial society was dependent upon a continuous supply of new enslaved people. Studies into the regional slave trade identify several circumstances that led people to fall into the hands of human traffickers. One was economic hardship; people could be forced by starvation and poverty to sell themselves or their immediate family. This often happened as a result of natural disasters or war. Debts were another cause. Those who could not repay their debts could be forced into slavery in order to compensate their creditors. Slavery could also be a punishment for a criminal offense. In wartime, prisoners of war might also be enslaved. And finally, people were plainly kidnapped and forced into slavery.²

Although this categorization seems clear, it is not known which of these scenarios was the most common. We also do not know exactly what role the colonial authorities played in the process of enslavement. In this chapter, I focus on the diversity of slavery practices and the entanglement between the local and the colonial slave trade in the Indonesian archipelago. Because of the fragmentary state of current research—there is as yet no survey of the history of slavery in Indonesia—it is impossible to provide a complete picture. Instead, this chapter zooms in on the three areas that Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose's last names refer to: Batavia, Timor, and Makassar.

The VOC's Slave Societies

The seventeenth century saw the VOC expand from a business with trading posts in the Indonesian archipelago, into an administratively institutionalized colonial presence there. Commercial interests led the Company to seek control of the supply of crucial spices, which in turn led to territorial conquests, sometimes coupled with extreme violence, repression of local populations, and slavery. The relations between the Dutch and the locals outside the fortified port cities varied. In some places, the VOC claimed the right to impose direct taxation. Elsewhere, local rulers retained that prerogative and paid tribute to the Company.

The VOC was most ruthless in Banda. After killing and deporting the local population, the Company created a slave society which ensured a regular production of nutmeg. In the fortified cities of Batavia (Java), Makassar (Sulawesi), and Kota Ambon (Maluku), urban communities sprung up that we now characterize as colonial enclaves. The relations in these cities were based on racial differences; the Dutch ruled, while people of Asian descent constituted an enslaved underclass. Between those two layers, there was a diverse mix of people ranging from Bugis traders and soldiers to Chinese and Arabic merchants, to European and Eurasian *vrijburgers* (people declared free citizens by the VOC, in some cases after having worked for the Company), and *Mardijkers* (freed people who had converted to Christianity). Typically, at least half the population of these colonial enclaves consisted of enslaved people. This certainly held true of Batavia, the colony's main trading center, which grew into a city of about 20,000 inhabitants in the seventeenth century. The 1670 census counted no less than 13,000 enslaved people.³

Azia van Batavia was likely born in Batavia at the end of the eighteenth century. Her mother lived there in slavery. The lives of the enslaved women in this period were documented by clergyman and artist Jan Brandes, who captured domestic scenes from his own home in watercolor. He painted women in the kitchen, who served tea, just as Azia would later do as a “tea maid” at Buitenzorg Palace.

Brandes’s watercolors also show how children born into slavery were sometimes allowed to play with their owner’s children. We can imagine that Azia’s early youth might have looked something like that of Bietja, who



can be seen playing with Brandes's son, Jantje, in this watercolor.⁴ As idyllic as this may seem, girls were in a vulnerable position in colonial society. As young children, they might be allowed to play with the other kids, but as adolescents and young adults they risked falling prey to their owner's lust. Sometimes, one of these young women had the "good fortune" of her owner marrying her, or at least acknowledging paternity of her children and granting her freedom at some point. This happened in nearly all European families that settled in Southeast Asia over the course of time.⁵



Jan Brandes was a Dutch clergyman and artist who settled in Batavia in 1778. Brandes's watercolor on the left shows his son, Jan, playing with Bietja, an enslaved girl. On the right, we see a tea party in a European home, with a "tea servant" serving the guests.

The scenes depicted by Brandes and such Eurasian family histories paint a picture of the fate of women in this society, but they tell only part of the story. Recent demographic research on Kota Ambon by historian Gerrit Knaap shows that two-thirds of the enslaved population there were men. A comparable ratio existed in Batavia. Enslaved men had to do hard physical labor for the VOC in the forts, on the roads, and in the ports. They also had to serve as foot soldiers in the army. Many worked for private families, too. In Kota Ambon, a wide variety of colonial inhabitants owned enslaved people: VOC employees, Europeans, Chinese, Makassarese, and Ambonese. Usually, it was the households of high-ranking VOC staff that employed the largest numbers of enslaved people, meaning a dozen or more. However, the ethnic group in which the most families owned enslaved people—65 percent—was the Chinese. Presumably, they relied on slave labor to keep their trade businesses going.

In the villages of Ambon, the numbers of enslaved men and women were roughly equal. Between 10 and 15 percent of the population consisted of enslaved people, considerably less than in the city. As a result, the institute of slavery had a less profound influence on social relations and the local culture in the villages than in the colonial enclaves. In Knaap's view, the many violent crimes and rebellions by groups of enslaved people in the city of Kota Ambon indicate that the enslaved people there were treated more roughly and violently than in the villages.⁶ There are very few concrete examples of slavery resulting from punishment, debt, or poverty in the local community. Enslaved people came from elsewhere; both the colonial and the local populations in Ambon were dependent on go-betweens for the supply of enslaved people from other areas.

In Batavia, it was no different. Azia van Batavia's parents or grandparents were almost certainly brought to Batavia from somewhere else, but we simply do not know from where. What we do know is that areas like Ambon and Batavia obtained a lot of their slave labor from regions such as Timor, Bali, and Makassar in the eighteenth century.

The Gray Area between Trade, War Booty, and Gifts

There is no way that Pasop van Timor—whose first name means “watch out” in Dutch—received that name from his parents. His name was imposed on him the first time that he was sold, and a deed was drafted. Owners often gave their enslaved people names like this as a lame joke,

probably for their own amusement. From a twenty-first-century historian's perspective, this epitomizes the dehumanization that befell enslaved people in the process of being enslaved and put on the colonial slave market. In Pasop's case, this probably began in or near the island of Timor.

Timor was a small trading post where the Dutch presence remained limited. It is one of the few places in the archipelago where the slave trade was a core activity for the Dutch. In Timor, most trade was conducted with local principalities. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *dagregisters* [official journals] from Timor speak of the exchange of gifts; the local ruler would "bestow" enslaved people, beeswax, and sandalwood upon the VOC, and the VOC would reciprocate with a "gift" of weaponry, alcohol, and textiles. However, this seemingly regulated form of barter was in fact not the result of a neat balance of supply and demand. Dutch demand was paramount; if necessary, the Company used violence to ensure that it received the gifts it needed.

According to historian Hans Hägerdal, the trade in humans existed on the island before the VOC ever set foot there, but it intensified due to the continuous demand from the Dutch. Moreover, this high demand fueled the warfare between the various kingdoms, which sold off the enslaved people whom they had captured as war bounty to the Dutch.

Because the Timorese kingdoms were unable to meet the voracious Dutch demand for enslaved people, more and more principalities became entangled in the web of the European slave trade. If the supply of people was too low for what the Dutch needed, they sometimes organized punitive expeditions on which they captured and enslaved locals. An analysis of the late seventeenth-century Timorese journals shows that the export of enslaved people fluctuated between 25 and 300 a year. Travel logs from the eighteenth century speak of an average annual export of 200 people.

It is of course far from certain that all trade in humans was recorded in the official journals. In addition, local intermediaries were active in the region, trafficking enslaved people to Batavia. There were also some outliers in terms of the number of people traded, such as the shipment of 777 people to Batavia in 1757, following a punitive expedition by the VOC. The sale of this group of people earned the VOC about 50,000 guilders—roughly equivalent to 500,000 Euros today.⁷ Hägerdal argues that the slave trade in that region led to a deep-rooted animosity toward outsiders, such as the Dutch, because they were responsible for the deportation of fellow islanders. The developments in Timor show that it is nearly impossible to

disentangle the effects of trade, warfare, and diplomacy. It might be better to reason the other way around and conclude that it is an illusion to think that people in Timor ended up in slavery without violence and kidnapping being involved.

Kidnapping and Market Forces

In its nearly two centuries of existence, the VOC set many different rules regarding slavery in its colonial enclaves. These rules determined the position of the enslaved in relation to their master, set punishments for attempting escape, and limited the enslaved's freedom of movement when off of the slave owner's property. Such rules give an impression of the tensions that existed between the enslaved and their enslavers.

Administrators introduced laws and regulations in an attempt to curb the violence and arbitrariness that went hand in hand with enslavement; notarial deeds played a crucial role. Selling an enslaved person was only permitted if two witnesses could confirm in the presence of a notary public or local officials that the person in question was indeed lawfully enslaved.⁸ It is in this kind of document that we come across the names Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose van Makassar. The idea behind notarial deeds was that they would protect people who had been unlawfully enslaved, through kidnapping, for instance. In practice, however, these documents had precisely the opposite effect; they became a means of legalizing slavery and of whitewashing a history of forced captivity and violence.

A good example is the deed that legalized the sale of Paloepose van Makassar. The trader who registered his purchase of Paloepose, Jacob Happon Rosenquist, was a scion of a notorious slave trading family who traveled back and forth between Makassar and Batavia.⁹ Witness Johan de Siso was from a similar family, who were infamous in Makassar for their brutal treatment of the people whom they held in slavery and traded. In 1795, twenty enslaved people rose up against the family. Their revolt failed and they were shot dead during their attempt to flee. Nevertheless, this violent incident did prompt a number of administrators to reflect on the state of the slave trade in Makassar.¹⁰

In practice, acting as a witness for a deed of sale was a favor which slave traders regularly did for each other. That is how it worked in the case of Paloepose van Makassar. In other cases, people were pulled from the street and paid to testify. The enslaved person's background and whether they

were legally enslaved did not matter. A deed of sale paved the way for people to be deported from Makassar to the slave market in Batavia, regardless of how they were enslaved. This was an open secret, just as everyone knew that most of the enslaved in Makassar had ended up there through kidnapping. At first glance, kidnapping might have seemed relatively small-scale, because individual abductions resulted in the capture of just a few people. They added up, however, and the crime became a major industry; an estimated 3,000 kidnappees were exported yearly from Makassar throughout the eighteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century, the colonial port city of Makassar had about 6,000 inhabitants, half of whom were free and half enslaved—just like in Batavia and Kota Ambon.¹¹

The kidnappings were mundane: fishermen were snatched from their boats at sea under cover of darkness, people were abducted outside villages at dusk, and children were lured into captivity with cookies. The latter befell two nine-year-old boys, Tapan and Tsjanga, who were from the area of Bulukumba, about 160 kilometers from Makassar, in 1786. After eating the cookies which they were offered aboard a pirogue, they were bound and shipped off to Makassar. There, they were sold to Jan de Siso, another member of the De Siso family mentioned earlier. A month later, fellow villagers from Bulukumba found the boys and liberated them. The kidnappers were subsequently arrested and prosecuted.

The case file, now in the Jakarta archive, shows that the kidnappers themselves were all being held in some form of slavery—some of them had debts, for instance—so, for them, capturing people was a way of earning money to buy back their own freedom. The kidnappers were convicted, but the main culprit, Jan de Siso, could simply go on with business as usual. This, too, was typical of the situation in Makassar and South Sulawesi. There are also known cases of VOC administrators who were deeply complicit in kidnapping operations.

Just like in Timor, the colony's huge demand for enslaved people led to a spiral of violence in Makassar. As we see in the file about Tapan and Tsjanga, everybody in colonial society was implicated in the slave trade. The sad observation that the kidnappers resorted to this practice to buy themselves out of slavery illustrates how firmly in the grip of slavery and unfreedom both local and colonial societies were. Even Dutch contemporaries understood that this vicious cycle was exacerbated by the constant demand for slave labor in the colonial enclaves. Thus, it was not only the kidnappers who had a stake in kidnapping but also the buyers who perpetuated this

violence. And it was the enforcers of the law who facilitated it all with their notarial deeds.

Paloepose, too, may well have been abducted from a boat at some point and sold to Happon Rosenquist, before he was registered as a slave, shipped off to Batavia, and ended up in Daendels's Buitenzorg Palace.

In Conclusion

We have no idea what became of Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose after 1811, when the English assumed control of the Dutch possessions and British Lieutenant Governor Thomas Stamford Raffles moved into Buitenzorg Palace. What we do know is that from that moment on, gradual steps were taken toward the abolition of slavery and the slave trade.

After the British occupation, the Dutch returned in 1815 and reluctantly continued this abolition policy. New bureaucratic instruments such as slave registers were intended to help regulate and restrict the slave trade. However, the demand for labor did not decline; in fact, it grew, and Dutch administrators knew all kinds of loopholes in their own laws and cleverly exploited the thin dividing line between serfdom and slavery that already existed in the local communities. Enslaved people in Banda were renamed bonded servants; in Bali, foot soldiers for the army were recruited through deals with the same local rulers who had previously sold enslaved people for the same market price; debt slaves were now called *pandelingen* (peons) and were used as labor in large-scale infrastructural projects. Slavery also remained a punishment for convicts until well into the twentieth century, although the convicts were now called "chaingangers" rather than "slaves."

The deeds of sale from Buitenzorg give us a glimpse of the practice of slavery under Dutch colonial rule. It was a violent world that was partly perpetuated and sometimes reinforced by the great demand for enslaved people in the Dutch colonial enclaves. The idea of a well-regulated, civilized slave trade and humane slavery was a colonial illusion, and forced labor was commonplace in the colony. These things were patently obvious to Azia, Pasop, and Paloepose. But due to a combination of colonialist denial and the deliberate whitewashing of Dutch complicity in all aspects of slavery, historians long thought that colonial and local slavery were best studied separately. Now that historians are asking new questions about the complex entanglement between colonial and local slavery and its legacy, we are gaining a better understanding of this painful history. Our knowledge is

still limited and fragmented, but the archives are full of clues that can help us piece together, and gain more insight into, the role of the Netherlands in the history of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago.

Notes

- 1 Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (ANRI), Buitenzorg 495, “Slaventransporten behorende tot den inventaris van Huize Buitenzorg, 1808.”
- 2 Anthony Reid, “Introduction. Slavery and Bondage in Southeast Asia,” in *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid and Jennifer Brewster, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983) 1–35.
- 3 Bondan Kanumoyoso, “Beyond the City Wal: Society and Economic Development in the Ommelanden of Batavia, 1684–1740” (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2011); Henk Niemeijer, *Batavia: Een koloniale samenleving in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2005); Eric Jones, *Wives, Slaves, and Concubines: A History of the Female Underclass in Dutch Asia*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Remco Raben, “Batavia and Colombo: The Ethnic and Spatial Order of Two Colonial Cities 1600–1800” (PhD diss., Leiden University, 1996); Matthias van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek: De geschiedenis van Nederlandse slavernij in Azië onder de VOC* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2015).
- 4 Merve Tosun, “Women at Home and Men Outdoors? Locating Enslaved People in Eighteenth Century Batavia,” in *Gendered Empire: Intersectional Perspectives on Dutch Post/Colonial Narratives*, Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis 39, ed. Nancy Jouwe, (Hilversum: Verloren, 2020), 41–56; Remco Raben, “Looking at Silence: Enslaved People In and Outside the Picture,” in *Revisualizing Slavery: Visual Sources About Slavery in Asia*, eds. Nancy Jouwe et al, (Edam: LM Publishers, 2021), 27–32.
- 5 Reggie Baay, *Daar werd wat gruwelijks verricht: Slavernij in Nederlands-Indië* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 2015); Reggie Baay, *De njai: Het concubinaat in Nederlands-Indië* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 2008).
- 6 Gerrit Knaap, “Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire in Southeast Asia: Seventeenth-Century Amboina Reconsidered,” *Slavery & Abolition*, 43, no. 3 (2022): 499–516.
- 7 Hans Hägerdal, “Warfare, Bestowal, Purchase: Dutch Acquisition of Slaves in the World of Eastern Indonesia, 1650–1800,” *Slavery & Abolition* 43, no. 3 (2022): 553–73. The present-day value was calculated using <https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php>.
- 8 Alicia Schrikker, *De vlinders van Boven Digoel: Verborgene verhalen over kolonialisme* (Amsterdam: Prometheus 2021), Chapter 5: “Ellendige slachtoffers van gierigheid en tirannie.”
- 9 Suze Zijlstra, *De voormoeders: Een verborgen Nederlands-Indische familiegeschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Ambo Anthos, 2021). Jacob Happon Rosenquist is one of Zijlstra’s ancestors. In her family history, she explores Rosenquist’s and her other ancestors’ role in the slave trade in Makassar.
- 10 Mr. R. Blok, governor of Maccassar, trans. J. von Stubenvoll, *History of the Island of Celebes to which Have Been Added a Report Concerning the Slave Trade of Macassar, Drawn Up by a Dutch Committee, Appointed for That Purpose: ... Vol. 3* (Calcutta: Calcutta Gazette Press, 1817).
- 11 Heather Sutherland, “Slavery and the Slave Trade in South Sulawesi, 1660s–1800s,” in *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 263–85; for more context, see Gerrit Knaap and Heather Sutherland, *Monsoon Traders: Ships, Skippers and Commodities in Eighteenth-Century Makassar* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).





Section 4

Early Formation of Slavery and Colonialism

Brian Elstak

"A 'merchant' with a top hat, silly collar and empty soul. Full of woes because, despite all the suffering and destruction, 'anything for profit' seems to have been the mantra. How awful."

Ain't the Devil Happy? (2023)

Pen on paper illustration

Abstract

This chapter explores the role of the States General of the United Provinces of the Netherlands in shaping the development of slavery within the Dutch colonial empire, spanning from the Act of Abjuration in 1581 to the abolition of the States General in 1796. The States General provided political, military, financial, and legal support for both private and corporate Dutch engagement in the slave trade and colonial slavery. The decisions made by the States General contributed to the justification, normalization, and intensification of the slave trade and the exploitation of enslaved individuals across the Dutch empire in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, while also influencing the gradual acceptance of slavery within the Dutch Republic.

Keywords: States General; slavery; Dutch East India Company; Dutch West India Company

State-Sanctioned Slavery: The States General from 1581 to 1796

Arthur Weststeijn

It is considered a key document in Dutch history: the declaration of July 26, 1581 in which the States General of the United Provinces of the Netherlands publicly declared that they no longer recognized the Spanish king, Philip II, as sovereign monarch. The edict, known as the Act of Abjuration, is commonly seen as the birth certificate of the Netherlands as an independent state. It stresses that in a free country, there is no room for political slavery. Subjects do not exist for the benefit of the monarch, "to serve him as slaves," but the monarch is there for his subjects. If he fails to protect their rights and tries instead to "command and use them like slaves," then he must "be regarded not as a prince but as a tyrant."¹ With these famous words, the States General, the body representing the several Dutch provinces that had risen up against Spain, not only claimed its right to oust Philip II but also staked out its own position as the embodiment of a free republic in which no individual would be allowed to behave like a despot, lording over others and treating them like slaves, even if only in a metaphorical sense.

Fifteen years later, on November 28, 1596, the same body issued another statement that has received far less attention. It was a response to a request from Rotterdam merchant, Pieter van der Hagen. Two weeks earlier, a ship of his had sailed into the harbor of Middelburg with 130 enslaved Africans on board. On arrival, the local magistrate had ordered them freed, but the members of the States General came to a very different decision. After having repeatedly discussed Van der Hagen's petition to let his ship set sail again carrying its human cargo, the States General ruled that he would be allowed to do whatever he wanted with his property.² This decision marked the start of the Dutch government's involvement in the transatlantic slave

trade. The Dutch Republic may have been a free country where there was no place for slavery in the abstract sense, but outside its borders, Dutch traders were explicitly given all the leeway that they wanted to enrich themselves through human trafficking and exploitation.

The States General was therefore not only foundational to Dutch independence but also to Dutch colonial slavery. From the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth century, the members of the States General gave political, military, financial, and legal backing to Dutch colonial slavery and slave trading.

Corporate Responsibility? The States General and the VOC

Historians have long emphasized the importance of the States General in the history of the Dutch Republic, pointing to the body's position within the Republic's complex confederate power structure. In that structure, each of the seven individual provinces had sovereignty, but the States General was responsible for their common foreign policy, for maintaining diplomatic relations with other states, and for the many wars waged by the Dutch Republic. The main consequence of this position was that the States General became the central administrative institution in a government apparatus which was otherwise entirely decentralized. Therefore, historical research into the political and constitutional development of the Dutch state has generally focused on the powers and decision-making processes of the States General as the predecessor of the modern-day Dutch Parliament.

Another aspect of the history of the States General has not been scrutinized nearly as much: the key role it played in Dutch colonial trade and expansion from the 1590s when the first ships from Holland and Zeeland set sail for Africa, the Americas, and Asia. At first, those maritime expeditions were private initiatives by merchants such as the Rotterdammer Pieter van der Hagen. As the States General was responsible for conducting foreign relations on behalf of the Republic and promoting the interests of its subjects abroad, it was involved in the creation of an overarching policy for those private colonial enterprises right from the start. This involvement developed not only indirectly—when Van der Hagen and other merchants petitioned the States General for a stamp of approval for their actions—but also directly as members of the States General actively initiated the formulation of colonial policy.



Engraving dating from 1639 depicting a session of the States General. The Lords Seventeen are engaged in debate. In the foreground a clerk is taking minutes.

The most far-reaching initiative in this respect was the decision made by the States General to establish the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1602. The creation of the VOC is the only aspect of the States General's colonial involvement that has been relatively widely researched. For many years, historians were mainly interested in the VOC as a public-private company with a trading monopoly. The research emphasized the States General's leading role in granting and repeatedly renewing the VOC's charter as a historical example of state intervention in the market. As such, the relationship between the States General and the VOC could serve as a mirror for contemporary debates about state aid for private enterprise, antitrust law and cartel formation, and shareholder interests.

A striking example of this can be found in the proceedings of a conference organized by the Dutch Parliament in the VOC commemorative year of 2002.³ At the conference, three leading maritime historians discussed in detail how the States General forced the merger of previously existing *voorcompagnieën* (pre-companies) into the Dutch East India Company, analyzing the political, military, and financial support the States General gave the VOC throughout its existence. The framing of the whole discussion was characterized by the concluding analysis, which described the relationship between the States General and the VOC in terms of state supervision and corporate governance of "a multinational *avant la lettre*." A brief discussion of the VOC's military actions only served to illustrate the importance of "corporate responsibility." Not a word was said about the VOC's role as a driving force behind slavery and the slave trade in the Indian Ocean.

The unspoken assumption that the role of the States General should primarily be seen in terms of the relationship between state and market is remarkable in light of the political and military nature of the support which it gave the VOC. After all, a key impetus for the establishment of the Company was military-strategic in nature, namely thwarting the Spanish by expanding the theater of war overseas. This is why the States General, in granting the VOC its monopoly, explicitly charged the Company with such tasks as waging war, building forts, and conducting diplomatic negotiations with governments in Asia. Moreover, the States General frequently gave military aid to the VOC in the shape of warships and materiel. In short, the States General turned the VOC into an overseas extension of its own sovereignty, even granting it the right to take possession of conquered territories and peoples. By delegating sovereign rights to the VOC, the States General

created the conditions for justifying slavery in the Company's charter area, because under the law of war at that time, the sovereign had the right to enslave people taken prisoner in a lawful war. That was made explicit in the instructions for the VOC's governor-general that the States General ratified in 1617, in which VOC employees were ordered to indiscriminately enslave prisoners of war and "treat them as rigorously as they deemed fit."⁴

Apparently, this theme of warfare—and the associated practice of slavery which it legalized—did not fit in with the dominant paradigm at the turn of the last millennium, which saw the relationship between the States General and the VOC mainly as a case of state aid for a trading company. Since then, the paradigm has shifted. More recent historical studies stress the violent nature of the VOC empire and the continuous overseas warfare that the States General engaged in. Simultaneously, research has shown that the VOC was complicit on a large scale in slave trading and the use of slave labor. Even so, no systematic research has yet been conducted into the specific role that the States General played in the development of slavery and the slave trade in the areas where the VOC had a monopoly.

How Slavery and the Slave Trade Were Institutionalized

In the Atlantic context too, the precise involvement of the Dutch state has yet to be studied systematically, although one important caveat must be made here: historians have long been emphasizing the political and military nature of the West India Company (WIC), the VOC's Atlantic counterpart. When in 1621 the States General established the WIC, it reaffirmed and reinforced its claims to overseas sovereignty. The state was more directly involved in the management of the WIC than in the VOC, as a delegate from the States General held a seat on the WIC board of directors. This entwinement of the Dutch state and the Company was clear from the WIC mandate, which included the task of opening a new front in the war against Spain, and from the way the States General continually funded military expeditions to keep the WIC war machine going.

The fact that the members of the States General took the lead in the formation and execution of the Republic's colonial policy meant that they were also responsible for the Dutch participation in the transatlantic slave trade. In the early days, it was private entrepreneurs like Van der Hagen who took the initiative to trade in enslaved Africans, for which they received permission from the States General. Once the WIC was established,

the Atlantic slave trade became part of the Company monopoly. Because the WIC and the States General were so interconnected, the slave trade also, in a sense, became a state matter. After the WIC had conquered various Portuguese sugar cane plantations in northeastern Brazil and several West African forts in the 1630s and early 1640s, the African slave trade became part of its core business.

The States General set guidelines to regulate the slave trade and the use of slave labor, and so legitimized these practices. A 1636 decree from the States General not only stipulated that the enslaved Africans working on sugar cane plantations in Brazil should be treated well, but also that they fell under Roman slave law: legal regulations that were laid down to support slavery in ancient Rome (and which were, in principle, not applicable to citizens in the Dutch Republic).⁵ Thus, the States General laid the foundation for the classification of African enslaved individuals as a separate category of colonial subjects to whom specific laws applied.

In addition, the States General emphasized that the Indigenous inhabitants of Brazil should under no circumstances be enslaved (see Chapter 19 by Erik Odegard). The reasoning was that Indigenous Brazilian peoples such as the Potiguara were potential allies of the WIC in the struggle against the Portuguese. The same instructions were issued regarding the Angolan coast, where in 1642, WIC employees were urged to keep in mind that the free local inhabitants “should in no way be enslaved.”⁶ These instructions reveal that the States General tried to create a legal framework for the Dutch involvement in the slave trade and slavery. By making enslavement subject to conditions (and not forbidding it across the board), the States General paved the way for the institutionalization of, the trade in, and exploitation of enslaved people in the colonies.

Crucial decisions by the States General led to not only the normalization, but also the intensification of the transatlantic slave trade and the use of slave labor. That was particularly true of the States General’s policy toward the Second WIC, which was set up in 1675 after the original WIC went bankrupt. When, in 1682, the successor Company was tasked with the administration of the colony of Suriname, the monopoly granted by the States General explicitly stated that the colony “could not be continued well other than through black Slaves or Negroes,” in other words, depended on enslaved people for its continued existence. The States General stressed that the WIC was “obliged” to provide the colony with a continuous supply of enslaved Africans.⁷ From this we can surmise that the States General not

only created the conditions under which slavery and the slave trade could continue, but also actively promoted the trade in humans and labor exploitation on the plantations.

The States General's policy also had big consequences for the role of private and foreign slave traders and slavers. For instance, in 1675, a resolution by the delegates in The Hague formally opened the harbor of Curaçao to all traders, enabling Curaçao to become one of the most important international slave markets in the Caribbean. When the States General eventually dismantled the WIC trade monopoly and definitively opened trade with Africa to all inhabitants of the Republic in 1734, this gave a new impetus to the Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. Even after the WIC monopoly was lifted, private parties with colonial interests could still count on the States General for support. There is tangible evidence of this in 1763, for instance, when a major slave revolt hit the colony of Berbice. In response to a lobbying effort by plantation owners and other stakeholders, the States General deployed a large contingent of troops to quash the rebellion (see Chapter 17 by Marjoleine Kars).

Freedom and Slavery on Dutch Territory

The States General did not limit itself to maintaining and promoting slavery in the colonies. The delegates also used their power to obstruct the emancipation of the enslaved on Dutch territory. Because in cities like Amsterdam local customary law formally prohibited the practice of slavery, the enslaved who sought a safe haven in the Republic could, in principle, regain their freedom there. The States General tried to cut off that escape route, but a few enslaved people succeeded in this anyway. Finally, in 1776, the States General decreed that enslaved people who were in the Republic could not immediately be freed. According to the decree, freeing them would breach the slaveholders' property rights and thus harm "the innate and actual freedom of the inhabitants of this Republic." This "Freedom of the Fatherland" did not apply to the enslaved from the colonies.⁸

This means first of all that the States General in effect cut off one of the few options that the enslaved had to free themselves from slavery. Secondly, it shows that the practice of slavery was not restricted to the colonial world but had gradually seeped into the fabric of Dutch metropolitan society. At the States General's behest, local laws which theoretically outlawed slavery within the borders of a given city were made subordinate to state-

wide legislation that explicitly gave the Republic's inhabitants the right to hold other people as property on Dutch territory.

The States General continued to push for the continuation of the slave trade and slavery almost until the end of the Dutch Republic. In November 1789, just months after the outbreak of the French Revolution which would eventually bring down the Republic, the States General issued another decree "to promote the Negro trade in the West Indies Colonies." By then, the enslaved in the colonies had risen up several times, and enlightened circles in the Netherlands were also hotly debating whether or not colonial slavery was justifiable and the slave trade should be abolished. But the States General did not relent. According to its decree, the trade and exploitation of enslaved people should be seen as "inalienable from the flourishing and prosperity of the Colonies and Commerce as a whole."⁹ The members of the States General clearly regarded slavery as an essential component of international trade and the Dutch Republic's colonial rule.

Questions for Further Research

The States General's decision making is recorded in extensive source and archive material that has yet to be systematically researched with an eye to the Dutch role in the history of slavery. The digitization of all handwritten and printed resolutions of the States General—in the REPUBLIC project carried out by the Huygens Institute for the History and Culture of the Netherlands and the National Archives in The Hague—will enable more efficient and more detailed analysis of the States General's role in the slave trade and slavery. Such analysis could focus on three lines of research: (1) individual, (2) institutional, and (3) ideological.

At the individual level, research can be done into the individual members of the States General, the delegates of the seven provinces who convened six days per week at the Binnenhof to debate and make decisions. Who were they? What was at stake for them personally with regard to slavery and the slave trade in the colonies? Were they themselves directly involved, financially or otherwise? Did they have close ties with others who had colonial interests, such as VOC or WIC board members or shareholders? The composition of the States General was subject to change, and in practice not all delegates had equal influence on the decision making. Could members with colonial ties or interests impose their will in that forum, or not?

At the institutional level, research could analyze the States General not only as a collective of individuals but also as an institution. How did the States General evolve into a central governmental body and what role did colonial politics play in this process, and more specifically how did the decision making concerning slavery affect this centralization? Did the States General's decisions about slavery and the slave trade increase the body's clout within the Dutch Republic's power structure? Did this bolster or weaken the central government's claims to sovereignty? In other words, what role did the history of Dutch involvement in slavery play in the eventual development of a unified Dutch state?

The third line of inquiry could delve into the ideological background to the Dutch complicity in slavery by uncovering the ideas and views underlying the States General's actions. What terminology did the members of the States General use in their decision making and what meanings did they attach to their language? What did they mean by concepts such as slavery and freedom, and did these words have different meanings to them depending on the context (Dutch or colonial)? By painstakingly analyzing which debates the States General intervened in, which arguments they used, and which conceptual shifts took place in these contexts, researchers can better identify the ideological legitimization of the Netherlands' involvement in slavery and the slave trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This analysis holds the key to the underlying paradox of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, a state which, as the States General stressed in the Act of Abjuration, arose from resistance to political slavery, only to grow into a colonial power that promoted slavery worldwide.

Notes

- 1 E.H. Kossman and A.F. Mellink, eds., *Texts Concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 217.
- 2 NA, Archives of the States General, 1.01.02, Inv. no. 3136, folio 58rv, States General Resolutions, November 28, 1596. Original quote: "metter zelve mooren zal moogen doen zoo 't hij 't verstaet."
- 3 Jaap R. Bruijn, Femme S. Gaastra, Henk J. den Heijer and Alexander H.G. Rinnooy Kan, *Roemrucht verleden: De Staten-Generaal en de VOC* (The Hague: Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2002).
- 4 J.A. van der Chijs, ed., *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek, 1602-1811, I* (Batavia / The Hague: Landsdrukkerij, 1885), 45.

- 5 Articles 85–86 of the States General’s instructions to the WIC on August 23, 1636, in *Groot Placaet-boek II*, ed. Cornelis Cau (The Hague: Hillebrandt van Wouw, 1664), 1261.
- 6 NA, Archives of the States General, 1.01.02, Inv. no. 5756, Addenda to the States General’s Resolutions, “Provisieele instructie voor de regeeringhe van het Suijder district,” Article 43, April 11, 1642.
- 7 Article 6 of the charter granted by the States General to the WIC on September 23, 1682, in *Groot Placaet-boek III*, ed. Simon van Leeuwen (The Hague: Jacobus Scheltus, 1683), 1426.
- 8 “Placaat van de Staaten Generaal, omtrent de Vryheid der Neger en andere Slaaven, welke uit de Colonien van den Staat naar dese Landen overgebracht of overgesonden worden. Den 23 Mey 1776,” *Groot Placaet-boek IX*, ed. Joannes van der Linden, (Amsterdam: Johannes Allart, 1796), 526.
- 9 “Placaat van de Staaten Generaal, tot aanmoediging van den Negerhandel in de WestIndische Colonien. Den 24 november 1789,” *Groot Placaetboek IX*, 1291.

The Colonial History of the Provinces and Admiralties

The Dutch Republic consisted of sovereign provinces, or regions. They were the predecessors of today's Dutch provinces, though during the Republic, they had far more autonomy. The provinces sent representatives to the sessions of the States General in The Hague, where colonial policy was decided. In this way, the provinces were also involved in colonial policymaking. Important colonial issues were "discussed in advance" at the provincial level. The provinces also regularly helped pay for the implementation of colonial policy. The WIC, in any case, often suffered from financial shortfalls and relied on the provinces for support. Because of the commercial interests at stake, the provinces on the North Sea had a particularly strong appreciation for the colonies. Zeeland even considered a few colonies exclusively its own, such as Suriname, which was conquered in 1667 by a Zeeland fleet and was only later sold to a nationwide Society. The province of Holland paid the lion's share of colonial costs and felt that this gave it the right to the largest share of the economic benefits raked in by colonial companies. However, the smaller provinces of Groningen, Frisia, and Utrecht also tried to secure interests in the VOC and WIC. It is no wonder that the provincial governments became actively involved in colonial policymaking. Because of the multilevel state structure of the Dutch Republic, the colonies were on the agenda at various levels of government. The pivotal role of the provinces as the nexus between city-level and national interests provides plenty of interesting leads for further research.

The sovereign provinces of the Netherlands did not have a common navy. Instead, there were five separate admiralties situated in Holland, Zeeland, and Frisia. An important source of income for them was *convooien en licenten*,¹ taxes which they levied on Dutch foreign trade. In the eighteenth century, the admiralties came to rely more and more on colonial trade.

Commerce with the colonies was not subject to *convoeien en licenten*, but this taxation did apply to the trade in colonial goods on the European market. So, a big part of the admiralties' income came from the trade in products like sugar, coffee, and cacao.

The defense of the colonies was the WIC and VOC's responsibility in principle, but the admiralties regularly offered support. They also supplied the warships that escorted merchant ships to and from the Caribbean and the VOC's cargo ships (known as East Indiamen). Another task which the admiralties took upon themselves was the transport of troops, as they did in 1763 during the slave revolt in the colony of Berbice. Currently, much debate focuses on the role of the admiralty men who are traditionally known as maritime heroes, such as Michiel de Ruyter. Were their deeds in the colonies so heroic?

Notes

- 1 Convoeien en licenten were taxes related to convoys (i.e., fees for the protection of shipping), and to trade licenses or duties imposed on goods.

Abstract

Belgian historiography has paid scant attention to the southern Low Countries' early participation in slavery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This contrasts sharply with Dutch historiography, which has recently looked extensively at the early connection between the nascent Dutch Republic and slavery. By bringing together a range of case studies and various sources including artworks, this chapter makes clear that several social groups, including merchants and financiers, actively participated in human trafficking and the use of slave labor through important trade cities like Bruges and Antwerp. Though they operated primarily within the Iberian colonial systems, their networks and experience were crucial for the slave trade of the Dutch Republic.

Keywords: fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; Bruges; Antwerp; Southern Low Countries; Atlantic islands

A Forgotten Page in History? The Southern Netherlands' Early Participation in Slavery

Jeroen Puttevils

Historians have not written much about the Southern Netherlands' early participation in slavery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In 1993, American historian Allison Blakely pointed out that historians from the Netherlands and Belgium had hardly researched the presence of Black people in sixteenth-century Antwerp. According to Blakely, this might be due to a sense of shame about the subject, or to the fact that slavery was so ubiquitous in Antwerp back then that the topic hardly seemed worth researching. It is remarkable indeed that despite the recent spike in interest in Antwerp's Golden Age, it is mostly art historians who have studied enslavement in sixteenth-century Antwerp.

In Belgium, historiography and the public debate on slavery mainly focus on nineteenth-century Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi. The 2021 report by the special commission on Belgium's colonial past, written at the behest of the Chamber of Representatives, contains only sporadic references to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By contrast, Dutch historiography is tracing the roots of the Low Countries' involvement in slavery further back in time, to the 1590s and even earlier, before the establishment of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the West India Company (WIC), the trading companies most closely associated with Dutch involvement in slavery.

Currently, this is a gap in Belgian historical research. Recent studies by art historians into the presence of enslaved people in sixteenth-century Antwerp rely heavily on older literature. Historians who want to investigate the role of the Southern Netherlands (present-day Belgium) in the slave trade and the use of slave labor can turn to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century articles and books that are mostly based on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century accounts by merchants, plantation owners, and explorers.

These works bemoan the fate of enslaved people and condemn the slavery system, but do not include the perspective of the enslaved. Another avenue to explore are references to the enslaved in the literature from the 1970s through the 1990s, but even in these more recent works, slavery and the enslaved are mentioned only in passing; they are not a research topic per se.

The transcontinental slave trade between Europe, Africa, and the Americas was a “multinational” affair from the outset. Therefore, it is not a good idea to view that complex and fluid trade through the lens of the twenty-first century nation-state. What does the label Southern Netherlands mean in the context of that multinational trafficking in humans? What are we to make of the “Flemish” who left the Southern Netherlands for the Iberian peninsula and the “New World” and remained there to take part in the slave trade? We must also take into account that in the Iberian world, the label of Flemish or Flamenco was given to people from both the Southern and the Northern Netherlands. So, viewing this subject in the framework of the later division between the Republic and the Habsburg-led Southern Netherlands only muddies the water. Besides, the complicity of Southern Netherlanders in the sixteenth-century slave trade is arguably part of Dutch history. In any case, pinpointing the start of Dutch complicity in slavery in the 1590s does not do justice to the continuities from the preceding period when the Netherlands was still a greater entity. The Southern Netherlands was already active in the trade in enslaved Africans in the fifteenth century, and the New World offered new opportunities for traders and entrepreneurs, particularly those from Antwerp. Another result of the Southern Netherlands’ participation in the globalizing trade of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the colonial plantation economy was that a considerable number of free and enslaved Africans ended up in Antwerp.

The Iberian Connection

Flemish entrepreneurs, many of them based in Bruges, were involved in the fifteenth-century Portuguese and Castilian expansions on the coast of West Africa which led to a growing trade in enslaved people. It began with sugar cultivation and trade in Madeira, the Canary Islands, and the Azores. There, plantation owners experimented on a large scale with the use of enslaved people from the original population (such as the Guanches in the Canaries) and imported North African and sub-Saharan enslaved people. It was also from these islands that the export of enslaved people to Latin America

began. Southern Netherlanders were very active in these proto-colonies as plantation owners and sugar exporters.

One example is Jacob Groenenberch, an Antwerp merchant born in Cologne in 1472. In 1513, he bought a sugar cane plantation in Tazacorte on the Canary Island of La Palma. By 1524, Groenenberch owned one sixth of all the land in La Palma.¹ An inventory of his estate, drawn up when his widow died in 1544, shows that there were enslaved people working on his Los Llanos sugar cane plantation. They were listed between the “animals” and the “pots” needed to cook the sugar cane.²

Another example is one Lorenzo de Gorrevod, who received permission from King Charles V in 1518 to transport “four thousand negro slaves, both men and women, to the [West] Indies, the [Caribbean] Islands and the [South American] mainland on the [Atlantic] sea, and to do this from the [West African] islands of Guinea and other regions from which one wishes to procure these negroes.”³ The licensee was also exempt from paying the usual royal taxes on slave trading. Born in Bresse (in present-day France), Lorenzo de Gorrevod, also known as Laurent de Gouvenot, was the king’s second chamberlain and had accompanied the young Charles V on a trip to the Spanish city of Valladolid. The 1518 slave trading license was doubtlessly a gift to De Gouvenot for services rendered. This license also marks the beginning of the direct transatlantic slave trade between Africa and Central and South America. Up to that point, the slave trade with South America had always been conducted via Seville or Lisbon. De Gouvenot’s license ended up changing hands several times, between traders in Seville, Genoa, and Castilia before it was actually used. This shows how the enslaved were commodified and became part of a financial web in which nobility and merchants from Castilia and Genoa did business. In the Flemish reports of that time, De Gouvenot is referred to as Flemish. But was this man with his complex and “international” life story Flemish just because he lived in the Southern Netherlands for a while? Rather, this episode makes clear how pan-European and complex the slave trade already was and how many stakeholders in northwestern Europe could be involved in it.

De Gouvenot was not the only one in Charles V’s “Burgundian” and “Flemish” entourage who was attracted to the tempting riches of the New World. Many of these high-ranking gentlemen, including regent Adriaan van Utrecht (the later Pope Adrian VI, the only Dutchman ever to become pope), maintained close contact with none other than Bartolomé de Las Casas, the first Spanish priest in Central America who was famous for his

criticism of the atrocities committed there by the Spanish. De Las Casas complained about the Spanish colonists to these Southern Netherlanders because he regarded the Flemish as potentially better colonists who might put right the injustices that the Spanish had done to the original inhabitants of the Caribbean. As odd a solution as it may seem, De Las Casas proposed to replace the “Indian” forced laborers, who had been decimated by disease, with enslaved Africans.⁴ Hence, De Gouvenot obtained his licenses. However, a “Flemish” takeover of the Spanish colonies like De Las Casas envisioned never got off the ground and he later expressed regret for having appealed for shipping in enslaved Africans because he had come to consider “black slavery” as unjust as the enslavement of “Indians.”

Another example of Southern Netherlanders’ early involvement in slavery is Roldán de Argote, from Bruges. He was a gunner who in 1519 signed on to sail aboard the *Concepción*, a carrack in Ferdinand Magellan’s fleet that departed on a voyage of discovery that same year. In July 1522, the decimated fleet reached the Cape Verde islands, where De Argote traded cloves from the Moluccan Islands for enslaved humans and food for the journey home.

To the “New World”

Usually, there is little information available about slavery on Flemish plantations in the Atlantic. That does not hold true for the sugar cane plantation on São Vicente, an island near the coast of present-day Brazil owned by Erasmus Schetz, an Antwerp-based merchant financier. Schetz bought this plantation around 1540. A long, but unfortunately anonymous, letter from 1548 and a series of other documents give us some insight into the conditions on the plantation.⁵ According to the letter, there were 130 enslaved men and women on the plantation. Clearly, this Antwerp trader dealt not only in sugar, but was also personally involved in colonization and slavery. The majority of the laborers on the plantation were enslaved locals, while the minority were Black people. In Brazil, enslaved Black laborers would not replace enslaved original inhabitants until the latter half of the sixteenth century.

Erasmus Schetz’s business exploits involved more than sugar production and trade. As early as the 1530s–1540s, he had built up an industrial complex for the production of brass in the Netherlands and in the Holy Roman Empire. This copper alloy was used to manufacture *manillas*—cuff

bracelets made from either copper or brass which were used as a medium of exchange and were in demand in West Africa. The Portuguese used these cuff bracelets to buy grains of paradise (melegueta pepper), ivory, and enslaved people. It was even customary to express the purchase price of enslaved people in manillas. Erasmus Schetz supplied the Portuguese crown with manillas via Antwerp. Thus, Schetz's industrial and commercial empire, which was based on the slave trade and slave labor, took on the typical shape of the three-way trade between Europe, Africa, and America. So, even though the slave ships did not actually call at the port of sixteenth-century Antwerp, the city on the Scheldt was one of the key locations from which the Atlantic slave trade was coordinated and financed.⁶



Portrait of Katherina in silverpoint by Albrecht Dürer, 1521.

There were also traders from the Southern Netherlands who tried to export enslaved people without an official license from the Spanish government. Most of the cases discussed here are of slave trade and forced labor in the Atlantic world. However, there are indications that people from the Low Countries were also involved in the slave trade in the Indian Ocean. Jan Hendrik is one such case. Hendrik was a soldier who fought

under Spanish Governor-General Miguel López de Legazpi in the siege and conquest of Manila in 1570. He was rewarded with an *encomienda* in the Philippines: a grant from the Spanish Crown that gave him the right to demand tribute and forced labor from the local inhabitants. The *encomienda* system led to slavery, first in Latin America and later in the Philippines.

Enslaved People in Sixteenth-Century Antwerp

The involvement of the Low Countries in early slavery could also be seen in the center of trade: Antwerp. Historians have searched for traces of Africans and enslaved people in sixteenth-century Antwerp (and the Low Countries) since the 1800s. It is often claimed that Antwerp had the second-most inhabitants of African origin in Europe, after Lisbon. That is an exaggeration. There are far more traces to be found of this group in the Portuguese archives and visual culture of that period than in Southern Netherlandic sources. Yet it is true that there were Black people in Antwerp back then, and that some of them were enslaved.

The contrast between the ban on slavery in the Netherlands and the actual presence of Africans, both enslaved and free, is a classic topic in historiography. In 1582, Antwerp common law stipulated in Article XXXVI that all people in Antwerp were free and that everyone who was held in slavery could invoke this right. Nonetheless, the Antwerp archives contain references to Black enslaved people in the city in the sixteenth century. For example, Portuguese merchant George de Sulco Lobo publicly proclaimed in 1516 that the two absconded “moors who are not Christians and are dressed in skipper’s clothes” must be found and brought back to their owner.⁷ This proclamation explicitly mentions the fact that the two were not Christians because it was illegal to enslave Christians in the Low Countries.

In 1552, Bertelmeeus, an enslaved Black man who belonged to the Spanish subject Pedro de Melgosa, invoked the Brabant freedom privilege—the precursor to Article XXXVI of Antwerp common law—to claim freedom.⁸ He had accompanied Paulo de Melgosa, a relative of his owner, and his goods on a trip to Antwerp. The Antwerp aldermen decided that Bertelmeeus had to be returned to his master in Spain, but that he should be treated well. Paulo de Melgosa was required to pay a large bond for this. If Bertelmeeus were to later return to the Low Countries, he would be freed immediately.⁹ It looks like the city magistrate was trying to get rid of this problem as fast as possible.



Jan van der Elburcht's painting *The Baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch* (1556-1563) refers to the Bible story from Acts of the Apostles 8:26-40.

We can conclude from these examples that the enslaved traveled with their masters to the Low Countries. German artist Albrecht Dürer even drew a portrait of one of them in 1521: Katherina, a maid to—or possibly enslaved servant of—João Brandão, factor to the king of Portugal. In his diary, Dürer simply called her Brandão's *Mohrin* (Mooress).¹⁰ Dutch historiography often cites the laws of Antwerp as proof that slavery did not exist in the sixteenth-century Low Countries, but these examples clearly challenge that claim.

The Antwerp archives also contain many records of enslaved people being granted freedom. In 1599, Antwerp merchant Adrien Wannemaquer reconfirms the freedom of Jehan Maria, an approximately 20-year-old “noir” from Ubohala in the Angolan kingdom. An English merchant had given Jehan Maria to Wannemaquer in Zeeland in 1590. The then 11-year-old had been captured, along with other “Blacks” by the British in an unknown location, and baptized on board by a priest. This baptism was reconfirmed in Antwerp, and Jehan Maria was freed. After several years of loyal service, Wannemaquer drew up a document reconfirming his status as a free man, to aid Jehan Maria's return to his birthplace. The document was probably written in French intentionally, so Jehan Maria could prove his free status on the trip back home.¹¹

The presence of Black people in Antwerp also brought about a change in the visual culture. In successive versions of the Adoration of the Magi scene, which was highly popular in the sixteenth century, the face of the Black king, Balthasar, becomes more and more individualized, as we can see for instance in the work of Gerard David, Barend van Orley, and Jan Gossaert. This shift in the visual culture started in the early sixteenth century, at a time when Antwerp drew more and more Spanish and Portuguese traders and craftsmen. Another theme that grew in popularity was the baptism of Moors, as we can see in the painting by Jan van der Elburcht painted on commission for the altar of the Antwerp cathedral. This baptism scene illustrates the prohibition on the enslavement of Christians in Antwerp.

Continuities during the Republic Era

Following the political and religious struggles in the latter half of the sixteenth century and a European diaspora, more and more merchants from the Southern Netherlands, most of whom had strong ties to Antwerp,

found a new home in Amsterdam. The transition from Antwerp to Amsterdam as a metropole for world trade has been extensively studied from the merchants' perspective. However, these merchants' connections to slavery and the slave trade have yet to be thoroughly researched. How important were these networks to the development of the Northern Netherlandic slave trade?

Willem Usselinx, born in Antwerp in 1567, was one of the founders of the WIC. As early as 1600, he devised plans for the Dutch colonization of parts of Central and South America which were controlled by Spain and Portugal. Usselinx envisioned agricultural colonies in which baptized members of the original population and European immigrants would work. He saw slavery as a typically Iberian and Roman Catholic practice, but this is not to say that he condemned it. Far from it, but he rejected its use because he thought that it would not be profitable. Usselinx wrote that slaves would only work hard if threatened with physical violence. In his view, a man from the Republic would be more productive than three Black people. The WIC ignored his advice, however, and the Company would soon become a major player in the transatlantic slave trade and slave labor.

Balthazar de Moucheron and his nephew, Cornelis, who were associated with the *voorcompagnieën* (pre-companies) and the VOC itself, were active in the trade in enslaved people in West Africa. Slave trader Ximenez was represented by the famous Amsterdammer Cornelis Pietersz Hooft in the early 1590s. Another Antwerper, Gaspar de Mere, left for Pernambuco in 1598 and acquired a sugar cane plantation near Cape Santo Agostinho. De Mere is believed to have provided crucial strategic information which led to the establishment of the WIC. Unfortunately for him, the Hollanders confiscated his plantation after they conquered Pernambuco in 1630.

Input for Further Research and Debate

The Southern Netherlanders who took part in the trade in enslaved people did so via the Portuguese and Spanish colonial systems which they already had commercial dealings with and, since Philip I of Castile's short reign, had geopolitical access to. They had hardly any influence over these systems and could also opt to work around them. However, much research is still needed to gain a clearer picture of the Southern Netherlands' role in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century slavery. Their role is not always easy to

trace because traders often circumvented the official colonial systems of the Spanish and Portuguese Crown, which is the origin of our sources.

It is also not always easy to identify the Dutch names that were phonetically transcribed in Portuguese or Spanish. This would require collaboration between Belgian, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese historians. Such cooperation might even reveal narratives from the enslaved themselves; these are unknown to us at present. Additional research would tell us how representative or anomalous such cases are.

Bruges, and later Antwerp, were hubs in a complex and globalizing commodity chain and financial network. This early history of slavery shows that even without big companies like the VOC or WIC, there was a trade in enslaved people run by small-scale expeditions and smaller plantations, both within and outside of the official colonial system. Studying this aspect of history is much more difficult than researching company archives, but studying the archives of Iberian courts of law, governments, and even the Inquisition, might provide us with information about the people enslaved by Southern Netherlanders.

Another arena that needs to be explored in more detail is the massive increase in book printing in the Netherlands in the sixteenth century. Countless travel stories and ethnographies *avant la lettre* came off the presses. These books can contain a wealth of information about the representation of other population groups and can serve as a source on racialization and ideas of white superiority, which must have contributed to the general willingness to tolerate the trade in enslaved people.

In Conclusion

This chapter teaches us that even before the Dutch Revolt (1568–1648), high-ranking nobility, merchants, and entrepreneurs from the Low Countries were clearly involved in slavery and the slave trade. The Southern Netherlands were part of a highly extractive and commercialized system that exploited forced laborers. As a result of the Reformation, the Catholic persecution thereof, and the Dutch Revolt and resulting Eighty Years' War, many trading families relocated to the Republic. The Dutch involvement in slavery therefore goes back much further than widely thought, via the Southern Netherlands.

Much research still needs to be carried out on how the knowledge about the slave trade and the trading networks that existed were passed on from the Southern to the Northern Netherlands. It seems that the ownership of, and trade in, enslaved people was a normal part of everyday life in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century merchant circles. Is this evidence of a clear pattern of unscrupulous pursuit of profit? What is much more difficult to ascertain is how people in the Low Countries who were not involved in human trafficking viewed slavery. How did they react when they ran into Katherina, the girl immortalized by Dürer?

In retrospect, this history seems inevitable. And yet... What if Bartolomé de las Casas had not appealed to Charles V and his “Flemish” entourage to spare the “Indians” and replace them with enslaved Black Africans, but had instead questioned the universal morality of slavery?

Notes

- 1 Hugo Soly, *Capital at Work in Antwerp's Golden Age* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021).
- 2 Fernand Donnet, *Les Anversois aux Canaries, un voyage mouvementé au XVIe siècle*, Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d'Anvers 1819 (1895–1896) (Antwerp: Veuve De Backer, 1895), 276–311, 202–365.
- 3 Quoted in Georges Scelle, *La Traité négrière aux Indes de Castille* (Paris: Larose et Tenin, 1906), 755. Original document can be found in Archivo General de Indias, Indiferente General, 419, libro 7, folio 735rv.
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- 7 FelixArchief Antwerp, Ancien Régime archives of the city of Antwerp, Gebodboeken, Inv. no. 14891539 A, folio no. 72v
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- 9 FelixArchief Antwerp, Ancien Régime archives of the city of Antwerp, Gebodboeken, Inv. no. 15391564 B folio no. 272r.
- 10 Moriz Thausing, *Dürers Briefe, Tagebücher und Reime*. 114, between March 17 and April 6, 1521 (Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1872).
- 11 FelixArchief Antwerp, Certificatieboeken BE SA 112, 1599, 28v; Donnet, “Les Anversois aux Canaries,” 516–18.

Abstract

This chapter discusses how private interests helped shape the Dutch Republic's policies on slave trade and colonial expansion. An important channel of influence was the petition, a direct request to the authorities signed by a wide diversity of private individuals. Both in Asia and the Atlantic, local and foreign actors tried to sway decision making, often through petitions. Colonial authorities could shape policy through their relatively far-reaching autonomy in implementing legislation. This chapter recommends further research into lobbying by the processing and manufacturing industries, the role of private interests in diplomatic exchanges, and the origins of social and racial policies that shaped colonial hierarchies.

Keywords: petitions; lobbying; private interests; colonial policies

Private Interests in the Policies of Slavery and Colonial Expansion

Joris van den Tol

On July 26, 1650, a petition from shareholders of the West India Company (WIC) was read in the States General. The dozens of signees stated that there was a major problem: although the WIC officially had a monopoly on the trade in enslaved Africans in Guinea, on the West African coast, in practice, the Company was “incapable” of “continuing the trade and commerce in Guinea.” As a solution, the petitioners suggested that the States General withdraw the WIC’s right to trade in Guinea and grant it to them instead. However, these shareholders were not alone in their desire to take over the WIC’s trading territory. Another group of traders in the Republic lobbied the States General in 1652 for the creation of a new company licensed to sell enslaved Africans within the trade zone of the WIC charter. Yet another petition shows that Jewish Amsterdammers argued in 1648 that Angola need not be recaptured from the Portuguese. After all, they stated, even with Angola no longer controlled by the WIC, “just as many blacks [were being shipped] to Brazil as before.” And even in the eighteenth century, when the slave trade was territorially more clearly defined and divided among European traders, the biggest private slave traders from Amsterdam successfully petitioned for a permit to “take a shipment of slaves to Suriname.” In short, private individuals regularly attempted to influence policy decisions about slavery and colonial expansion.

Private Influence on Colonial Policy

In 1639, the colonial administration of the WIC colony in Brazil (1630–1654) had to use much rhetorical flair to persuade the Company leadership in the Republic that “without slaves it is not possible to get anything done in

Brazil” and that any objections they might have were “unnecessary scruples.” But evidently, just eleven years later, there was wide support among WIC shareholders for the trade in enslaved Africans, as we can see from the fact that dozens of them signed the 1650 request submitted to the States General. The petition was circulated in The Hague, Zeeland, Leiden, Dordrecht, and elsewhere to give people in a variety of places a chance to show their support for it. The signees included women, men, a mayor, a *solliciteur-militair*,¹ painters, writers, and people about whom nothing has been recorded in the history books. Their diverse backgrounds show us that people from very different layers of society had private interests in the slave trade. From the seventeenth century, requests to the country’s political leadership were often accompanied by canvassed petitions. In the eighteenth century, this phenomenon took on increasingly bigger proportions; petitions have been discovered with hundreds and even thousands of signatures.² These petitions aligned people of different social classes, genders, ethnicities, religions, and geographies and gave groups outside the political elite more opportunities to exert influence on politics.

Research has shown that the various governmental bodies in the Republic were highly receptive to petitions; about 40 percent of the petitions in Amsterdam directly led to new legislation. Nearly everyone could exert influence by means of a petition. It was not necessary to be a burgher (resident with rights and duties) of a city, citizen of the republic, or member of a guild. Some petitions were even submitted by merchants on behalf of “friends from England,” for instance.

Aside from these written requests, there were two other important strategies for promoting private interests. The first was influencing public opinion, and ultimately decision making, through pamphlets and other publications. The second was leveraging social capital and personal relationships to lobby regents. Because it was apparently possible for so many people to co-shape slavery and colonial expansion policies in so many ways, it seems likely that those policies were not so much based upon ideals as upon private interests. As a result, political power grew increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy families and merchant regents.³ Nevertheless, people from outside those family factions continued to exert some influence on politics.

Private Interests in the Colonies

Colonies enjoyed relatively great legislative autonomy, partly because they were geographically so far removed from Europe and partly because local European elites dominated colonial administrations. It was therefore comparatively easy for them to influence policies relating to slavery and expansion. In that sense, the Dutch colonies were no different than the British or Spanish colonies, for instance.⁴ Instructions from the highest authorities in the Republic might be crystal clear, but local circumstances gave colonial administrations considerable leeway to deviate from them. That gave colonial inhabitants with vested interests the chance to put their stamp on policy.

Colonists in Asia had more autonomy than those in the Atlantic world, for the simple reason that the trip from Amsterdam to Batavia took several months, while ships from Amsterdam could reach Manhattan, Curaçao, Paramaribo, Guinea, or Recife in just weeks. This distance, combined with the States General's smaller role in the VOC, meant that most petitions were handled by the colonial administration and only rarely reached The Hague. Within the VOC offices in Asia, the Council of the Indies in Batavia (the highest administrative body in the VOC), played a leading role. However, here too, the same mechanisms of distance and local lobbying were at play. For example, when the VOC administration at Fort Zeelandia in Taiwan (1624–1662) received instructions from Batavia to grant a gambling license to the highest bidder, Taiwan-based Chinese merchants managed to persuade the local Dutch administrators in Zeelandia not to carry out the orders. The Chinese co-colonists were afraid that their representatives on the island would gamble away all of their profits. In Batavia, too, a sizeable group of Chinese co-colonists succeeded in influencing VOC policy in such a way that it coincided with their private economic interests. Although the administrators did not record all petitions and decisions, minutes taken in meetings reveal that there were many and that they were primarily submitted by the Chinese in the colony.

In the Atlantic colonies, too, it was not only Dutch private interests that influenced slavery and colonial expansion policy. Initially, the WIC did not intend to enslave the original population in the Brazil colony (see Chapter 19 by Erik Odegard). After all, the idea was to free the original inhabitants from the yoke of the Catholic Portuguese, and enslaving them was entirely

incompatible with this. Although plantation and sugar mill owners repeatedly sought permission to do so, the WIC directors stood their ground for a long time. That changed in 1642, when Company directors in the Republic responded more favorably to petitions from Portuguese co-colonists who found enslaved Africans too costly and therefore asked permission to enslave original Brazilian inhabitants for labor. The directors decided that as long as these Brazilians had already been taken prisoner in an internal war between Brazilian population groups, it was justifiable for the colonists to buy them "at the lowest possible price" and keep them in slavery for seven years. Slavery, the directors reasoned, was a better fate than being beaten to death, which was what would happen to them if they were not sold.

Dutch and other European colonists were not the only ones who managed to influence policy in the Dutch Atlantic colonies. In 1645, free Africans petitioned and were granted the right to form their own army company with "their own [i.e., African] captains and officers." The original inhabitants of the colonies also made use of the right to petition the leadership in an attempt to secure their own private interests. One example of this was the permission that some groups in the original Brazilian population (such as Potiguara) received to appoint their own aldermen and intermediaries instead of Dutchmen. The Brazilian, Potiguar Antônio Paraupaba, and the Congolese envoy Dom Miguel de Castro even traveled to The Hague to seek support for their private colonial interests.⁵

It is interesting to explore what role lobbying played in shaping the social stratification in the Dutch colonies. Studies of slavery and colonial policymaking in the Spanish empire have already revealed how petitions from people of various social backgrounds led to the creation of categories such as *mulatto* and *mestizo* to demarcate different racial groups.⁶ Although the Dutch colonial empire has not been investigated from this angle, it seems likely that a study into such practices and systems would yield similar findings. In the VOC colony in Java, for instance, petitions pertaining to mixed (i.e., Eurasian) relationships led to new legislation that preserved and reinforced the social hierarchy. In the VOC colony in Sri Lanka, meanwhile, the colonial laws governing social (and racial) categories and structures grew less strictly divided as a result of the influence of interactions between the Indigenous population and the European administration in the colony.⁷

Taken together, these findings make clear that Dutch policy on slavery and colonial expansion was neither a matter of lofty ideals, nor the

prerogative of a small group of regents who could pull all the strings. The policy was not even exclusively formulated in the Republic, but was in equal measure conceived, influenced, and perpetuated in the colonies. And for hundreds of years, it was private interests that dominated policymaking, from the seventeenth century, when the very first steps were taken to charter companies that would trade in enslaved people, to the nineteenth century, when there were attempts to keep slavery in place for as long as possible.⁸ The various administrative bodies—city councils, provinces, the States General, stadtholders, grand pensionaries, colonial administrations—were highly receptive to private lobbying. In other words, Dutch policy on slavery and colonialization was largely a bottom-up process in which merchants, investors, captains, innkeepers, soap makers, ivory turners, and other private stakeholders banded together by collecting signatures to promote their joint interests.



In 1642, Bartholomeus van der Helst painted this portrait of then 20-year-old Gerard Andriesz Bicker, heir to a famed Amsterdam regent dynasty. The portrait, nicknamed “Fat Bicker,” shows him decked out in full garb.

Follow-up Research into Private Interests

Much of our knowledge about this subject comes from a historically developed interest in merchants; portraits like that of Gerard Andriesz Bicker (“Fat Bicker”) have conditioned us to look at merchants as the literal embodiment of the prosperity of the Dutch Republic. However, our knowledge of private stakeholders other than the merchants from Holland and Zeeland is piecemeal. Even research into regions outside of Holland and Zeeland tends to focus on the merchant elite. Further research is needed, especially in three areas.

The first of these is the role of industry. Research has shown that European industry was implicated in slavery and extractive capitalism in various ways, from glass makers, *jenever* distillers, and bakers who locally produced goods for slave traders, to the processors of colonial goods such as sugar, tobacco, and cotton. We do not know to what extent Dutch slavery and colonization policy reflects the private interests of the manufacturing and processing industries. This is a particularly important question because, for one thing, the market for the processing industry quadrupled in size between 1650 and 1770, while the general economy stagnated and even went into recession. Another reason to investigate this question is that the processing and manufacturing industries were located in inland provinces like Utrecht, Overijssel, Brabant, and Guelders, which means we can safely assume that the Dutch economic involvement in slavery was not restricted to the provinces of Holland and Zeeland. For example, in 1667, hatmakers (who depended on the supply of North American beaver pelts) co-signed a request to reconquer New York, which was ruled by the English at the time. In the period 1770–1771, sugar processors filed petitions lobbying against the merchant bankers’ stance on excise taxes. These examples show how industry, too, was able to influence the decision making regarding colonial slavery. The Dutch Research Council (NWO) recently funded a study into industry’s role in the shaping of economic and colonial expansion policy.

The second area that needs to be more closely explored is how international politics were intertwined with slavery and colonial expansion. The slave economy’s international nature suggests that policy formation played a major role in worldwide diplomacy. Research into diplomatic history has only recently begun to look beyond the work of ambassadors and examine the conduct of third parties and individuals in the ambassadorial entourage. This new diplomatic history, as it is called, has not yet made deep

inroads in colonial historiography and the historiography of slavery. That is particularly remarkable considering the fact that so many non-Dutch actors played a role in the Dutch slavery companies, and vice versa, that so many Dutch actors were active in non-Dutch enterprises with a link to slavery.

The third area that warrants closer examination is the shaping of colonial policy in the colonies. To begin with, we know virtually nothing about the formulation of policy for continental Africa (particularly in areas in present-day Angola, Ghana, and South Africa). Secondly, as we have seen in this chapter, some research has been done into the implementation of colonial legislation in Asia and the Americas, but relatively little attention is paid to its origins. Based on research into other colonial empires, it seems probable that the legislation aimed at keeping the social and racial hierarchy intact was probably partially shaped by non-European groups and groups with a mixed background who wanted to protect their own privileges. However, it is also possible that the Dutch empire was different, because it was more closely governed from Europe, although that is unlikely, given what we know about other examples of legislation such as gambling laws. Either scenario would give us important new insights into the daily social and racial realities in the colonial world.

Notes

- 1 *A solliciteur-militair* was a private financier who ensured that soldiers in the Dutch Republic received their pay, even if, as often happened, the Dutch provinces were late in paying salaries.
- 2 Joris van den Tol, *Lobbying in Company: Economic Interests and Political Decision Making in the History of Dutch Brazil, 1621–1656* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), 139–72; Janse, Maartje et al. “Strategies of Collectiveness: Representative Claims in Dutch Petitionary Practices, c. 1600–1940,” in *Petitions and Petitioning in Europe and North America: From the Late Medieval Period to the Present* (Proceedings of the British Academy, 262), ed. Richard Huzzey et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 142–59.
- 3 Julia Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Marjolein C. 't Hart, *The Making of a Bourgeois State: War, Politics, and Finance during the Dutch Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).
- 4 Jack P. Greene, *Negotiated Authorities: Essays in Colonial Political and Constitutional History* (Charlottesville/London: University of Virginia Press, 1994); John Leddy Phelan, “Authority and Flexibility in the Spanish Imperial Bureaucracy,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1960): 47–65; Alejandra Irigoin and Regina Grafe, “Bargaining for Absolutism: A Spanish Path to Empire and Nation Building,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 88, no. 2 (2008): 173–209.
- 5 Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in Arms, Partners in Trade: Dutch-Indigenous Alliances in the Atlantic World, 1595–1674* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), 170–71, 213–16; Lodewijk Hulsmann, “Brazilian Indians in the Dutch Republic:

- The Remonstrances of Antonio Paraupaba to the States General in 1654 and 1656," *Itinerario* 29, no. 1 (2005): 51–78.
- 6 Adrian Masters, "A Thousand Invisible Architects: Vassals, the Petition and Response System, and the Creation of Spanish Imperial Caste Legislation," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 98, no. 3 (2018): 377–406.
- 7 Sophie Rose and Elisabeth Heijmans, "From Impropriety to Betrayal: Policing Non-Marital Sex in the Early Modern Dutch Empire," *Journal of Social History* 55, no. 2 (2021): 315–44; Dries. Lyna and Luc Bulten, "Classifications at Work: Social Categories and Dutch Bureaucracy in Colonial Sri Lanka," *Itinerario* 45, no. 2 (2021): 252–78;
- Nira Wickramasinghe, *Slave in a Palanquin: Colonial Servitude and Resistance in Sri Lanka* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).
- 8 C. K. Kesler, "Willem Usselincx en de oprichting van de Westindische Compagnie," *De West-Indische Gids* 3, no. 1 (1921): 65–78; Wim Klooster, *The Dutch Moment: War, Trade, and Settlement in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Karwan Fatah-Black, Lauren Lauret and Joris van den Tol, *Serving the Chain? De Nederlandse Bank and the Last Decades of Slavery, 1814–1863* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2023), 127–61.

Colonial Expansion and the Dutch State

The VOC and WIC are the best-known colonial companies, but not the only ones. Decades before the VOC was established, merchants from the Republic were already involved in ventures in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Through the creation of companies, these merchants combined their capital and spread the risk. These businessmen often held important posts in local and national government, and their overseas expeditions were foundational to early Dutch colonialism. Colonial policy was jointly shaped by the States General, the provinces, and cities in the Dutch Republic.

Some of the prominent names in the mercantile and administrative elite were Claes Adriaensz van Adrichem, Elias Trip, Laurens Bicker, Daniël van der Meulen, Johan van der Veeken, Jacques de Velaer, and Balthazar de Moucheron. Operating from the port city of Middelburg, De Moucheron invested in various pre-companies, including the Company of Veere (est. 1597) and the Company of De Moucheron (1600). He was an active participant in privateering, an initiator of shipping to and from West Africa and South America, and one of the first managing directors of the VOC. On two occasions, De Moucheron even tried to conquer islands in the Gulf of Guinea and make them suitable for inhabitation at his own expense. Neither attempt led to a permanent settlement. At the peak of his career, De Moucheron owned dozens of ships, which sailed all over the globe with hundreds of his crew on board. Trade was an important goal of these voyages, but this went hand in hand with aggressive conquests. De Moucheron received support for his ventures from many investors, including Prince Maurits of Orange, stadtholder and supreme military commander of the Republic. The States General time and again gave De Moucheron permission to continue his exploits, and he acted as an advisor to both the States General and the States Provincial of Holland and Zeeland.

Other merchants were not only advisors to, but also members of, Dutch state administrative bodies. Adriaen Ten Haeff, for instance, established the Middelburgsche Compagnie in 1598, and later became a cofounder of the Compagnie van Verre and one of the first managing directors of the VOC. In the same period, he was the mayor of Middelburg and a member of the States General. No doubt this made it easier for him to secure financial and official support for his companies. These examples illustrate the deep entwinement between early imperialism, which was shouldered by the Republic's wealthy merchant elite, and city and state politics.

The national government's role is also evident in the trade with North America. From 1600 to 1614, fierce competition raged for the fur and whale trade. The merchants Lambert van Tweenhuysen, Hendrick Corneliszoon Lonck, Arnout Vogles, Hans Claeasz, and Jan Holscher all led one or more companies that were involved in this trade. The competition ultimately proved disastrous, so in 1614, these Amsterdam merchants consolidated into two larger companies: the New Netherland Company, which focused on the fur trade in the New Netherland colony and was granted the right to claim new countries, ports, and trade routes, and the Noordsche Compagnie (Northern Company) which focused on whaling and the trade in whale oil. The States General granted both companies a charter and paid the admiralties to provide naval escorts of several of their missions. The managing directors of the Northern Company were appointed by the administrators of the cities represented by a company chamber, which gave these cities a lot of power. When the New Netherland Company was created, traders with contacts in the States General were given priority access to investment opportunities in the company. This again makes clear how much influence the States General and the city administrations had. They gave the New Netherland and Northern companies the rights to conquest and trade, controlled their power through governance structures and paid for their military needs.

The competition for the right to trade and conquer territory was not unique to North America. Traders also competed against one another for patents and power in West Africa, South America, and various parts of Asia. In these areas, the admiralties supported large military expeditions, too. And again, a key role was played by Prince Maurits, the States General, and the various regional and city administrations.

To name one example, the States of Holland and the Amsterdam city council repeatedly encouraged the merger of many smaller Amsterdam companies to create a United Amsterdam Company. A similar United Zeeland Company was established under Ten Haeff's leadership. To prevent more competition from flaring up and to boost colonial power, the States General consolidated several companies into the VOC in 1602, and another cluster of companies into the WIC in 1621. The States General granted the charters that gave these two companies the sole right to trade and to rule the areas they conquered. Even after the VOC and WIC were established, many other organizations remained active in the Dutch overseas territories, with the approval of the Dutch state. An interesting example is the Provinciale Utrechtsche Geoctroyeerde Compagnie (est. 1720). This company was supported by the Utrecht city authorities who hoped to earn money from the Dutch overseas territories. The company even had its own sugar mill in Suriname.

At the same time, all kinds of businesses sprung up which were given administrative responsibilities in the colonies, and all these were closely intertwined with the power of the cities, provinces, the States General, and wealthy merchant families. Berbice, for instance, was ruled for a long time by the Van Pere family from Zeeland, and was eventually transferred to a small group of Amsterdam merchants united in the Society of Berbice. Suriname, to give another example, was ruled by the States Provincial of Zeeland from 1667 to 1682, at which point the WIC took over for just one year before the colony was turned over to the Society of Suriname, a joint venture of the WIC, the city of Amsterdam, and Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck, a wealthy merchant. These administrative entities were only able to exert their power because they had been granted a charter by the States General.

In New Netherland, the States General sold patroonships (landownerships), which gave wealthy merchants the right to collect taxes, use land, and adjudicate the law in the areas which they bought. The patroons ruled essentially as autocrats. The Guelders-born Amsterdam diamond dealer Kiliaen van Rensselaer was probably the most successful patroon; he laid claim to an area larger than the modern-day province of North Holland. Van Rensselaer also held administrative posts in the Republic. He was a WIC managing director and, in that context, had lobbied for the introduction of patroonships. There were other patroons in the Republic who had both a vote in the national government and a foothold in the colonial companies, such as Albert Coenraads Burgh (a WIC managing director,

mayor of Amsterdam, member of the Council of State, and ambassador to Russia), Samuel Blommaert (diplomat and WIC managing director), and Samuel Godijn (managing director for both the WIC and the Northern Company). These men had a network that gave them even more power. Van Rensselaer's contacts in the Republic enabled him to appoint his nephew, Wouter van Twiller, as director of the New Netherland colony. His close contacts with Twiller and other New Netherland directors is certainly one of the reasons why Van Rensselaer became such a successful patroon.

Other prominent colonists also had family networks in the Republic with a great deal of money and power. Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck was the grandson of a diplomat and clerk of the States General. Samuel Godijn was father-in-law to multiple scions of the famous Trip family of Amsterdam regents, and members of the Van Pere and Bicker families held posts in all the Republic's administrative bodies. These colonists' political influence in the Republic enabled them to strategically expand their power and wealth elsewhere in the world.

By extending charters and offering financial and military support, the States General, provinces, and cities granted individuals and organizations not only the opportunity to trade, but also to colonize territory. This gave "traders" the right to use violence, use land in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, and rule the colonies which they established there. These same men had decision-making powers in colonial organizations and the governmental bodies of the Republic or belonged to families and networks where many had such powers. Therefore, it is impossible to differentiate between trade, politics, and imperialism in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch government. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the earliest forms of Dutch colonialism, we need to examine the colonial and political mechanisms behind the Dutch trading companies.

Abstract

This chapter on early modern Curaçao focuses on the interdependence of the Dutch and local elites. In early forms of colonialism, the latter group acted as “bridgeheads” and “local” traders. In Curaçao, Sephardic Jews were given political positions to grease the wheels of trade relations on behalf of the WIC. They enjoyed religious freedom, bought animals and land, and owned enslaved people. Willemstad was an important center of commerce that expanded into a staple depot and a key port city in the seventeenth century. The seafaring “free slaves” are another group whose role is important to understand in order to grasp how the slave trade and the colonial system functioned.

Keywords: Curaçao; Willemstad; local elites; Sephardic Jews; seafaring enslaved people

The Entanglement of Colonialism and Local Society: The Sephardim in Curaçao

Jeanne Henriquez

The elite in early modern Curaçao was far more mixed than generally assumed. The administrative, that is to say Dutch, elite on the island mainly consisted of the lower- and higher-ranking civil servants who had been appointed by the West India Company (WIC). They were Protestants, and their trading houses were mainly located in Europe and Asia, the areas with which their enterprises conducted intercontinental trade. In addition to the Protestant elite, Sephardic Jewish traders also had significant influence in Curaçao. They possessed trading houses not only in Europe, Africa, and Asia, but also in the Americas—predominantly in port cities like New York and Coro (Venezuela)—and on several Caribbean islands such as Saint Thomas, Jamaica, and Curaçao. Trade between all those areas was largely in the hands of the Sephardim, who thus played an important role in daily life in the Caribbean. With their geographical knowledge of the continent, these polyglots (who spoke Portuguese, Spanish, English, and other languages) were sometimes appointed to political posts with the aim of facilitating smooth trade relations between the WIC and Spanish colonial administrators.

Their role as “bridgehead” and “local” traders was not unique in the colonial worlds of the early modern period, as early forms of colonialism were all dependent on local elites and traders. Sephardic Jews also had influence in Suriname and Portuguese Brazil. In Batavia and Taiwan (then called Formosa), Chinese entrepreneurs played a crucial role in getting the colonial sugar industry off the ground, supplying labor, and running local and regional trade. European free citizens—former VOC workers who settled in Asia or South Africa after serving out their employment contracts—played a similar role in many other colonies. They were of key importance to the

Bandanese and South African plantation industry, for instance, and to the slave trade between Makassar and Batavia. Often, marriages between men from the elite and women from a local community or enslaved women led to mixed colonial administrative elites. Without such local elites, the Dutch colonial empire could not have functioned.

The Role of Sephardic Jews in Curaçao's Trading Economy

Since the Inquisition, Sephardim had always been mobile and had learned to navigate between the various political, social, and cultural systems in Europe, Africa, America, and Asia. Due to the increasing religious persecution which they suffered in Habsburg Spain, they had settled all over Europe and in the areas colonized by the European powers. Many Sephardic Jews took up trade and positions in banking and insurance, for instance. Their wide contacts and knowledge made them pioneers in the field of intercontinental trade.

In Curaçao, the Sephardim enjoyed favorable conditions. They were given religious freedom and could purchase animals and land. They also owned enslaved people. They worked with and were supported by the WIC directors, who considered them potentially very useful for the development of Curaçao. There are many examples of cooperation between Jewish merchants and the WIC, as in the case of Don Manuel Belmonte, who supplied Jean Cooymans with enslaved people.¹ Many researchers have called for further studies into this network. Historian Christian Cwik, for instance, argues that while we can now better identify various individual Jewish merchants, it remains key to focus on identifying worldwide trade connections. An extra obstacle in this regard is that Jewish traders are often referred to by more than one name, which can also be spelled in multiple ways in different sources. Cwik explicitly argues that historians must be prepared to do their research in various archives, countries, and linguistic areas.² Only then, he argues, can we arrive at a clearer picture of the Sephardim's role in Curaçao and the rest of the Caribbean. This kind of research is also needed to map out the other local elites, such as the Chinese traders in Batavia mentioned earlier.



View of the estate of Don Manuel Belmonte, a.k.a. Isaac Nunez, on the Herengracht in Amsterdam. Etching by Romeyn de Hooghe, circa 1693–1695.

Curaçao and Saint Eustatius as a Staple and Slave Depot

Curaçao was a significant center of Caribbean commerce even before Willemstad became a free-trade zone in 1675. After all, it was strategically located close to the coast of Coro and the Caracas coastal region, where cacao was produced. Dutch merchants could offer their services in Curaçao, making use of the convenient locations of both that island and Saint Eustatius. Both had direct ties to the economic centers of Europe and North America. Willemstad harbor underwent a transformation after 1675, when it became a free port. At that time, most colonies still clung to mercantilist principles, which meant that they stimulated and protected their own economies by forbidding trade in products from other areas. As a result, products were generally expensive and supply was limited. Free trade, by

contrast, offered colonists the opportunity to bypass the more expensive products from their home country. They could purchase cheaper products imported from elsewhere and negotiate higher prices for their own tropical products. Hence, Curaçao grew into a staple depot: a central location where many export products were stored before being transported further abroad and sold. This turned Willemstad into the seventh most important harbor city in the world in the seventeenth century.³ By becoming a staple depot, Curaçao operated according to economic principles that contrasted sharply with the mercantilism of the surrounding area. The same happened in Saint Eustatius and Saint Thomas. This development also led to a trading boom in enslaved people in Curaçao. Colonists from the entire Caribbean region could purchase enslaved humans there because in Curaçao, the resale of the enslaved was permitted.

Starting in 1660, the slave trade in the Curaçao slave depot was regulated by Spanish supply contracts called *asientos de negros*. These were contracts granting merchants a monopoly on the purchase and sale of enslaved Africans along a given trade route. The *asientos* specified the prices and numbers of Africans to be supplied for a certain period of time. These monopolies were granted by the Portuguese and Spanish crown. In 1662, the Spanish *asiento* was issued to the Genovese banking house Grillo & Lomelino. They, in turn, hired several parties, including the WIC, to transport enslaved people to Curaçao, which made the Company a major supplier of enslaved people that year. In 1730, the WIC monopoly on the slave trade came to an end, and as a result, other Dutch trading companies could get a piece of that business.

In 1815, the Netherlands concluded a treaty with Great Britain that officially banned the slave trade with West Africa. However, new historical research shows that the Dutch continued the trade in enslaved people from West Africa until 1863, despite the treaty.⁴ The inter-island slave trade in the Caribbean, which became prominent after the abolition of the slave trade with West Africa, was geographically widespread. More research into this subject can supply us with a better overview of the scale of the slave trade in the region.

It is not altogether clear what the role of the Sephardic Jews was in the slave trade. The historical literature does mention the names of Jewish-owned slave ships, but the scale of this trade can only be clarified by means of systematic research based on sources such as genealogical literature and the log entries recorded when slave ships unloaded their cargoes

of enslaved people for resale in the Caribbean. By paying special attention to the role of local elites who took part in this trade, such as the Sephardim, it will become possible to reveal the diversity of the slave trade and the colonial system.

Seafaring Enslaved People

Curaçao's development into a trading hub depended not only on the Sephardic Jews, but also on the enslaved and free Black population, who worked as sailors, fishermen, dockworkers, sailmakers, and porters. Their labor was essential support for all trade activity. However, the enslaved and free Black craftsmen in Curaçao have been largely overlooked in the history books.

Historian Julius Scott sketched the dilemma faced by the owners of seafaring enslaved people: they needed enslaved people who could perform labor, as sailors on their ships, for instance, but they knew that the sea offered the enslaved myriad opportunities to escape. On top of that, the enslaved learned various skills that made fleeing even easier. They became fluent in various languages, for instance. Another aspect that Scott raises is that the seafaring "free slaves" acted as a window on the world for the enslaved who remained on land. They were highly mobile, both geographically and socially, and the oceangoing and long-distance sailors in particular could bring their fellow enslaved news of what was happening in Europe and on the other islands.⁵ This mobility and the intercolonial entwinement initiated by the local colonial elites created new connections that circumvented colonial authority and set in motion social and cultural developments of their own.

The dynamic and economic nature of the port city of Willemstad, and the new challenges faced by the enslaved who came to live and work there, have parallels elsewhere in the Caribbean in the same period. The enslaved were given more freedom in such cities than on the plantations. They also had opportunities to earn their own income and thus to actively work toward buying their own freedom or that of their immediate family members. However, much less research has been done into such urban slavery than plantation slavery. Therefore, urban slavery in Willemstad deserves more attention, particularly in comparison to other key port cities in the Caribbean. In so doing, special attention should be paid to the resilience of Black Atlantic creoles in general, and that of the seafaring Black population

of Curaçao in particular. After all, the mass escapes of enslaved seafaring Blacks, also known as maritime marronage, took on impressive proportions in Curaçao from the late eighteenth century until 1863. Despite all sorts of military interventions and, between 1710 and 1766, at least nine published proclamations aimed at putting a stop to these mass flights, groups of enslaved people kept fleeing. Special attention should be paid to the role of women and children in the struggle for freedom and equality, as in the case of women’s attempts to flee with their children, aided by enslaved seafarers. As we know, the information that we have about the Black population depends entirely on what mattered to the European authorities, as it was they who recorded it in the sources which we now study. Yet it is possible to indirectly “hear” the voice of the enslaved by reading the documents written from the slave owners’ and colonial administration’s perspectives against the grain. The documents on the Sephardic Jews’ trading missions also provide information on the history of the seafaring Black population. This angle offers us insight into the lives of the Sephardim and the Black community. At the same time, the information so gathered can be compared with the intermediary roles played by other local elites in colonies elsewhere.



The harbor of Willemstad, Curaçao, by Willem Hendrik Hoogkamer, based on a design by Reinier Frederik van Raders, circa 1820–1828.

In Conclusion

We know far too little about how local European and mixed elites, such as the Sephardic Jews in Curaçao, contributed to the growth of Dutch trading and plantation capitalism. Instead of a plantation economy, Curaçao was a commercial hub, and the flourishing trade there involved elements such as mobility, flexibility, networks, and transit. Unfortunately, the history books too often assess the economic history of Curaçao using criteria that apply to plantation economies, thereby ignoring factors that can explain the growth of commercial capitalism. Additionally, too much historiography focuses on the Protestant administrative elite on the island. In the complex Dutch colonial trading economy, there was an important role for the Sephardic Jews as intermediaries. Their role in the Americas should be examined in more detail with the aid of existing genealogical research findings. Prosopographical research, i.e., research into clan and family-related structures that transgress local and regional borders, can be of great use here. The purpose of such research is to understand patterns in relationships and activities by studying collective biographies. By linking data on the import and export of products between Curaçao and various countries in the Caribbean to data on the many elite groups' shipowners and captains, we would learn not only about the value and diversity of the products traded, but also about the trade relations between the various elites.

The Sephardim also had an intermediary role in relation to the enslaved seafarers and the free Black seafaring population. These three groups had much in common: all three were mobile, spoke many languages, and were adaptable to life in unfamiliar surroundings; all of them can be considered "culture creators." A comparative study of the relationship between the Sephardic Jews and these seafaring ethnic groups in other colonies in the Caribbean can help to resolve questions that are as yet unanswered. Part of the research could focus on how the dynamic nature of port cities in various Caribbean colonies influenced enslaved seafarers. To show the complexity of colonial relationships, researchers must interconnect these research topics by approaching them from a multidisciplinary and broad geographical perspective. Historians, anthropologists, linguists, economists, and sociologists will need to delve into the archives in various countries, where the sources are written in many different languages. If we want to do justice to the diversity of the people involved, we cannot rely on the

Dutch archives alone. Gaining a fuller understanding of the Dutch trade in humans and goods from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, in which Curaçao functioned as a hub, requires archival research not only in the Netherlands, but also in Coro, Caracas, Cartagena, Porto Belo, Vera Cruz, Saint Thomas, and Puerto Rico, for instance. This entails a broader approach to imperial history, or in other words, a cross-border colonial history.

Notes

- 1 Isaac Emmanuel and Suzanne A. Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, part 1 (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1970, 77; Herbert Marius Alvares Correa, *The Alvares Correa Families of Curaçao and Brazil* (The Hague: Végron, 1965), 10. Belmonte, also known as Isaac Nunez, was one of the most prominent members of Amsterdam's Sephardic community; Cooymans was a WIC managing director.
- 2 Christian Cwik, "The Rise of Jewish Merchant Capitalists in the Caribbean: The Triangulation of Barbados, Jamaica and Curaçao," in *A Sefardic [sic] Pepper-Pot in the Caribbean: History, Language, Literature and Art*, ed. Michael Studemund-Halevy (Barcelona: Tirocinio, 2016), 13–29.
- 3 Wim Klooster, "Curaçao as a Transit Center to the Spanish Main and the French West Indies," in *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680–1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders*, ed. Gert Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 43.
- 4 Joseph C. Dorsey, *Slave Traffic in the Age of Abolition, Puerto Rico, West Africa and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean, 1815–1859* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 120.
- 5 Julius Scott, "Negroes in Foreign Bottoms': Sailors, Slaves and Communication (selection)," in *Origins of the Black Atlantic, Rewriting Histories*, ed. Laurent Dubois and Julius Scott (New York: Routledge, 2010), 69–98.

Abstract

This chapter explores the involvement of Dutch churches in slavery. Until recently, no research had focused specifically on this topic. The chapter provides a brief description of the churches that were active in the colonies: the Dutch Reformed, Lutheran, Moravian, and Roman Catholic churches. Churchmen were involved in slavery both in the practical sense, as slave owners, and theologically, by justifying slave owning with biblical arguments. Dutch churches still bear the physical and spiritual legacy of slavery. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research, which include an emphasis on multiperspectivity, the use of new methods, and the examination of other religions and regions.

Keywords: Dutch Reformed Church; Lutheran Church; Moravian Church; Roman Catholic Church; slavery; theology

“Clearly Counter to the Spirit of Christianity”? The Church in the History of Dutch Slavery

Martijn Stoutjesdijk

In January 1628, the Amsterdam classis (a layer of the regional church administration) of the Dutch Reformed Church wrote, in response to a question from the church council of Batavia (present-day Jakarta), that it was “not Christian to have serfs.”¹ That same year, the classis of Walcheren came to a similar conclusion, and in July 1629, it deemed holding people in slavery “improper and impermissible for Christians in the Indies.”² Those answers, and the questions that they were a reply to, came late. Long before 1628, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) had begun large-scale slave trading and importing enslaved people to Banda and Batavia.

More than two centuries later, in May 1858, the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church petitioned Dutch king William III to abolish slavery in the West Indies because the church:

in recent years especially ... has come to the ... awareness that, like many other wrongs denounced by Christianity, this inheritance from days past is, if not counter to the letter of the Holy Scriptures, clearly counter to the spirit of Christianity, and leaves a blemish upon it, of which it must cleanse itself as soon as it can.³

For the more than two centuries between these two moments, however, the Dutch actively dealt in enslaved people, both in “the East” and in “the West,” under the auspices of companies like the VOC and the West India Company (WIC). All that time, the Reformed Church, the public, or privileged church of the Dutch Republic, was a reliable partner to the companies and overseas authorities in the organization of colonial slave societies. The

church supplied ministers who preached aboard ships, during wartime, and in the colonies, and rarely spoke out against the institution of slavery or specific slavery practices. In fact, the church itself owned slaves and some of its ministers supplied the ideological justification for trading in and owning enslaved people. This raises several questions. Why, over the years, did the church and its ministers take different stances on the permissibility of slavery? How did the church deal with slavery and the enslaved in practice? And, how, in turn, did the enslaved themselves react to the church and Christianity?

Current State and Quality of Research

Even though the church appears to have played a big part in the legitimization of colonialism and slavery and was also an important guardian and shaper of colonial society, very little research has been done on its role in the history of colonial slavery. It is telling that, to my knowledge, no academic work entirely devoted to the relationship between the church and slavery was published until 2023.⁴ Even in recent research projects, religion is sometimes disregarded entirely. The edited volume on the city of Amsterdam's role in the slave trade (2020), for instance, has more than forty chapters, but not a single one dedicated to the role of the church(es).

It is hard to say why the knowledge on this subject is so underdeveloped. Part of the answer probably lies in the fact that for a long time, church historiography and colonial historiography did not intersect. Older church history often did not go beyond descriptions of congregations and ministers, while research on colonial history was characterized by “a secular perspective that obscures the entanglement of Christianity with colonialism in the Republic.”⁵ In addition, research into the role of the church is complex and time-consuming, requiring knowledge of various religions and languages (Dutch, German, and Latin as well as Papiamentu, Malay, and Sinhala). It also requires much patience to sift through church archives, many of which have not been digitized and some not even cataloged. However, in the past decade, theologians, church historians, and historians of colonialism have started to research the church's role in the history of slavery. Examples are projects led by Geertje Mak; Alicia Schrikker; and Annette Merz, George Harinck, and Rose Mary Allen. Several churches now also feel the responsibility to examine their own history with regard to slavery.

The Reformed Church and the Ecclesiastical Landscape

As the public or privileged church, the (Dutch) Reformed Church (originally known in Dutch as *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*, later as *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, and later still, *Protestantse Kerk in Nederland*, or PKN) had a uniquely prominent position in the Dutch Republic and in the colonial societies. In the metropole, other religions were tolerated, but this tolerance did not apply to most of the colonies. Other religions only established themselves in the Dutch colonies overseas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and often only after consulting with the Reformed Church. Because the Reformed Church—as the privileged church—worked hand in hand with the colonial administration, it grew into the church of the status quo, the (white) powers that be, the slaveholders. Therefore, when the authorities actively encouraged missionary work among the enslaved in Suriname, it was mainly the other churches—particularly the Moravian Church (or *Evangelische Broedergemeente*, EBG) and the Roman Catholic Church—that made many converts and thus became “Black” churches. This brings us to the three most important churches aside from the Reformed church that could be found in the Dutch colonies—other religions and forms of spirituality practiced there are not discussed in this chapter.

A church that was close to the Reformed Church in terms of origins and religious beliefs was the Lutheran Church, which is also Protestant and has been subsumed in the PKN since 2004. In the Netherlands, the Lutheran Church had been present from early on, since 1558. In the colonies, too, it was often the first to appear after the Reformed Church. In Suriname, the Lutherans entered the stage in 1741.⁶ They were not slow to arrive in other parts of the colonial empire either; in 1745, a position for a Lutheran minister was established in Batavia, and in 1780, one was set up in the Cape Colony. The Lutherans do not only resemble the Reformed in terms of origins and beliefs but also in their approach. Just like the Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church in the West Indies focused on the white planter elite and was hardly active in proselytizing enslaved or free people of color. This is why in Suriname, both churches have always been considered *deng bakra kerki* (white churches). In Curaçao, the United Protestant Congregation (*Verenigde Protestantse Gemeente*)—the result of an early (1825) merger of the Reformed and Lutheran churches—has a similar reputation.



Members of the Moravian Church (or EBG, also called *Hernhutters*) in front of their church, de Grote Stadskerk (on the left, behind the trees) in Paramaribo, circa 1885.

A very different story is that of the *Hernhutters*, also known as the Moravian Church or EBG. This Protestant missionary church was mainly active in the West Indies. Although the EBG's history goes back further, the part that is relevant for this chapter begins with Nikolaus von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) and the establishment of the Christian colony of Herrnhut on his estate in Germany. From Herrnhut, and later from the Dutch city of Zeist (*Zeister Zendingsgenootschap* [Zeist Missionary Society], est. 1793), Moravian brothers and sisters were sent to do missionary work in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Thanks to Von Zinzendorf's connections, they were allowed into Suriname at a very early stage, in 1735.⁷ In the West Indies, they devoted themselves to the biggest demographic for missionary work: the enslaved population, in which virtually no one was Christian yet. Although the missionaries did not preach resistance against the social order (which was or-

daind by God), they did manage to convert many enslaved and formerly enslaved people to Christianity through their solidarity with the Black population (among whom they often lived), the education which they provided, and their promise of a better world. To this day, they are the biggest Protestant church in Suriname.

The Roman Catholic Church played a complex role in the Dutch colonial empire that warrants further research. Because of the Reformation and the war against Catholic Spain, the Dutch tended to oppose the Catholic Church. Initially, they disapproved of slavery as a Catholic, "papist," and therefore reprehensible practice. In many colonies, the Dutch had been preceded by Catholic Portuguese settlers. The Dutch took great pains to convert those Catholics to Calvinism, which was particularly successful in Sri Lanka, for instance. However, in most colonies, the presence of the Catholic church was tolerated sooner or later. As a minority church, the Catholics focused on the conversion of the Black population in some parts of the Dutch colonial empire, as they did in Suriname after 1840.⁸ In Curaçao, the Catholic church even became the dominant branch of Christianity among the Black population, but that was also due to the fact that Curaçao served as a transit port for enslaved people bound for the Hispanic colonies of South America. Those colonies insisted that the enslaved Africans sent to them were baptized Catholics, and to this end, a handful of priests were permitted to live on the island.

Concrete Complicity

Churches and clergymen themselves were also actively involved in slavery in various ways. In Dutch Brazil, enslaved people were made to construct the church buildings, and Johannes Basseliers, the first Reformed minister of Suriname, had his own plantation and used large numbers of enslaved people to work his fields.⁹ The Lutheran Church of Suriname and Berbice are known to have run their own plantations, and both the Catholics and the Moravians owned enslaved people. At the same time, it appears that in most colonies, the Reformed Church did little to concern itself with the (spiritual) well-being of the enslaved. In early seventeenth-century New Netherland (a colony that included present-day New York, New Jersey, and Delaware), it was possible at first to coexist with enslaved people within the same church "without social segregation and without the twisted religious legitimization that accompanied it."¹⁰ But the tide soon turned, and

on the rare occasions when enslaved people were converted, they were relegated to a second-class position in the “white churches.” In Suriname, Black people had to sit in the pews at the back of the church (*baka banyi*) and in the Lutheran church, free white people were baptized on Sundays and people of color on Wednesdays. In a letter from Saint Thomas, seven people who were kept in slavery by Dutch and Danish plantation owners described how their white fellow Christians mocked their EBG baptism as a “dog’s baptism,” and how they called the baptized enslaved people “firewood for hell.”¹¹ A question that remains to be answered is to what extent the churches, perhaps by means of church discipline, took measures against slave owners who mistreated, abused, or killed their enslaved people.

While there was little interest in converting enslaved people in the West Indies—“Heaven was not made for them, anyway,” Jan Willem Kals quoted a slaveholder as saying in 1759¹²—in the East Indies, missionary work seems to have been taken more seriously, partly because the Dutch encountered so many Catholics in the areas which they captured from the Portuguese. For the enslaved in the East Indies, it was permissible and advantageous to convert because the rules for enslaved Christians were less strict; in Sri Lanka and South Africa, for instance, the VOC initially had specific schools for the enslaved, and there was a special category of “Christian slaves in the service of the Company.”

An enormous task lies ahead of us with regard to the study of the church’s concrete involvement in slavery. Not only are there major geographical gaps in our knowledge, about the church in India, for example, but we also know very little about the financial flows between the colonies and the (homeland) churches and clergy. What, for instance, is the origin of the substantial diaconal funds of the congregations in The Hague and Amsterdam? And if there is some connection to slavery, what implications does that have for how the money was spent in the past and should be used in the future?



Jacobus Capitein was the first Black minister educated in Holland. He served as a WIC preacher in Fort Elmina, in his homeland of Ghana.

Theology and Exegesis

Various theologians and ministers of the Reformed Church commented on slavery from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century. Their statements ranged from outright rejection to staunch defense of the practice, and all shades in between. Although detailed studies on the theological debate on slavery are rare, several scholars have compiled lists of—usually the same—theologians who engaged in this debate. The names mentioned

include Udemans, Voetius, Picardt, De Mey, De Raad, Hondius, Smytegelt, Kals, Capitein, and—on the subject of abolition—Millies and Beets. These theologians’ publications repeatedly cite certain arguments in the defense of slavery, particularly regarding the enslavement of Africans. One of the frequent references is to the Curse of Ham, based on a biblical story in Genesis 9, in which Noah curses Ham and condemns him to a life of servitude to his brothers. Some theologians in the colonial period, such as Johan Picardt, saw Ham as the forefather of the (Black) African peoples, which enabled them to use this bible passage as a justification for the enslavement of Africans.

Others, such as the Black minister Jacobus Capitein, emphasized the distinction between spiritual slavery and physical slavery. They argued that the church should concern itself with the former and encourage its flock to be free of sin, and disregard physical slavery as inconsequential. Theologians who were critical of slavery and the slave trade pointed out that all people share the same nature (Jacob Hondius) or referenced the biblical prohibition against (human) theft (Bernardus Smytegelt). However, there is much more to uncover, and the role of the Bible and theology in both legitimizing and criticizing slavery deserves to be examined more systematically. In addition, little or no attention has been paid to the perspectives of the enslaved and other groups of color (with the notable exception of Capitein), even though they—both as laypeople and theologians—contributed to the debate. Some of those who spoke out were Johannes King in Suriname, Black Harry in Saint Eustatius, and Petrus Kafiar in Papua.

Cultural Legacy

A great need is felt within organizations of the descendants of the enslaved and in the churches themselves (e.g., the ecumenical organization called *Stichting Heilzame Verwerking Slavernijverleden* [Beneficial Processing of the Legacy of Slavery]) to examine the relationship between the church and slavery beyond the framework of colonial history and to also look at what they call the “cultural legacy” of slavery.

The cultural legacy of slavery is multidimensional. Studies are currently being done into the physical traces of slavery in church buildings and cemeteries, into the relationship between the Bible, slavery, and racism in the hermeneutic practices of present-day white and Black churches, and into the relationship between race and religion. As part of such research into

the afterlives of slavery, we can also look into trauma, discrimination, and reparations. For philosophers and systematic theologians, this legacy offers opportunities to reflect on concepts such as guilt and punishment, (original) sin, freedom, and slavery. From a practical theological and liturgical/ritual perspective, we could ask which rituals and religious celebrations could contribute to dialogue and reconciliation.

In Conclusion

It is abundantly clear that there is a great deal of work to be done in the field of slavery and the church. This is a clear-cut challenge for current and future generations of researchers who are interested in the intersection of church history and colonial history. The discourses of religion, history, race, and ethnicity have shaped the colonial era and are still palpable, visible, and tangible in churches and society in the Netherlands and in the former Dutch colonies. The challenge is to renew the traditional one-sided perspective of (church) history, most of which was written from a white (European) male point of view. New research can ensure multiperspectivity by incorporating the perspectives of enslaved women and men, free people of color, and Indigenous populations. In that line of endeavor, research should also include other religions and forms of spirituality which existed alongside Christianity, such as Winti (in Suriname) and Montamentu (in Curaçao), Islam (Indonesia), Buddhism (Sri Lanka), and Hinduism (Bali and India), as well as the issue of multiple religious belonging. To ensure multiperspectivity, it is not enough to read existing sources against the grain; they will also have to be supplemented with other data by drawing on oral history, archaeology, visual data, materiality, and data-driven methods. The study of slavery and the church also stands much to gain in terms of theory development from New Imperial History and from research on the relationship between race and religion, for example. Finally, it goes without saying that our knowledge of the relationship between slavery and the church actually comprises just fragments of the overall history and afterlives of the Dutch colonial empire. This is partly due to the fact that many archives have yet to be digitized or even discovered, and partly due to the scope and complexity of the Dutch colonial empire. Many potentially valuable cases for research in the field of slavery and church (the *Mardijker* community,¹² Dutch India, the smaller Caribbean islands, Dutch Brazil) have barely been explored. It is time for that to change.

Notes

- 1 GB Inv. no. 23, outgoing letters 1625–1642, fol. 10–17; Batavia church council to Amsterdam and Walcheren classis, January 2, 1628. See Henk Niemeijer, “Calvinisme en koloniale stadscultuur Batavia 1619–1725” (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 1996), 176.
- 2 Minutes of the Walcheren classis, July 12, 1629.
- 3 “Adres der Synode,” *Tijdschrift uitgegeven van wege de Nederlandsche Maatschappij ter bevordering van de afschaffing der slavernij* 4 (1858–1859): 2.
- 4 Bente de Leede and Martijn Stoutjesdijk, eds., *Kerk, kolonialisme en slavernij: Verhalen van een vervlochten geschiedenis* (Kampen: Kok, 2023).
- 5 Janneke Stegeman, “De kinderen der heydenen.’ Utrecht, de kerk en slavernij,” in *Slavernij en de stad Utrecht*, eds. Nancy Jouwe, Matthijs Kuipers and Remco Raben (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2021), 173.
- 6 Pearl I. Gerding, *Op weg naar grotere hoogten: Een geschiedenis van een kerk / On the Way to Greater Heights : A History of a Church* (Paramaribo: Evangelisch Lutherse Kerk in Suriname, 2019 [rev. ed.], 25–29.
- 7 Johan M. van der Linde, *Het visioen van Herrnhut en het apostolaat der Moravische Broeders in Suriname 1735–1863* (Paramaribo: C. Kersten & Co., 1956).
- 8 In many Spanish colonies, the Catholic church was dominant. There has been extensive debate about whether slavery in a “Catholic” colony was better than in a “Protestant” colony. See Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946) and the debate sparked by this publication.
- 9 For Dutch Brazil, see Danny L. Noorlander, *Heaven’s Wrath: The Protestant Reformation and the Dutch West India Company in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 171; for Suriname, see Johan M. van der Linde, *Surinaamse suikerheren en hun kerk* (Wageningen: H. Veenman, 1966), 75.
- 10 Willem Frijhoff, *Wegen van Evert Willemsz: Een Hollands weeskind op zoek naar zichzelf* (Nijmegen: Sun, 1995), 777.
- 11 Jan Willem Kals, *De nuttige en noodige bekeeringe der heidenen in Suriname en Berbices* (Leeuwarden: Pieter Koumans, 1759), 84.
- 12 *Mardijkers* were an ethnic community in the Dutch East Indies made up of mostly Christian descendants of freed slaves. *Mardijker* is a Dutch corruption of *merdeka* (from Sanskrit *maharddhika*, rich, prosperous, powerful), which in Malay originally meant “freed slave” and has come to mean “independent.”

Missionary Work in the Dutch Colonies: More than Evangelism and “Civilization”

Ideologically speaking, Protestant churches and the worldwide Roman Catholic church were ambivalent towards colonialism. Systematic exploitation went against the Christian principle that all people are equal as they are made in the image of God. In practice, however, missionaries of both branches of Christianity strove to win souls and gain influence. How did they cooperate with the colonial authorities to this end, and how did they try to control the daily lives of the local population, their languages, cultures, family relations, sexuality, and reproduction? And how did people react to this? What lasting impact has this had? Mission archives contain relevant sources for the purpose of trying to answer these questions.

Until the nineteenth century, the VOC and WIC were responsible for the Protestant church and its missionary work in overseas territories. As these areas were transferred to the Dutch state at the end of the eighteenth century, so was the responsibility for church and missionary affairs. When freedom of religion was enshrined in the Dutch constitution in 1848, this created room for new Protestant and Catholic missionary zeal in the Dutch East Indies, Suriname, and the Caribbean. Laws and agreements were drawn up, detailing which Christian missionary organizations were allowed to carry out which activities and where, which population groups they were allowed to target, and how much the missionary organizations had to pay for these permissions. The sources containing these laws and agreements can reveal how deeply the colonial authorities and missionary work were entangled.

Some archives contain reports of voyages and expeditions, notes on the language, culture, or specific customs of certain local population groups, and sometimes even ethnographic photographs. Detailed information about local populations and the enslaved can also be found in chronicles, parish records, official and personal correspondence, and missionary magazines. There, we find details on customs, language, kinship structures, work, clothing, hairstyles, body decorations, and beliefs and views on age, sexuality, and gender. The sources are written from a European Christian perspective, but by painstakingly reading mission archives against the grain, we can gain knowledge about the local population and their perspectives and agency. The archives of Christian missionary organizations do contain references to statements, actions, and other forms of cooperation and resistance by Indigenous people. Thus, the frustrations of missionaries about the “unruly” population can start to speak volumes about their stubborn resistance.

In the course of the nineteenth century, missionaries were given more room to maneuver by the Surinamese and Dutch Caribbean authorities and plantation owners. That meant that they could expand their work among the enslaved, offering them (religious) education which was needed to convert, baptize, and incorporate them into their local congregations. Before 1863, some missionaries themselves kept enslaved people. They were also involved in manumissions, when owners freed their enslaved. In Indonesia, where slavery continued into the twentieth century, missionaries purchased the freedom of enslaved children, youths, and vulnerable adults and housed them in foster care and other care institutions. The missions spread stories about the people whom they freed, prompting the Dutch churchgoing public to give charitable donations. Mission archives give us a picture of the colonial aspects of this Christian humanitarian aid. In this “soft” colonialism, aimed at spreading “civilization” and “development,” a European way of life was upheld as the norm for the (formerly) enslaved to aspire to. However, this endeavor was anything but “soft,” as it institutionalized the superiority of white Christians and disqualified local kinships, customs, and childrearing practices.

Abstract

This chapter explores the historiography and future directions of research on the impact of Dutch colonial slavery. Dutch historians have long regarded colonialism and slavery as an “overseas” phenomenon, unrelated to the “miracle” of Dutch prosperity and economic growth. Recent research challenges this narrative and reveals that slavery and colonialism were integral and formative aspects of Dutch history. It also shows that colonial slavery in the Atlantic and in Asia was the result of a deliberate, imperialist policy aimed at extraction and profit. Its impact extended well beyond economic processes, however. Taking stock of this historiographic shift, this chapter discusses the implications it has for our understanding of the history of slavery, colonialism and the development of Europe and the world.

Keywords: slavery and capitalism; Atlantic; Indian Ocean; Cultivation System; colonialism

The Economic and Social Impact of Dutch Colonial Slavery

Matthias van Rossum

On June 7, 1751, the enslaved April van Mallabaar stood in the notary's office in Batavia. Also in the room was the Reader of the Church of Batavia Castle, who was there to affirm his sale of April to a barber surgeon for seventy-five guilders. We know little about April. His original name, age, and other background details were not recorded by the notary. However, because the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the colonial administration, required deeds of sale to be drawn up everywhere in its jurisdiction, we know that the same man had been sold in the VOC-ruled southwest Indian city of Cochin just a year earlier, by a messenger of the court to a ship's doctor who worked on the VOC vessel *Schellag*. The buyer and seller had agreed to name him after the month of his sale, and the ship's doctor then brought April along from India to Batavia. Thus, April joined the ranks of the many hundreds of thousands, or in some estimates up to two million, enslaved people who were brought to the Dutch colonies in Asia and the Atlantic world.

While not much information was written down, one detail does stand out in this story: The church reader sold April for much less than the sums paid for him earlier, in Cochin and Batavia. Had something happened to April? Or was there some other reason for this? The church reader conducted a lively private trade in enslaved people and textiles with the plantations in Banda. Did he have pressing debts? April's new owner likely did not care much and clearly saw his cheap purchase as a stroke of financial acumen and good luck, because he gave him the telling new name '*Fortuyn*' (Fortune).¹

In this chapter, I will explore the impact of Dutch colonial slavery on the Dutch Republic and, later, the Netherlands. Dutch imperialism and complicity in slavery and the slave trade were shaped by hard financial interests. Therefore, the academic debate has tended to focus on the economic aspects of the history of slavery and has often only addressed matters such as “wealth” or “profit.” This has been exacerbated by the fact that Dutch historians long regarded colonialism and slavery as an “overseas” phenomenon and viewed it in isolation from national history. Atlantic and Asian slavery was treated as something remote, unrelated to other aspects of Dutch history such as the “miracle” of Dutch prosperity and economic growth in the early modern period. New perspectives clearly show, however, that slavery and colonialism are an integral and formative part of Dutch history.

Shifting Perspectives

Over the past two decades, assessments of the economic significance of colonial slavery have shifted significantly. Two arguments dominated traditional colonial historiography in this respect. The first was that the Atlantic slave trade was irrelevant to the Dutch economy because it had not been profitable enough. The second argument was that the broader, slavery-based Atlantic complex had turned little profit because of the massive losses incurred during moments of crisis, such as the rebellion and fall of Brazil and the financial bankruptcy of Suriname.²

This traditional colonial historiography is sharply criticized because it is based solely on indicators of “profit” and “loss” that fail to provide any insight into the importance and impact of slavery and the slave trade. Upon closer examination of the broader Atlantic economy’s effects, it becomes clear that slavery in the Atlantic world had an enormous influence on the world economy and that Europe played a pivotal role in this.³ The slave trade generated a massive chain of economic activity in the Dutch Republic, for instance, by stimulating shipbuilding, the production of commodities used as currency in the slave trade, the payment of salary to sailors and soldiers, insurances, and commissions. The Atlantic slavery-based plantation economy was also entwined with the supply chain, financing, insurance, processing, and transport industries in the Republic and elsewhere in Europe. To understand the significance of these impacts, it is necessary to look beyond the (incidental) records of profits and losses.

An approach that has been reintroduced in recent years is to research the impact of (parts of) the Atlantic slavery system using the “gross margin.” In 2012, Karwan Fatah-Black and I calculated that the Dutch Atlantic slave trade alone, without including any other slavery-based activities in Asia and the Atlantic world, contributed 0.5 percent to the economy of the entire Dutch Republic. The total contribution it made to the Republic is estimated at 63 to 79 million guilders, or the equivalent of 11 to 14 billion euros.⁴ The Dutch Atlantic slave trade was of essential strategic interest; without the supply of enslaved Africans, the Atlantic slavery system could not have functioned. At the same time, the slave trade was just a small cog in the machinery of Atlantic slavery. This is why we recommended that this method be developed further so it could be applied to the wider Atlantic system and thereby provide new insights into the role of slavery, slavery-related economic activities, and their influence on the development of early modern Europe.

Slavery, Regents, and the Economy of the Republic

Recent historical research into the economy has revealed how extensively and profoundly this Atlantic system influenced the Dutch Republic and the wider European economy. For example, historian Gerhard de Kok showed that port cities like Middelburg and Vlissingen heavily relied on the slave trade: a tenth to a third of their economy consisted of activities directly linked to it. The slave trade also stimulated shipbuilding in places like Rotterdam. In the early seventeenth century, Middelburg and especially Amsterdam saw the rise of glass factories that produced beads used as currency in the Dutch Atlantic and Asian slave trades. Rotterdam slave traders Coopstad and Rochussen, who transported more than 22,000 enslaved Africans in the eighteenth century, bought large amounts of jenever from the thriving Schiedam distilleries as a commodity. The economic engine fueled by Dutch slavery profits was running at full throttle.⁵ It was not only the slave trade, but also the wider Atlantic slavery system that many Dutch sectors grew entangled with. This had consequences for the Netherlands and its colonized societies. The financial sector serves as an important example. It is known that the predecessors of financial institutions such as ABN AMRO, InsingerGilissen, Aon, and ASR bank were active in insurances, loans, and investments in slavery and the slave trade. These activities provided a stimulus to the financial sector and the wealth of the Republic.

lic, while slavery- and slave trade-related insurance policies led to harsher treatment of the enslaved by ships' crews and plantation overseers. The transport of Atlantic slavery-produced goods, as well as the transatlantic slave trade, gave a boost to shipbuilding and lumber industries in cities like Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Zaandam. The VOC used the shipbuilding techniques which these shipyards developed for Atlantic ships to construct its own slave ships in Amsterdam.



De Gouden Bocht ("Golden Bend"), the most prestigious stretch of Amsterdam's Herengracht, painted in 1685 by Gerrit Berckheyde. This was probably where insurer Insinger & Co. (a predecessor of InsingerGilissen) was headquartered.

The import of sugar from plantations in the West Indies turned the Netherlands into a sugar-processing hub in the mid-eighteenth century. Amsterdam alone had ninety sugar refineries, but Rotterdam, Dordrecht, Zwolle, and Utrecht also had sugar industries. Coffee and sugar linked the labor of

enslaved people on the plantations with Dutch consumers and with the country's trade and processing industries.⁶

The extensive supply chains of the Atlantic slavery system had a profound influence on the structure and orientation of the Dutch economy. Historian Tamira Combrink recently demonstrated that the growth of the coffee trade in the second half of the eighteenth century—to almost a tenth of the total value of trade in the Dutch Republic—led to a shift in the Dutch economy's orientation from the Baltic and Mediterranean to transit trade via the Rhine to the German hinterland.⁷

In the same way, tobacco-processing factories sprung up in the mid-seventeenth century that processed tobacco from mainly West Indies and North American plantations. This not only created a considerable number of jobs in cities like Rotterdam, but also caused big changes in rural areas. In the early seventeenth century, merchants with interests in the colonial tobacco trade had already set up a growing tobacco industry around the Utrechtse Heuvelrug and the Veluwe, which enabled them to influence prices. In the eighteenth century, Amsterdam tobacco trader Jan Agges Scholten, a VOC commander and commissioner of the Admiralty, purchased the Asschat estate near Leusden to produce cheaper tobacco there, which he could mix with American plantation tobacco.

This is just one example of the structural changes that were set in motion by the big-city regents who had gotten rich partly from their complicity in colonialism and slavery and who bought estates, manors, and land throughout the Netherlands. Just a stone's throw from Scholte's estate, there were other estates owned by prominent families with colonial interests, who held important regional and national administrative positions, such as the Pauw, Nassau, Bentinck, Van Asch van Wijck, Bors van Waveren, and Van Reede families. The merchant regents' activities earned them not only noble titles, but also tax income, administrative privileges, and room for economic ventures.

The Prosperity of the Netherlands and Europe

Research has shown that active European involvement in Atlantic slavery significantly boosted the regional economies across the continent. The Atlantic slavery complex is estimated to have been good for no less than 11 percent of the British economy in the early nineteenth century. Denmark's three tiny Caribbean colonies, whose enslaved population consisted of less

than 1 percent of all the people in the entire Danish empire, accounted for 5 or 6 percent of total state revenues. Portugal's colonial empire is estimated to have contributed about 20 percent of the country's income per capita. As far as the Netherlands goes, the measure of gross margin discussed earlier has been used to calculate that in 1770, slavery-related economic activity comprised 5.2 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the entire Dutch Republic's economy. Calculated solely for the province of Holland, that percentage is nearly twice as high, at 10.36 percent. In today's value, this amounts to nearly 45 billion euros a year (in relation to the Dutch GDP of 861 billion euros in 2021).

The economic significance of the Atlantic slavery system was comparable to that of the port of Rotterdam today, or the entire financial sector of the United Kingdom or the United States prior to the economic crisis of 2013. This fact puts present-day gestures by the Dutch state in a new light, and begs the question what insights underpinned the amount of 200 million euros that the government earmarked for the fund which it announced when apologizing for slavery on December 19, 2022.

Not only the direct Dutch connections are relevant; so is the deep dependence on Atlantic slavery that existed in the hinterlands of European colonial and maritime powers. To name just one example, the vast majority of the overseas imports that passed through the powerful trading city of Hamburg bound for central and northern Germany consisted of sugar and coffee produced by slave labor. And vice versa, commodities that were traded for enslaved people, such as beads from Bohemia, came from the interior of the European continent. One important example of the European hinterland's economic stake in slavery is Silesia—a region that now straddles Polish, German, and Czech territory—where the large-scale production of linen grew increasingly oriented toward the Atlantic slavery complex, through the supply of textiles that were used by Dutch enterprises to buy enslaved people or to clothe them on the plantations. At the end of the eighteenth century, this trade from Silesia represented about 15 percent of the total value of goods produced in Prussia.

It would be interesting to know what role Dutch merchants played in this trade, in Silesian linen manufacturing, and in the expansion of serfdom. Intriguingly, Dutch merchants did this around the same time that the VOC intensified forced labor in similar *corvée* systems in Asia.⁸

The Bigger Picture and Further Research

Slavery and colonialism were important foundations upon which Europe built an economic advantage over the rest of the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is becoming abundantly clear that this also applies to the Netherlands, but how and why this is so needs to be explored in more detail. Coffee, sugar, insurances, and glass are well-known examples, but more research is needed into the structure and origins of the huge economic stakes which the Netherlands and Europe had in Atlantic slavery. Study is also needed into how the hard financial interests of the colonies were pushed through the States General and what consequences this had for the economy and society at large.

Further examination of Atlantic slavery's impact on the Netherlands and Europe is of crucial importance, but that is not all that is needed for a complete picture of colonialism and slavery's influence on the economy and society. We must also systematically study the far-reaching impact of Dutch colonial slavery and slave trading on the many colonized societies worldwide (see the chapters in Section 3 of this book). While the impact of slavery was also huge in a cultural, societal, and administrative sense, from a purely socioeconomic history angle, there are at least four lines of inquiry that should definitely be pursued.

The first of these is to establish that the enormous Dutch economic and social stakes in overseas Atlantic colonial slavery was not a historical coincidence, but the result of a deliberate imperialist policy set in motion in the early seventeenth century by the States General, colonial trading companies, and urban mercantile elites. Prominent merchants such as the Amsterdammer Reinier Pauw, or Dirk Gerritszoon Meerman of Delft, who also held positions in the Dutch government and trading company administrations, played a crucial role in pushing for a more aggressive colonization policy. They saw to the appointment of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, who personally implemented ruthless colonial expansionism in Asia.



This photo, which was taken in 1905, shows forced laborers repairing the railway used by the Aceh tram near Meureudoe. Soldiers armed with rifles can be seen supervising the workers.

Many pieces of the puzzle have fallen into place, but there is as yet no systematic analysis of the origins and effects of this policy, of the ways in which colonial policy in Asia and the Atlantic world were intertwined, and of the role played by the networks of a small number of regent families. The horrific overseas atrocities of a number of sons from these elite families, such as the Delft regent's son Adriaan van der Dussen, who was responsible for several acts of barbarity including the depopulation of the island of Siau in the Indonesian archipelago, illustrates the need for more research into the worldview and supremacist ideology of these regent families and their role in overseas colonial operations.

A second line of research that deserves attention is Atlantic slavery as the most extreme and large-scale outcome of a colonial system that organized worldwide appropriation and extraction by various methods. For too long, Dutch historians adopted a framework that saw Dutch overseas history from the perspective of "commercial relations," and not for the imperialism that it was. The history of slavery, the Netherlands, and the

world would benefit from better research into the workings and impact of the colonial system as a whole. Dutch colonial conquests and even acts of depopulation the world over were all done in the service of a system that ensured the supply and production of key commodities. This is why the Dutch from the very outset tried to conquer areas with fertile soil for growing crops, in favorable military-strategic locations, or strategically placed for the slave trade.

This resulted in multiple systems of colonial exploitation. Colonial slavery was the cornerstone in the colonies of Brazil, Suriname, the Guianas, the Caribbean, North America, Banda, Batavia, and South Africa. The VOC colonization of Taiwan may well have fallen into the same pattern, because in the mid-seventeenth century, Chinese sugar merchants staffed their plantations with large numbers of laborers transported from the mainland who were called “adopted sons,” but in reality were often bought or forced to work to pay off debts.

The European slave trade in the Atlantic world led to the forced displacement of an estimated 12 million Africans. The Dutch alone transported 610,000 enslaved Africans. Between 660,000 and 1.1 million enslaved people were transported to the VOC colonies in Asia, most of whom came from present-day India, Myanmar, Madagascar, Mozambique, and different parts of the Indonesian archipelago. This slave trade has not yet been sufficiently scrutinized. Its detailed reconstruction will require a lot of research in projects like *Exploring Slave Trade in Asia* at the IISG.

This chattel slavery coexisted with another colonial system that relied on *corvée* labor, where the colonial authorities forced local population groups to participate in agricultural production and other work. In nearly all cases, the colonized people were forced to help build the colonial infrastructure—roads, canals, bridges, and forts—and clear land for farming. In the Moluccas, Sri Lanka, and Java, the VOC employed this system to force the population into the large-scale production of spices and cinnamon, and later coffee, pepper, and indigo.

Unlike chattel slavery, these *corvée* systems did not lead to long-distance displacement of people, but instead to the confinement of the local population. To prevent evasion of forced labor, the VOC introduced a system of passes, population registers listing individuals’ caste, ethnicity, and origins, strict mobility laws, and draconic punishments. This formed the basis for the better-known Cultivation System introduced in the nineteenth century. This Dutch system in turn served as a model for the forced

labor systems in other European colonies such as the Belgian Congo. This shows how Dutch history is characterized by long successions of colonial warfare, slavery, and different types of forced labor. Their systematic nature, interaction, and certainly their impact and repercussions have yet to be sufficiently researched.

The third line of research needed is the issue of how the Netherlands as a whole profited from Dutch colonialism on a world scale. Because of the entanglement of slavery and colonialism, it is relevant to ask how much wealth the Netherlands as a whole acquired from its colonial past. Research could focus, for instance, on the colonial companies, or on the Cultivation System, whose colonial profits were invested in enterprises such as the railways, the North Sea Canal, and the Nieuwe Waterweg, large-scale engineering works that gave the Netherlands a strategic infrastructure. Much remains to be studied with regard to the Cultivation System. For example, what were the roles of the House of Orange and the Netherlands Trading Society (NHM), a predecessor of ABN AMRO Bank for which the Dutch state once again holds partial responsibility as a major shareholder?

The same questions also apply to the period after the Cultivation System. We know that when *corvée* labor was discontinued, the sentences for light or suspected offenses in the Dutch East Indies were changed from corporal punishment to forced labor. Suddenly, large numbers of colonial subjects were sentenced to forced labor to work on the construction of infrastructure and the clearing of farmland. This newly cleared and accessible land was then granted to private enterprises and investors who therefore profited from this convict labor. The scale, effects, and repercussions of this colonial public-private dynamic are not yet understood.

Finally, one last neglected, yet deeply important context and task for researchers is to explore how the ongoing colonial policies of violence and coercion influenced social relations, both in the Netherlands and in colonial societies. In addition to the structural long-term developments, which require a certain “top-down approach,” it is important to look for the everyday and individual experiences that can shed new light on these histories from “bottom-up” perspectives. These bottom-up perspectives are particularly crucial because of the insights that they can provide into the social effects of colonial policies. Research into the lives of the enslaved, the Black communities in the Republic, and the position of women has begun. More research is needed, however, to attain a better understanding of the daily effect of coercive systems and their consequences.

In general, little is known about the way in which the changes triggered by slavery and colonialism co-shaped the inequalities and social relations in the Netherlands. The same is true of the effects that slavery and colonial exploitation had on the social structures in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The economic underdevelopment of colonized societies went hand in hand with a huge impact on social relations.

Notes

- 1 See also: Matthias van Rossum, "New Perspectives on Early Modern Dutch Atlantic Slavery and Slave Trade," *TSEG / Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 19, no. 2 (2022): 5–16. For a case, see Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (ANRI), Archief Notarissen, 5638; Gerrit Verbeet, "Dagboek van Gerrit Verbeet, Getrouw Dienaar Jesu Christi in Zyne Gemeinte te Banda Neira," in *Litterarische Fantasien en Kritieken*, deel 5, ed. Cd. Busken Huet, (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink, 1882), 80–166.
- 2 Pieter C. Emmer, *The Dutch Slave Trade 1500–1850*, trans. Chris Emery (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006); David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 3 Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964 [1944]); Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (New York: Verso, 1997); Armand Zunder, *Herstelbetalingen: De "Wiedergutmachung" voor de schade die Suriname en haar bevolking hebben geleden onder het Nederlands kolonialisme*. (The Hague: Amrit Consultancy, 2010); Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic: Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 185.
- 4 Matthias van Rossum and Karwan Fatah-Black, "Wat is winst? De economische impact van de Nederlandse transAtlantische slavenhandel," *TSEG / Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 9, no. 1 (2012): 3–29. We calculated this from the average salaries, based on 250 guilders per year for the early modern period and an average gross yearly salary of 44,800 euros in 2021; from this we arrived at a factor of 179.2. A calculation based on the average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita would result in virtually the same result; if we use the average of 275 guilders for the period 1700–1800 and compare that to the GDP per capita of 45,800 Euros in 2021, we get a factor of 166.5.
- 5 Gerhard de Kok, "Cursed Capital: The Economic Impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade on Walcheren around 1770," *TSEG / Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 13, no. 3 (2016): 1–27; Felicia Fricke, "Productie en handel van glazen kralen in Amsterdam," in *Slavernij in Oost en West: Het Amsterdam onderzoek*, ed. Pepijn Brandon et al. (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2020), 257–63; Merel Blok, "Schiedam en het Atlantische slavernijverleden," *Schiedams Historisch Jaarboek 2021* (Nederland: dr. K. Heeringa Stichting, 2022), 16–37.
- 6 Tamira Combrink, "Slave-Based Coffee in the Eighteenth Century and the Role of the Dutch in Global Commodity Chains," *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 1 (2021): 15–42; Karwan Fatah-Black, Lauren Lauret, and Joris van den Tol, *Serving the Chain? De Nederlandsche Bank and the Last Decades of Slavery, 1814–1863* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2023); Gerhard de Kok and Pepijn Brandon, "Het slavernijverleden van historische voorlopers van ABN AMRO:

Een onderzoek naar Hope & Co en R. Mees & Zoonen,” (Amsterdam: IISG, 2022); Karin Lurvink, “The Insurance of Mass Murder: The Development of Slave Life Insurance Policies of Dutch Private Slave Ships, 1720–1780,” *Enterprise & Society* 21, no. 1 (2020): 210–38; Gerhard de Kok, “De koloniale impact: Industrie en financiële dienstverlening,” in *Het koloniale verleden van Rotterdam*, ed. Gert Oostindie (Amsterdam: Boom, 2020), 91–144.

- 7 Tamira Combrink, “Rhine Trade in Slave-Based Commodities in the Eighteenth Century,” *TSEG / The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History*, 19, no. 2 (2022): 95–120.
- 8 References to underlying literature are included in Tamira Combrink and Matthias van Rossum, “Introduction: The Impact of Slavery on Europe – Reopening a Debate,” *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 1 (2021): 1–14.

The Colonial Collections of Stadtholders William IV and William V

From the earliest days of the VOC and WIC, the stadtholders of the Republic collected objects from all over the world, such as silverware from Batavia, Asian porcelain, lacquerware, Asian textiles, and weapons. Stadtholder William IV (1711–1751) and his spouse, Anna van Hannover (1709–1759), were avid collectors of gemstones, minerals, corals, and animals from overseas. They also had a great interest in topographical maps, travel logs, and flora and fauna atlases. They displayed their collection in the Stadhouderslijk Kwartier, their palace in the Binnenhof, the seat of government in The Hague. William V (1748–1806) later greatly expanded the collection in his private museum in the nearby Buitenhof. His menagerie even included live animals from the colonies. The objects and animals, whose origins are not clear, were sometimes purchased but often gifted by merchants and governors-general in the East and West Indies. Some of the objects are known to have been stolen, such as the collection of six lavishly ornamented weapons given to the young Prince William V by Lubbert Jan van Eck, governor of Ceylon. Van Eck confiscated the weapons during the conquest of the king of Kandy's castle in 1765.

When the French army brought down the ancien régime in 1795, the collected items were dispersed. Some of them were taken by William V, the last stadtholder, when he went into exile in England and Germany. Most, however, were taken as spoils of war back to Paris. A small part of the collection stayed behind for the Batavian Republic. Almost everything that remained in the palaces was auctioned off. Objects from the former stadtholders' collections are now in the National Library of the Netherlands (KB), the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, the Dutch National Archives, the Royal House Archives, Paleis het Loo, Mauritshuis, Wereldmuseum Leiden, Naturalis, Rijksmuseum Boerhaave, and the Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris.

To date, no overarching interdisciplinary research has been conducted into the provenance of the objects in the stadholders' collections and no unambiguous answer given to the question whether these collections were obtained lawfully. However, studies conducted since the 1960s have inventoried the collections of the House of Orange, revealing that several purchases and gifts are in fact colonial objects.¹ Since 2019, several museum collections have been studied to determine the provenance of objects from the colonial era, such as the Pilot Project Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE) at the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures and Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, which possess items from the former stadholders' collections. The results will probably only clarify the origins of a small part of the total collection. For a more complete picture, research will have to be carried out in the Royal House Archives, Huis ten Bosch, the National Library of the Netherlands (KB), and the National Archives. Collections outside the Netherlands and objects auctioned off during the Batavian Republic also need further examination. Such research can clarify the relationship between the former and current possessions of the House of Orange and the colonial past.

Notes

- 1 S.W.A. Drossaers and Th. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, *Inventarissen van de inboedels in de verblijven van de Oranjes en daarmee gelijk te stellen stukken 1567–1795* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974–1976, 3 vols.); Lunsingh Scheurleer, "De Stadhoudelijke verzamelingen," in *150 Jaar Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Koninklijk Penningkabinet* (The Hague: Staatsdrukkerij, 1967), 9–50; Jan van Campen, *De Haagse jurist Jean Theodore Royer (1737–1807) en zijn verzameling Chinese voorwerpen* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000).

Abstract

This chapter examines how the Dutch royal family, and specifically the Princes of Orange, financially benefited from colonial enterprises in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Newly discovered historical records from private archives show significant earnings from the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the West India Company (WIC), with the princes receiving portions of profits based on fictitious capital investments. The VOC's profit allocations were significant and reveal how the princes' colonial interests were entangled with their formal roles in the state's military and political spheres. This chapter highlights the need for further investigation into private archives to fully map out and understand colonial financial flows and the royal family's colonial interests.

Keywords: colonial profits; Dutch East India Company (VOC); Dutch West India Company (WIC); Princes of Orange; financial flows; jouissance

The Princes of Orange and Their Colonial Profits

Raymund Schütz

In 1869, the Dutch stadtholder's 1772 income was the subject of an article in *De Navorscher*, a magazine about history, genealogy, and linguistics.¹ The publication claimed that the stadtholder, Prince William V, received 40,000 guilders that year from the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and 10,000 guilders from the West India Company (WIC). Stadtholder William's total income in 1772 was 383,685 guilders and 19 cents. On May 11, 1674, *de Heren Zeventien* (the Lords Seventeen, the VOC executive board) had resolved that William III and his successors would receive the equivalent of one-thirty-third of all the money paid to capital participants, VOC shareholders who had invested money but held no managerial role in the company.

As historian Gert Oostindie has observed, historians have devoted scant attention to the colonial profits of the House of Orange. Remarking that it smacked of a cover-up, Oostindie concluded that the archives still held many secrets. This lack of information resulted from the fragmentation of archival research, the conflicts of interest of those who held both public and private positions, the fact that the VOC financial records were long kept confidential, and the lack of interest shown by earlier generations of historians. Based on good old-fashioned archival research, I have managed to partially fill this gap, so I can now provide a preliminary overview of how the House of Orange has benefited from colonialism and continues to do so.

After discussing the political and economic context, I will describe the stadtholders' political and military positions and colonial interests. I will then compare their colonial earnings with the rest of their official income. I will also describe the basis on which VOC profits were paid to

the stadtholders. And finally, I will answer the question why this remained unknown for so long and how further archival research can lead to a more complete picture of the stadtholders' colonial profits.



Stadtholder William V, painted by Johann Georg Ziesenis, circa 1763-1776.

The Princes of Orange and the VOC

From the outset of the Dutch Revolt in 1568, William the Silent, Prince of Orange, and his family enjoyed a special position in the new Republic. After his death, his son Prince Maurits was appointed stadtholder of the States of Holland and Zeeland and as such became the Republic's highest-ranking official. He was made Captain-General and Admiral of the Seven Provinces and commander of the State troops. As stadtholder, he received 30,000 guilders a year, and as military commander, 120,000.

What is less well known is that the stadholders were also involved in the Republic's colonial enterprises. The VOC and later the WIC were established with the approval of the stadholders and received state financial support. The States General charged 25,000 guilders for the charter which they granted to the VOC in 1602 to conduct trade in Asia. This amount was offset against the fee which the States had to pay in 1638 to become a capital participant in the Company. Later renewals of the charter were granted at much higher prices. In this way, part of the VOC's profits from colonization and trade in Asia flowed back to the States General and the stadtholder. In 1647, for instance, the VOC paid 1.5 million guilders for a twenty-five-year extension. This money was then transferred to the financially struggling WIC. In 1664, the charter was extended in return for the supply of VOC ships to the Dutch naval fleet for use in the war against England. In 1693, the charter was renewed again until the year 1740, but this time at a price of 3 million guilders. In 1743, the two sides agreed on a twelve-year extension for which the state would impose a 3 percent tax on all dividends paid. Next, Prince William IV saw to the extension of the charter until 1774 for which the state received 1.2 million guilders from the VOC. And finally, when the Company charter was renewed in 1776 for a period of two years, the state again imposed a 3 percent dividend tax.

Support from the stadtholder was also important whenever the VOC became mired in small-scale disputes with other entities. Menno Witteveen describes, for instance, how the Venetian authorities seized the VOC ships *De Pauw* and *Sint-Paul* in August 1618 for having violated the Venetian trade monopoly. The vessels belonged to Amsterdam mayor and VOC *bewindhebber* (managing director) Reinier Pauw, who played a prominent role in the increasingly imperialist conduct of the VOC under Jan Pieterszoon Coen. After his ships were impounded, Pauw immediately reported this to Prince Maurits of Orange, who jointly with the States General wrote a letter to

the Venetian Doge (leader), stressing that the ships belonged to favored subjects of his. This did the trick. The ships and their cargo were returned to their owner and the crews were set free.

The backing of the States General and the power politics of the stadtholder were what enabled the VOC to pursue such an aggressive overseas trade policy. The prince and the States General played more than just a formal, distant role in colonial expansion policy; sometimes they actively intervened to defend the interests of the VOC and its capital participants.²

Dividend Payments by the VOC

Nowadays, we assume that all of a company's financial flows are accounted for in one central accounting system, but in the VOC, every chamber kept its own records, which were kept by an apparatus of hundreds of high-ranking bookkeepers and clerks according to centrally determined rules. The chambers of the VOC kept various books: the journal, the ledger, the garrison book, the ships' logs, the participants' book, and various auxiliary books. Based on these records, the profit and loss statement was drawn up. However, most of the books from the seventeenth century have been lost. Until its bankruptcy, the VOC's accounting remained fragmented, which makes it more difficult to find data.

Present-day accountants have carefully studied what has survived of the VOC books, but in 2011, Johan van Helleman concluded that the VOC's accounting was shrouded in secrecy.³ J.P. de Korte's study analyzed the Chamber of Amsterdam balances on May 15, 1700 and May 15, 1701. These showed that the amount paid to Prince William III was 25,000 guilders, which was calculated as half of 25 percent of a 200,000-guilder capital participation in the stadtholder's name. That was approximately one-thirty-third of the 6.4 million guilders that the capital participants had invested in total when the enterprise was established. An important point here is that the Princes of Orange did not actually invest money in the VOC. Their capital participation of one-thirty-third part, mentioned above, was based on an "imaginary capital" of 200,000 guilders. In other words, although the princes had not invested anything, they were rewarded as if they had risked 200,000 guilders in capital.

We can get some indication of what these earnings mean in today's terms by comparing them to an average income. An average day laborer in the Republic earned about 200 guilders a year; sailors and soldiers earned less, but had a relatively secure income and received housing and meals. But even if we reason from a comparatively high yearly income of 250 guilders, the 25,000 guilders paid to William III in 1701 was equivalent to 100 annual salaries for an average worker. If we then take the average gross annual salary of a Dutch worker in 2021, which came to 44,800 euros, then the prince's payment was worth no less than 4.5 million euros.⁴

In addition to the resolutions found in the VOC archives, excerpts of the VOC accounts can be found in family archives, such as those of Hope (deputy to the stadtholder), Hudd, and the Delft regent family Van Vredenburg. Adriaan van Vredenburg (1680–1759) and his son Gerard (1710–1784) were managing directors of the VOC chamber in Delft, which is why their family archives include information about that chamber in the shape of resolutions, balance sheets, and income statements. One of the documents in these archives is a list of the dividends paid by the VOC from 1676 to 1701, which is based on a May 11, 1674 resolution of the Lords Seventeen ratified on September 28 of that year, with the telling title "Payment by the East India Comp: To His Highness William Henry Prince of Orange."⁵ The stadtholder received one-thirty-third of the total company profit. In some years, no payment was made (1676–1678, 1683, 1684), but in 1698 and 1699, the prince was paid twice (see Table 2). In 1675, William Henry received 25 percent profit on 200,000 guilders, or 50,000 guilders. During his reign as stadtholder of the VOC (1675–1701), he was paid an amount worth nearly 200 million euros in today's currency. The payments to his successors, William IV and William V, were also recorded; they received a total of 280,000 guilders (now worth more than 50 million euros) and 635,000 guilders (now close to 114 million euros), respectively.

Table 1.
VOC Payments to William Henry of Orange III

Year	Percentage	Amount paid	Value in 2021
1675	25.00	<i>f</i> 50,000	€ 8,960,000
1679	12.50	<i>f</i> 25,000	€ 4,480,000
1680	25.00	<i>f</i> 50,000	€ 8,960,000
1681	22.50	<i>f</i> 45,000	€ 8,064,000
1682	33.33	<i>f</i> 66,666	€ 11,946,547
1685	40.00	<i>f</i> 80,000	€ 14,336,000
1686	12.50	<i>f</i> 25,000	€ 4,480,000
1687	20.00	<i>f</i> 40,000	€ 7,168,000
1688	33.33	<i>f</i> 66,666	€ 11,946,547
1689	33.33	<i>f</i> 66,666	€ 11,946,547
1690	40.00	<i>f</i> 80,000	€ 14,336,000
1691	20.00	<i>f</i> 40,000	€ 7,168,000
1692	25.00	<i>f</i> 50,000	€ 8,960,000
1693	20.00	<i>f</i> 40,000	€ 7,168,000
1694	20.00	<i>f</i> 40,000	€ 7,168,000
1695	25.00	<i>f</i> 50,000	€ 8,960,000
1696	15.00	<i>f</i> 30,000	€ 5,376,000
1697	15.00	<i>f</i> 30,000	€ 5,376,000
1698	15.00	<i>f</i> 30,000	€ 5,376,000
1698	15.00	<i>f</i> 30,000	€ 5,376,000
1699	20.00	<i>f</i> 40,000	€ 7,168,000
1699	15.00	<i>f</i> 30,000	€ 5,376,000
1700	25.00	<i>f</i> 50,000	€ 8,960,000
1701	20.00	<i>f</i> 40,000	€ 7,168,000
Total paid		<i>f</i> 1,094,998	€ 196,223,642

Table 2.

VOC Payments to Stadtholder William Carl Henry Friso of Orange IV

Year	Percentage		Amount paid		Value in 2021
1747	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1748	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1749	25.00	<i>f</i>	50,000	€	8,960,000
1750	25.00	<i>f</i>	50,000	€	8,960,000
1751	25.00	<i>f</i>	50,000	€	8,960,000
1752	25.00	<i>f</i>	50,000	€	8,960,000
Total paid		<i>f</i>	280,000	€	50,176,000

Table 3.

VOC Payments to William V

Year	Percentage		Amount paid		Value in 2021
1753	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1754	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1755	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1756	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1757	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1758	15.00	<i>f</i>	30,000	€	5,376,000
1759	15.00	<i>f</i>	30,000	€	5,376,000
1760	15.00	<i>f</i>	30,000	€	5,376,000
1761	15.00	<i>f</i>	30,000	€	5,376,000
1762	15.00	<i>f</i>	30,000	€	5,376,000
1763	15.00	<i>f</i>	30,000	€	5,376,000
1764	15.00	<i>f</i>	30,000	€	5,376,000
1765	17.50	<i>f</i>	35,000	€	6,272,000
1766	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1767	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1768	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1769	20.00	<i>f</i>	40,000	€	7,168,000
1770	15.00	<i>f</i>	30,000	€	5,376,000
Total paid		<i>f</i>	635,000	€	113,792,000

Payments by the WIC and Other Colonial Enterprises

VOC payments were not the only source of colonial profit that the stadtholders enjoyed. Other companies gave them a cut of the profits based on similar calculations. One example is the Amphioen (Opium) Society, which existed from 1745 to 1794 and was set up to combat opium smuggling in the VOC-controlled areas in the East Indies. The Society was granted a lucrative monopoly and shipped a large amount of opium from India to Java. In 1749, the Society's participants gifted the stadtholder a participation capital of thirty shares worth 2,000 *rijksdaalders* (coins worth 2.5 guilders) and the right to one-eleventh of the company profits in return for "the gracious promise of protection."⁶ It is not known whether the stadtholder also received earlier payments from the Society of Suriname (1683–1795), for instance. This colonial administration was in the hands of the WIC, the Aerssen van Sommelsdijck family, and the city of Amsterdam. From 1705 to 1772, it paid out a total of 3,329,000 guilders in profits (equivalent to 594 million euros) to its shareholders. Research will be required to establish whether there was a connection between the stadtholder and this Society.

The stadtholder also received income from the WIC. The Company was chartered by the States General in 1621 to conduct trade, wage war, and see to the colonial administration of the West Indies. It is not yet known whether the stadtholder received an annual cut from the WIC; this, too, will have to be researched. What we do know is that the stadtholders received a share of the privateering booty captured by the first WIC.

The charters of both the VOC and the WIC stipulated that if they captured enemy ships, they were required to give their "country and the admiral" (the stadtholder) a percentage of the booty.⁷ The stadtholder received 10 percent of the booty taken in European and North Atlantic waters and 3.5 percent of the booty captured south of the Tropic of Cancer. This could yield huge amounts of money. When the WIC's Piet Hein captured the Spanish treasure fleet in 1628, for instance, the booty was worth about 7 million guilders after covering the expedition costs. Piet Hein himself received 6,000 guilders, his crew 200 guilders per person (an annual salary) and the stadtholder, Prince Frederik Hendrik, 700,000 guilders (worth roughly 125 million euros today). The States General supported the warfare and privateering with generous annual subsidies for the VOC and WIC. Thus, the stadtholder indirectly profited from the subsidies that allowed the companies to fight their battles.

The first half of the eighteenth century saw the Second Stadtholderless Period (1702–1748),⁸ during which there were, in principle, no profit distributions to anyone based on their position, but it remains unclear whether the stadtholder actually did not receive any compensation from the various societies and companies. This question demands further study.

Following this period, the stadtholders acquired yet another source of income. In 1749, the most influential capital investors in the VOC and WIC, the Major Participants, appointed Prince William IV as Chief Managing Director of both companies. This role gave him the right to appoint the Managing Directors and Major Participants from three nominees. In return, the prince pledged to promote the economy and trade. The Major Participants paid him a *jouissance* (profit share) of 4 percent for his efforts.⁹ Due to its poor financial state in 1749, the WIC could not yet make this payment. William IV's new role led to disputes with the WIC directors and the Lords Seventeen who attempted to limit the prince's new powers.

In the late eighteenth century, the stadtholders held dividends and shares in the WIC worth 1,288 guilders, and in the VOC worth 18,239 guilders. An accompanying note stated: "These items neither requested nor received in recent years," because no *jouissance by provisie* (profit share based on commission) had been paid out since 1769 due to the WIC's losses.¹⁰

Colonial Profits Versus Other Income

How did the colonial profits which the Princes received in the shape of VOC and WIC dividends compare to the stadtholders' other sources of income? The stadtholders also earned an income from their official position as military commander and their political offices in the States General and the Council of State. From 1672 on, the stadtholder received 25,000 guilders per year for serving on the Council of State; this annual fee was later increased to 30,000 guilders (roughly equivalent to 5.3 million euros today). The stadtholder was also remunerated for his role as the top military commander to the tune of as much as 120,000 guilders, composed of proportional contributions from each of the provinces. Maintaining an army and waging war was very expensive, so further research is needed to reveal how profitable this military fee was for the stadtholders. What is clear is that this annual fee was raised to 262,000 guilders in wartime. To cover unforeseen risks, the prince also received 42,000 guilders itemized as "the extraordinary of War," meaning all expenses incurred as a result

of warfare. For the biggest item, “Secret Correspondence,” the stadtholder received 100,000 guilders. This covered the costs of conducting confidential postal communications, which included hiring secretaries who could write and decipher letters in code. When the costs of warfare exceeded the stadtholder’s fees, the state was always ready to make up the difference. For the stadtholder, the risk was virtually nil. Any war debts accrued were forgiven by the States General anyway, as was the case when Prince Maurits had amassed a 2-million-guilder debt.¹¹

In addition to their state incomes, the Princes of Orange also received income from their land ownership in Orange, the Marquisate of Breda and the earldom of Lingen (until 1702) and other private properties. There is as yet no good survey of these incomes, which means they cannot be included in the comparison.

Accountability

From 1675 to 1770, the VOC paid dividends to the three Princes of Orange totaling 2,009,998 guilders (with a current value of 360,191,642 euros). As mentioned earlier, this was based on *imaginary* capital, which means that the Oranges had not actually invested in the company and therefore ran no risk; this capital was actually a gift from the other participants. From the mid-eighteenth century, the Oranges also received income from the Amphioen Society (current worth 45.9 million euros) and for their role as the VOC’s Chief Managing Director (more than 13 million euros). This was supplemented by income from (colonial) privateering and possibly from other companies.

Table 4.
 Overview of the Stadtholders' Regular and Colonial Incomes
 SG = States General; CS = Council of State

	Period	in Guilders	Current Value
SG+CS (William III)	1675-1701	<i>f</i> 1,485,000	€ 266,112,000
SG+CS (William IV)	1747-1752	<i>f</i> 330,000	€ 59,136,000
SG+CS (William V)	1753-1770	<i>f</i> 990,000	€ 177,408,000
VOC (William III)	1675-1701	<i>f</i> 1,094,998	€ 196,223,642
VOC (William IV)	1747-1752	<i>f</i> 280,000	€ 50,176,000
VOC (William V)	1753-1770	<i>f</i> 635,000	€ 113,792,000
Chief Managing Directorship VOC	1749-1770	<i>f</i> 76,148	€ 13,645,690
Amphioen Society (one-eleventh)	1748-1794	<i>f</i> 256,364	€ 45,940,364
Privateering WIC (example: 1628) (Spanish Treasure Fleet)		<i>f</i> 700,000	€ 125,440,000
WIC; Society of Suriname; other companies	*	further research needed	
Other privateering	*	further research needed	
WIC and VOC Chief Managing Directorship (after 1770)	*	further research needed	
Fees for warfare and secret correspondence	*	further research needed	
Income from land ownership	*	further research needed	
Total general payment	1675-1770	<i>f</i> 2,805,000	€ 502,656,000
Total colonial profit	1675-1770	<i>f</i> 3,042,510	€ 545,217,696
Grand total	1675-1770	<i>f</i> 5,847,510	€ 1,047,873,696

Table 4 shows what we know now, based on current research. From this overview, we can conclude that, from presently known incomes alone, the Princes of Orange received a total of 3.04 million guilders in colonial profits. This translates to 545 million euros in today's economy.

This amount can be compared to what is known about the princes' "regular" income, which was not derived directly from colonial profits but came from their positions in government and their service in wartime. This regular income for the stadtholders' positions in the Council of State and the States General amounted to a total of 2.8 million guilders for the duration of the reigns of Williams III, IV, and V (or 0.5 billion euros today). In addition, the Oranges received substantial payments in the shape of an annual military allowance and money to cover the costs of secret correspondence, but these items were offset by large expenditures for the army and other costs. This makes it harder to estimate how much profit the Oranges actually enjoyed from their regular incomes. It is important to note that these regular earnings were also intertwined with colonial interests by virtue of the stadtholders' role in national decision making (e.g., in the States General), in foreign affairs, and in warfare.

It is clear that the stadtholders' regular earnings consisted to a great extent of colonial profits, but the data are far from complete. Was the Lords Seventeen's resolution of May 11, 1674 a formalization of agreements reached earlier and had similar dividend payments been made between 1602 and 1675? It is unknown whether the Society of Suriname and other colonial companies and societies paid the Oranges, and if so, how much. Further studies should focus in particular on private archives, and network research will have to uncover where we need to look. Archives that come to mind are the archives of the House of Orange-Nassau and the private records of the lawyers, managing directors, and capital participants of the colonial societies. This will likely provide a clearer picture of the colonial money flows to the stadtholders.

Historian Johan Huizinga wrote that history is the scholarly manifestation of how a culture shows accountability for its past. Slavery and colonial history are now the subject of debate, and based on the "new" data uncovered, the head of state cannot sidestep this discussion.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Gert Oostindie, Jan L. van Zanden and Michiel Schwartzberg for their advice and comments on earlier drafts.
- 2 Menno Witteveen, *Reinier Pauw en Amsterdam: De macht van een man en een stad* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2022), 910; Matthias van Rossum, “De VOC, van Amsterdam naar Azië,” in *De slavernij in Oost en West: Het Amsterdam onderzoek*, ed. Pepijn Brandon et al. (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2020), 52–61.
- 3 Johan van Helleman, “Financiële verantwoording door de VOC,” *Management Control & Accounting (MCA)* 12, no. 2, (2011): 27–31.
- 4 This method can give an indication of the contemporary value of incomes and investments by multiplying them by a factor of 179.2. Using average incomes, this method gives a more accurate estimate than using the current value of currencies (as available from <https://iisg.amsterdam/nl/onderzoek/projecten/hpw/calculate.php>). Another calculation uses the average gross national product (GNP) per capita. This results in a similar estimate: assuming an average of 275 guilders for the period 1700–1800 and comparing this to the 2021 GNP of 45,800 euros per capita, we derive a factor of 166.5.
- 5 NA, Archives of Adrian and Gerard van Vredenburg, 1.10.83, Inv. no. 8; NA, Archives of the Dutch East India Company VOC, 1.04.02, Inv. no. 50.
- 6 Correspondence between the Participants and the stadtholder, letter dated September 30, 1750. NA, Archief van Stadhouderlijke Secretarie, 1.01.50, Inv. no. 1195.
- 7 H. den Heijer, *De geotrooieerde compagnie, Ars Notariatus* 128 (Deventer: Kluwer, 2010), 54.
- 8 During the periods designated as the First Stadtholderless Period (1650–1672) and Second Stadtholderless Period (1702–1748), the office of stadtholder was vacant in several Dutch provinces, and no single stadtholder reigned over the entire Republic. There were, however, stadtholders at provincial level in some of the provinces.
- 9 W. E. H. Winkels, *Publicatiën en verordeningen betrekkelijk Suriname, Resolutie November 26, 1749* (Paramaribo: W.E.H. Winkels, 1816).
- 10 Memorie van Raaden en Rekenmeesters der Erfgoederen van den Prins van Oranje en Nassau, overgeleverd aan de Fransche Repraesentanten in Den Haag, den 9 Februarij 1795, bijlage B in *Geschiedenis van de jongstgeëindigen oorlog 1793–1803, derde deel*, Cornelis Van der Aa, (Amsterdam: Johannes Allart, 1803), 316; *Nieuwe Nederlandsche Jaerboeken, vierde deel*, 2nd. vol. (Leiden: P. van der Eyk & D. Vygh, 1769), 1350.
- 11 J. Haverkamp, *’s Lands verydelde hoope ter geheugenisse der ingezetenen vertoont in een kort begrip der historie van het leven van Willem Karel Hendrik Friso* (Amsterdam: De Compagnie, 1753), 55.

Dutch Colonial Slavery and Its Afterlives: Findings

*Rose Mary Allen, Esther Captain,
Matthias van Rossum, and Urwin Vyent*

In 1816, Johannes Rudolph van den Berg, his wife, Johanna Christina Umbgrove, and their three children traveled from Vught in the province of Brabant to the Dutch East Indies. Van den Berg had been appointed Resident of the island of Saparua in the Moluccas; he was sent there to restore Dutch colonial rule. He had barely settled in when the inhabitants of Saparua rose up in May 1817 against the Dutch administration in what became known as the Pattimura War. The rebels also attacked Van den Berg himself, leaving him, his wife, and two children dead. Only their six-year-old son, Jean Lubbert, survived. He was found and rescued by one of the enslaved people kept by the family. But the story does not end there. According to family legend, when Jean Lubbert was brought back to the Netherlands, the Dutch king offered to make him a lord. The boy is said to have declined, but asked instead for permission to include in his surname a reference to the island where his parents were murdered. Thus, Jean Lubbert acquired a double-barreled surname, which is still used by one of his descendants: Rudolph van den Berg van Sapa-roea, a retired banker in Hilversum. Rudolph's explanation for why he opts to use "Van den Berg" instead of the full double-barreled name is telling. "Van den Berg van Sapa-roea is quite a loaded name," he explains. "You'll see what I mean when you look at the list of names that my father's secretary once kept: Van den Berg van Ammehoela [kiss my ass], Van den Berg van Kamasutra. I didn't really feel like dealing with that all the time."¹

The story of seventy-five-year-old Rudolph van den Berg van Saparoea is unique. As a descendant of the colonizers in the Dutch East Indies, he is probably one of the few people who ended up with a double-barreled name as a result of slavery. The descendants of the enslaved, by contrast, are still dealing with the effects of having been robbed of their own names and given slave names. The extent to which this affects them, even to this day, is poignantly expressed by the story of Auset Ank Re, who was born as Monique Zichterman. “For at least twenty years, I felt the need to change the name I inherited from my parents,” she says. “Zichterman is a bastardization of Governor Sichtman of Suriname’s name. My Indigenous great-grandmother married Sichtman in 1863. When he died four years later, she was enslaved. When I heard that story, it strengthened my desire to change my name. As a free, married woman, my great-grandmother should never have been enslaved.”²

Handed-down family histories of enslaved individuals show how difficult it can be to get a clear picture of what happened and how this has continued to affect descendants. At the same time, the practice of naming also has to do with identity formation, which has undergone complex changes under the influence of slavery and colonialism. It is easier to identify “imposed” names than to determine what are “authentic” or “original” names. How descendants experience this naming issue demonstrates how loaded this link to the past is. Recently, the Dutch government decided that descendants of enslaved individuals could change their names at no cost. Previously, this procedure cost about 800 euros, and applicants had to submit a statement from a psychologist confirming that their name caused them distress. Such stories show how deeply ingrained slavery and colonialism are, both institutionally and in people’s daily lives.

Slavery & the Dutch State responds to a dual need for knowledge. It provides insight into slavery’s history and its effects, and the role and involvement of the Dutch state. The book consistently examines these aspects in relation to each other. It is clear that in order to properly understand the history of slavery, we need to study the actions of the Dutch state and other colonial authorities because their role was so formative and far-reaching. But we also need to be aware that politics, the economy, and society are so interwoven that a narrow perspective will not help anyone understand this book’s subject matter. *Slavery & the Dutch State* therefore takes colonial slavery as a point of departure and examines it broadly, also exploring the

less obvious links between slavery and the history of Dutch colonialism. We scrutinize the state's involvement in slavery, but do so while taking into account the societies all over the world that got caught up in Dutch colonial slavery and how they were affected by this, both immediately and long-term.

This book shows how deliberate, systematic, extensive, and prolonged Dutch involvement in colonial slavery was. *Slavery & the Dutch State* looks beyond the historically delineated periods in which slavery and the slave trade were legally permitted and practiced. It demonstrates that they have shaped individuals and societies ever since. The history of colonial slavery has had an impact on countless lives in various ways. Obviously, the millions of African, Asian, Indigenous, and other enslaved people and their descendants have felt its effects, as have societies worldwide that intersected with this history. People's responses to this have varied widely, with diverse outcomes. The chapters in this book make clear that this history has left deep scars on the Netherlands and elsewhere, but also that there are many gaps in our knowledge that need to be filled to fully understand the precise mechanics and consequences of this legacy, and even the history of colonial slavery itself.

The following questions were central in *Slavery & the Dutch State*:

- In what socio-economic, political, and societal context did the Dutch become involved in slavery, and what were the contemporary and long-term consequences of this involvement, both in the Netherlands and in the societies which the Dutch colonized?
- How have various stakeholders, such as the enslaved, administrators, entrepreneurs, and others in the colonized societies, responded to and dealt with the issue of slavery up to the present day?
- How can we create space for redress and healing with respect to slavery and its continued impact?

Findings

One important insight that *Slavery & the Dutch State* has yielded is that the design, workings, and consequences of slavery and the slave trade were deeply intertwined with broader colonial structures through which the Dutch government exerted power in various parts of the world. Slavery was

one of several instruments of exploitation and control deployed by Dutch colonialism. Others include acts of aggression such as the conquest of forts and their environs, the suppression of local uprisings, forced cultivation and labor, and even mass displacements and depopulation. Power and control could also involve less visible forms of oppression and governance, such as re-education, religious conversion, restriction of movement, and explicit ethnic and racial discrimination against colonial subjects. All these instruments of power influenced the development of slavery and its afterlives. For example, conquests and depopulation paved the way for the slave trade and the establishment of the colonies where the enslaved were put to work. Governance, law, and racial discrimination shaped the development of colonial slavery. Conversely, slavery had a significant impact on other forms of forced labor and exploitation, such as *corvée*/cultivation systems, contract labor, and convict labor, all of which existed side by side. It is clear that slavery cannot be looked at in isolation from broader Dutch colonial history; much research is still needed to fully understand the many interconnections between the history of slavery, colonialism, and their afterlives.

Slavery & the Dutch State sheds light on the history of colonial slavery and its effects from various perspectives. It is impossible to summarize all the contributions of the authors here, but many arrived at similar conclusions that can help set the direction of further research and guide societal and political engagement with the history of colonial slavery and its afterlives. Exploring the history of colonial slavery is necessary for three reasons. The first of these is to understand the historical development of the Dutch colonial slave trade and slavery, and the state's complicity in these practices and their consequences. The second reason for this exploration is that this history, and the Dutch state's involvement in it, have had ongoing economic, social, cultural, and administrative repercussions—some of which lasted from the transition from legally permitted slavery and slave trading well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and others even up to the present day. Thirdly, this historical study is urgently needed because of how society currently engages with the history of colonial slavery, its long-term consequences, and its ongoing effects. Insights and developments in these three areas are closely interconnected, but do not always progress at the same pace. Therefore, we discuss these three findings separately.

1. Historical Development, Complicity in, and Consequences of Dutch Colonial Slavery

The Dutch state, its predecessors, and large—mostly private—segments of society were directly and deeply complicit in slavery through deliberate colonial policies.

With respect to the complicity of the Dutch government's predecessors in colonial expansion, slavery, and the slave trade, it can be concluded that this happened in a context of deeply intertwined (geo)political, economic, and private interests. Especially in the early modern period but also long after, the exercise of power by, and on behalf of, the national government was dispersed across a large number of political institutions, such as the States (provinces), stadtholders, cities, and admiralties. Executive power was in the hands of many different private and colonial organizations that operated in the Netherlands and abroad, such as the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the Dutch West India Company (WIC), MCC [Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie], various gentlemen's clubs and patronages, and the Netherlands Trading Society [Nederlandsche HandelsMaatschappij; NHM].

Dutch colonial power was exercised across many layers, by many different actors, and in many shapes. This complexity makes it hard for contemporary observers to pinpoint the locus of power. Colonial power could be exercised by different layers of the Dutch state but also delegated to colonial companies. Colonial power was sometimes exercised through direct colonial governance (sovereignty) and sometimes through indirect governance (suzerainty), for example by imposing coercive contracts on local states or by appointing local rulers. There was a diffuseness to the complicity of the Dutch state, its representatives and its subjects in colonial power, slavery, the slave trade, and their repercussions. Yet that complicity, despite its diffuse nature, was also undeniably strong. This close bond between slavery and the Dutch state consisted of four core elements:

- *Rights to use or operate* land, trade, production, or other activities in directly or indirectly colonized areas claimed by the Dutch state. It was no accident that the powers given to colonial companies and patronages were expressed in terms of exclusive property rights or licenses (“charters”). The traditional explanation in terms of “trade monopolies” is en-

lightening, but provides only a limited perspective on this history. After all, the use of land, mobilization of labor from local inhabitants (corvée labor), and other forms of usufruct were explicitly granted as exclusive rights to colonial organizations, such as the WIC and VOC, and even to individuals who were entrusted with colonial governance on a personal basis, such as Abraham van Pere (in the colony of Berbice) and Kiliaen van Rensselaer (in a colony on the Hudson River in New Netherland).

- *Delegated power* in areas claimed as colonial territory. This included the authority to act (semi-)independently in warfare and the use of force; to establish and maintain relations with states and populations with respect to war, peace, and diplomacy; and to provide colonial governance, administer justice, and levy taxes on colonized areas and populations. On behalf of the States General, the VOC acted as a local government in parts of South Africa, southwestern India, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and the Indonesian archipelago. Atlantic organizations such as the WIC, MCC, gentlemen's clubs and patronages were granted similar powers in Brazil, the Caribbean, Guyana, and North America. As colonial governments, they signed treaties with local rulers and exacted forced labor from local populations (corvée). The VOC even imposed "tribute obligations" on Asian states and rulers subordinate to the company. Both the Atlantic organizations and the VOC were actively involved in the administration of slavery and regulation of the slave trade. These colonial organizations even actively shaped colonial and local rules concerning "enslavement," which sometimes were evaluated and approved up to the level of the States General.
- *Direct and indirect support from the Dutch authorities* for colonial organizations. Sometimes, these were supported from their inception with money (in the form of loans, for instance), with subsidies for warfare, or by the direct supply of weapons, soldiers, or other resources. The Dutch authorities and the stadtholder also supported colonial organizations involved in slavery by maintaining diplomatic relations with slave-exporting states.

- *Control over and (co)ownership of colonial organizations by the Dutch authorities.* Cities and provinces were offered seats on the board of companies and other colonial administrative organizations. The stadtholder was also invited to sit on the board of the VOC, WIC, and other organizations. All colonial organizations were accountable to the States General and often to city or other authorities as well.

The contributions in this book point to the very close ties that manifested themselves in various ways between the Dutch state and colonial administrative organizations. This leads to several important conclusions. The interconnectedness between administrative and colonial institutions was not limited to formal political relationships and responsibilities—such as the States General’s responsibility for colonial policy—but was also actively driven by the consolidation of private power and resources of a relatively small group of extremely wealthy merchant and regent families. They exerted their influence not solely in the governance of colonial organizations but also in city governments, provinces, admiralties, and the States General. Their private enterprises were usually directly or indirectly linked to colonial slavery and expansion, through the trade in weapons and colonial goods, for instance, or via investments in plantations. Thus, they shaped colonial expansion and slavery in multiple ways. Dutch involvement in slavery and the slave trade was therefore not a “historical accident” or “unfortunate coincidence” but part of an active and deliberate policy of the regent and merchant elite who shaped the Netherlands and its place in the world during colonialism.

Dutch slavery and colonialism had a significant impact on societies worldwide.

The Dutch history of slavery is inseparable from Dutch colonialism, and Dutch activities in that arena greatly affected societies across the globe. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, Europeans took and transported more than 12 million enslaved people from Africa across the Atlantic. Dutch traders were directly responsible for the trade of at least 600,000 enslaved persons. The arrival of European colonial powers also caused explosive growth in the slave trade around the Indian Ocean and the Indonesian archipelago, likely involving millions of enslaved individuals. Limited research in these regions makes it difficult to provide a precise

reconstruction of the numbers involved. It is estimated that 660,000 to 1.1 million enslaved individuals were transported to areas ruled by the VOC.

Colonial slavery caused widespread social, economic, and cultural transformations worldwide, often beginning with outright violence and devastation. A notorious example is the violence perpetrated by the Dutch in the Moluccas. The history of colonial slavery and forced labor began there long before the Banda Islands were fully subjugated in 1621. After the conquest of the Asian principality of Ternate in 1607, the Dutch imposed a treaty on its inhabitants, forcing them to recognize the States General as their “protector,” obligating them to build forts, reimburse war costs, and exclusively supply cloves. The peoples and islands formerly under Ternate’s rule were now deemed “vassals” of the States General. As early as 1615, the entire population of the island of Siau was deported by the VOC to work forcibly on a conquered island in the Banda archipelago. These lesser-known histories shed light on the systematic nature of colonial conquest, dispossession, and exploitation.

In Brazil, the arrival of the Dutch resulted in a complex and bloody guerrilla war, while in North America and other places, it sparked large-scale conflicts with Indigenous populations. In Banda, it led to the depopulation under the leadership of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, during which an estimated 15,000 Bandanese were murdered. This laid the foundation for the establishment of a plantation society. The VOC allocated conquered land to European “planters” and imported enslaved Asians from areas in present-day India, Myanmar, and parts of Indonesia.

What followed was even more devastating: the unleashing of Dutch colonialism and participation in slavery worldwide—from West Africa to Brazil, from Taiwan and Mauritius to Sri Lanka and South Africa, and from North America to the Caribbean, Berbice, and Suriname. In almost all these geographic regions, slavery was introduced practically from the beginning, as was the export or import of enslaved humans. This was often accompanied by large-scale land appropriation, the subjugation of local populations, and the imposition of other coercive systems, such as *corvée* labor and precursors to the Cultivation System. Several chapters in this book, primarily in Section 3, show that slavery formed the basis of many colonized societies in both the Atlantic world and the Indian Ocean. These contributions also make clear that colonial slavery usually was just one of many ways in which colonial power was exerted and that those ways existed side by side. For example, in South Africa, the VOC established a slave society with European

settlers and enslaved individuals from Madagascar, East Africa, India, and the Indonesian archipelago; at the same time, it slowly displaced and subjugated the local population over centuries of colonial expansion.

Dutch colonial administrations did not use slavery and other forms of forced labor (such as corvée, convict, and contract labor) in the Atlantic world and Asia as independent systems, but as complementary elements of a single, comprehensive colonial system.

Dutch colonial slavery not only stretched across the globe; its development in different parts of the world was also interconnected. A side-by-side comparison of different histories of Dutch colonial slavery would reveal many interactions that have hardly been researched and are therefore little known. Such a comparison would also yield new perspectives. Slavery affected different regions in different ways. In some areas, enslaved individuals were deported by slave traders. Such places of enslavement and deportation in West Africa, East Africa, Madagascar, parts of South Asia, and the Indonesian archipelago were often subjected to relatively little colonial authority, but still, the Dutch involvement in the slave trade had a significant impact. And then there were the heavily colonized regions that enslaved individuals were transported to. These places where enslaved people were used to produce goods for the metropole were located in North and South America, South Africa, Java, Banda, and other former VOC territories. And finally, there were regions like the home country, where slavery was virtually non-existent, but where slavery was organized and where the profits of slavery and colonialism set in motion great changes.

A side-by-side comparison will also show how colonialism, slavery, and the slave trade strengthened the links between these regions. This is glaringly obvious when it comes to the large-scale transportation of people under the banner of colonial slave trading. But overwhelming evidence of this interconnectedness and (economic) interdependence between the colonies can also be found in the fact that the revenues of the Cultivation System in Java from 1830 to 1870 were used to financially compensate plantation owners in the Caribbean when “their” enslaved people were emancipated.

Dutch colonial administrations did not use slavery, the Cultivation System, and its precursors, and convict and contract labor in the Caribbean and in Asia as stand-alone methods. Rather, these types of labor were used

as complementary elements in a single, comprehensive colonial system. The abolition of the slave trade, and later of slavery, increased the use of other forms of (forced) mobility and labor, such as the Cultivation System in the Dutch East Indies and the relocation of contract laborers to Suriname, allowing the Dutch state and colonial entrepreneurs to continue meeting the demand for new workers on plantations after the abolition of slavery in 1863. Such links were facilitated by the close exchange between colonial administrations in the Caribbean and Asian parts of the Dutch colonial empire. Governors-General such as Johannes van den Bosch (1780–1844) and Johan Kielstra (1878–1951) had experience with the colonies in both regions. Various parts of the colonial empire and even the Netherlands were subjected to administrative experiments, often with far-reaching consequences for local populations. These forms of colonial social engineering are mentioned in current historiography and the biographies of colonial administrators but warrant more systematic research. Worldwide, colonial slavery left a profound mark on the structure of societies, on social and cultural relations, and on economic development. Likewise, the Netherlands was deeply and structurally influenced by slavery and broader colonialism. Much more research needs to be done on the early effects and emergence of Dutch complicity in slavery and colonialism—and particularly on the mutual effects of slavery on the Netherlands and societies worldwide.

2. Afterlives and Adaptations

Slavery and the subsequent use of other forms of forced labor led to socio-economic and societal reorganizations worldwide that underlie modern inequalities.

The profound effect of Dutch colonial slavery on society, the economy, and governance persisted even after the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. During the transition from legally permitted slave trading and slavery to other nineteenth-, twentieth-, and ultimately twenty-first-century orders, the Dutch state's complicity in colonial slavery continued to resonate socially, culturally, economically, and administratively.

It is not a coincidence that many colonized societies evolved into suppliers of agricultural products and ores for the global economy. Slavery and colonialism laid the groundwork for the unequal development of the mod-

ern world economy through the lopsided development and even underdevelopment of colonized societies, and through the infusion of colonial profits into the Netherlands and other parts of Europe. This book shows that the abolition of the slave trade and slavery did not end colonialism, but merely transformed it. Abolition led colonial entrepreneurs and the Dutch colonial state to replace slavery with other forms of forced labor, such as *corvée*, convict, and contract labor, which had been commonly used colonial instruments from the beginning but were now employed on an even larger scale and in new ways.

The Netherlands was also influenced socioeconomically by slavery and other forms of forced labor. New industries emerged, such as sugar and coffee processing, and glass and textile production. Shipbuilding, insurance, banking, and overseas and intra-European trade flourished. In a broader context, colonial profits, including those from the Cultivation System, paid for much of the infrastructure of the Netherlands, helping to strengthen the country's position as a transportation and service economy. Colonial profits were used to finance the national Dutch railways in the mid-nineteenth century, the New Waterway for the port of Rotterdam, and the North Sea Canal for the port of Amsterdam. This goes to show that Dutch colonial slavery not only contributed to large-scale global changes but also had a significant impact on the transformation of the Netherlands itself. It laid the foundation for the tremendous collective prosperity in this country. Conversely, it also facilitated the prolonged concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a small number of merchant and regent families, and therefore may also have had a hand in the inequalities which persist in Dutch society to this day.

The social hierarchies created and reinforced by slavery and colonialism have caused persistent inequalities in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and in many other societies across the globe.

One of the most prominent sociocultural legacies of colonial slavery and the slave trade is "racialization." Slavery is inextricably linked to the development of a high-productivity growth economy based on labor intensification. The labor provided by enslaved people played a crucial role in this. To justify enslavement and its regulation, the colonial ruler had to determine which individuals could be enslaved—and used the term "enslaveability" for that purpose. This justification was founded on notions of

a presumed superiority of the colonizer and inferiority of the inhabitants of the colonized regions. Thus, colonial racism created perceived differences between people based on race and was used to underpin a growth economy based on oppression and segregation. Colonial rule further entrenched this social order by legitimizing it, codifying agreements and arrangements in trade treaties, notarial deeds, charters, etc. Thus, the colonial legal system did not merely reflect but also validated colonial practices. Slavery was embedded in more comprehensive structures of labor mobilization, exploitation, and racism, which allows us to draw a connection between colonial rule, capitalism, and discrimination. These cannot be seen separately and have continued to intersect in various ways since the slave trade and slavery were formally abolished.

Dutch colonial law provided the legal underpinnings for the inequality imposed in colonial contexts. In the colonies, distinctions between the free and the enslaved were translated into categories constructed around “national character.” Thus, persistent hierarchies were created during slavery, under which everyone was classified into a “racial” category: either “Dutch” or “Eurasian” (mixed Indonesian-European), or a “non-European” category, such as “Indian” or “Bush Negro” in Suriname, or “Foreign Oriental” or “Native” in the Dutch East Indies. As late as 1936, Suriname’s colonial-era “population register” still referred to formerly enslaved individuals and their descendants as “natives.” In the Dutch East Indies, this systematic oppression persisted until Indonesian independence in August 1945. The racial constructs which the Dutch used to justify social inequality shaped reality profoundly. For example, while universal suffrage was introduced in the Netherlands in 1919, this did not apply to the colonies. It took until the 1930s for the first forms of suffrage to be established there, and even then, the majority of the population was excluded. In Suriname, universal suffrage was not implemented until 1963. In the Netherlands, policy discourse continued to distinguish between “eastern” and “western” Dutch citizens (the former term referring to people from the former Dutch East Indies and the latter from Suriname and the Caribbean). Until very recently, Dutch policy distinguished between *allochtonen* [“immigrants”] and *autochtonen* [“native Dutch” inhabitants] as well as between “western” and “non-western” immigrants. All of this goes to show that the inequalities created by the colonial administrative apparatus have continued to affect the subjects of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for a very long time.

Slavery and colonialism have profoundly influenced how people related to each other and have continued to affect people's lives in terms of social relations, education, language, and health.

One of the most alienating aspects of life under colonial rule must have been that Dutch colonizers and the colonized were supposed to maintain a distance even though they often found themselves in close proximity. Jan Brandes (1743–1808), a Dutchman who traveled to the Dutch East Indies in the service of the VOC, painted a watercolor of a domestic scene that shows his young son playing with a girl, the daughter of one of his enslaved servants. At some point, these two toddlers' proximity and familiarity would have to give way to distance to satisfy the requirements of colonial slavery. Dutch colonizers grew terrified at the thought of one of their own "going native," of "Indonesianization" or "Africanization," as it was called. Going native was seen as lowering oneself to the level of the "natives." Friendly relations, let alone intimate relationships, between the colonizers and the colonized threatened the former's social status and prestige. Yet, as strict as these distinctions might have been on paper, in practice they proved to be porous and boundaries were crossed in a variety of ways. Since very few Dutch women traveled to the colonies, intimate relationships between colonizers and the colonized or enslaved usually involved Dutch men and Indonesian or Caribbean women. Because of the colonial context in which these relationships originated, they were inevitably marked by structural inequality, even if the love and friendship were sincere. We must seriously take into account the fact that coercion, abuse, and sexual exploitation were common. Children born from such a relationship occupied a space between colonizer and colonized and, depending on the situation, might rise to a higher position in the colonial system, with more freedoms or privileges than the colonized or enslaved parent.

Social stratification in slave and colonial societies was complex and the strata were subject to vastly different conditions. Slavery was one of the most extreme forms of restriction: regulations determined whether the enslaved were allowed to wear shoes and hats, and where they were allowed to walk. Owners decided how the enslaved were to be punished, where they lived, and what work they did. It was up to the owners whether they recognized the children whom they fathered with enslaved women, and whether the enslaved were sold off or allowed to stay with their loved ones, children, or parents. Even after abolition, almost every move one made in colonial

societies was coded according to colonial criteria: whom you could associate with, which language you spoke in which context, whether you could go to school, whether you could practice your religion, which professions or positions were open to you, and whether you had access to buildings and associations, transportation, and healthcare. This led to a preoccupation with determining one's position on this uneven playing field and, for the colonized, with improving that position if possible. One way to climb the colonial social ladder was through a relationship or marriage with someone higher in the colonial pecking order. Another was to receive an education at a Dutch school and to speak Dutch. In a colonial setting, this enabled Indonesians and Surinamese to "improve" their position. In Curaçao, mastering the Dutch language became important after Shell opened an oil refinery on the island in 1918. These and similar developments had a potential downside: adopting Dutch behavior and customs (at least outwardly) could lead the enslaved and colonized to start abandoning or undervaluing their own customs and traditions.

Studies that critically examine the legacies of slavery and colonialism show that an orientation toward Dutch culture did not automatically mean total acceptance or assimilation. More research is needed on the afterlives of these social and cultural legacies, as well as on the tension between the culture of the colonized and the culture imposed by colonialism, on the likely influence that this had on family structures, psychology, and even physical well-being, and on the perpetuation of cultural marginalization and restrictive (self-)images.

3. Contemporary Responses

The attitudes and racial structures instigated during slavery and colonialism have also had delayed effects and caused enduring tension, both of which influence present-day societies in the Kingdom of the Netherlands (particularly in Aruba, Curaçao, Saint Martin, Bonaire, Saint Eustatius, and Saba) and the Netherlands' relationships with former colonized territories (Suriname, Indonesia, and other countries).

Racialized discrimination in the colonies was long-lasting and systemic. It was not until December 6, 1942, that Queen Wilhelmina questioned the "difference in treatment based on race or nationality." She said this dur-

ing World War II, while in exile and under pressure from the Americans. At the time, the Dutch kingdom faced the imminent loss of its colonies, precipitated by Indonesian and Surinamese nationalist movements that began in the early twentieth century and by the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies. The queen questioned a practice that, until then, had been an unshakable foundation of her kingdom and Dutch colonialism. Indeed, even after the war, things did not exactly change quickly. The former overseas territories were promised autonomy, but only after a 25-year-long constitutional transition period. However, Indonesian nationalists were not prepared to wait that long. Two days after the Japanese surrender on August 17, 1945, Sukarno and Muhammad Hatta unilaterally declared the independent Republic of Indonesia. The Netherlands refused to recognize Indonesian independence and a protracted war followed, which the former colonial power ultimately lost. On December 27, 1949, the Netherlands formally transferred sovereignty to Indonesia (with the exception of West Papua). Four years earlier, after the Japanese surrender, Dutch nationals were repatriated and Eurasians, Moluccans, Papuans, and Chinese left Indonesia and migrated to the Netherlands. These “relocations” continued until 1962 when the Netherlands also left West Papua.

After the bloody loss of Indonesia, and eager not to suffer a similarly traumatic experience in Suriname, the Netherlands meticulously prepared for that country’s independence. This was done in close consultation with political leaders in Suriname, which had formally become an autonomous state within the Kingdom of the Netherlands under the 1954 Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands. On November 25, 1975, Suriname officially became an independent republic. The “Territory of Curaçao,” renamed the “Netherlands Antilles” in 1948, remained within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 1986, Aruba obtained *status aparte* (separate status) and was recognized as an autonomous member of the kingdom. On October 10, 2010, the entity known as the Netherlands Antilles was dissolved. Just like Aruba, the islands of Curaçao and Saint Martin became autonomous countries within the Kingdom. Bonaire, Saint Eustatius, and Saba became special Dutch municipalities. The current relationship between the Netherlands and Aruba, Curaçao, Saint Martin, Bonaire, Saint Eustatius, and Saba is an uneasy one, characterized by frequent disappointment. While the Netherlands consistently emphasizes transparent governance and anti-corruption programs, the governments on the islands perceive this as unwanted, neocolonial interference in their internal political affairs and

feel discriminated against compared to the Netherlands when it comes to the introduction and application of laws and regulations. The more the islands feel the Netherlands' economic power, while they find themselves struggling economically, the stronger this sense of inequality and the accusation of neocolonialism grows. This means that the islands are constantly navigating between the notion of political independence as part of their emancipation process, and an understanding shared by the various islands that their status as small island nations makes them economically, financially, and politically vulnerable in the larger transnational world.

Greater and more detailed knowledge of the history of slavery and colonialism will enrich our understanding of the historical roots of contemporary social relations in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and relations between the Netherlands and the areas which it once colonized.

Various conceptual and interpretive frameworks through which we understand the history of slavery and colonialism are currently in the midst of a long-overdue renewal. It is primarily a shift away from perspectives shaped by colonial and nationalist histories, which enabled the Netherlands to continue seeing itself as a “minor” and “moderate” colonizer, whose involvement in slavery was only “marginal.” The histories of colonialism and slavery were kept separate from the portrayal of the Netherlands as a “tolerant” country, where democracy was embraced early and a “modern” free market economy took shape. It was only by rigidly separating these two aspects of history that the many contradictions between them could remain obscured.

Researchers are trying to shed this colonial, naive, and sometimes trivializing attitude toward Dutch history by considering new perspectives that are designed to provide a clearer view of that history and its current ramifications. *Slavery & the Dutch State* shows that the history of slavery is not just a footnote in worldwide Dutch colonialism, but one of its very foundations, upon which the Netherlands, its economy, society, and position in the world were built. This brings to light the fact that all Dutch people, regardless of their place of birth or residence, are to some extent bound up in the history of slavery and colonialism. This book illustrates how grave the consequences of that history continue to be. Not only can such insights lead to changes in the way that the Dutch see themselves and their place in the world, but they can also provide a basis for greater mutual

understanding of the past and the present in the entire Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The plurality of the history of Dutch colonial slavery has various meanings and repercussions that are part of a shared past and present, and that need to be further mapped out to facilitate dialogue, mutual understanding, and reconciliation.

Colonial slavery's significance in the present day is not the same to everyone. The history of slavery and its afterlives have affected different societies and groups of people in divergent ways, creating multiple perspectives on this history. This multiperspectivity is present in the multifaceted history of slavery and in the myriad ways that it is dealt with. In some places, the past has been explicitly processed and integrated into the collective consciousness of descendant communities and societies, such as in Suriname and South Africa. In other areas, this process has been much more implicit, such as in Indonesia, or is still going on, as in Curaçao and the Netherlands. At the same time, these histories of slavery are part of a shared past and share clear common threads, both in the historical workings and repercussions of slavery and in present-day events where the past comes to the surface.

One topic currently debated by the Dutch central government and municipalities in the (Caribbean) Netherlands clearly illustrates this multiplicity: how to shape the commemorations that memorialize slavery and celebrate its abolition. When the date of abolition—July 1, 1863—is mentioned, this implicitly refers to transatlantic slavery, the European-run enslavement and trade of Africans to North and South America and the Caribbean from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The problem is that Dutch colonial slavery was geographically much more extensive than this, so for some descendants of the enslaved, other historical dates may be more relevant. Curaçao deliberately opted not to celebrate the abolition of slavery on July 1 but to commemorate the major uprising of the enslaved led by Tula on August 17, 1795. This annual event takes place at the national monument, at the Rif in Willemstad. In Indonesian history, yet another date holds special meaning. On January 1, 1860, more than three years before the abolition of slavery in Suriname and the Caribbean, the Dutch Parliament passed a law abolishing slavery in the Dutch East Indies. Hence, this date is more significant for descendants of the enslaved from

Indonesia, who are showing a growing interest in the history of slavery in Asia.

Aside from such public debates, there are other, less visible aspects of colonial slavery and its afterlives. For instance, the municipality of Utrecht recently decided to allow residents to change their surnames if these were associated with slavery. Subsequently, the central government commissioned research to determine whether it would be a good idea to extend this policy to the entire kingdom.

These visible, and less obvious, examples are just a few of the many ways in which the repercussions of slavery affect people's lives today. They bring to light the interconnectedness between these repercussions and the history of colonialism. They also reveal how the afterlives of the past touch on concrete and pressing current issues, such as discrimination in the labor market based on people's names and backgrounds.

Commemorations, monuments, and legal regulations can be seen as the most public, yet mainly cultural, gestures by which society—and particularly politicians—attempt to deal with and acknowledge the history of slavery and its afterlives. In the government's apology on December 19, 2022, Prime Minister Rutte emphasized that it was about “placing a comma, not a period.” The papers in this book show that the repercussions of colonial slavery, and hence the tasks that await us after the comma, not only pertain to culture, knowledge, and commemoration, but also compel us to deal with contemporary issues such as racism, marginalization, inequality of opportunity, and even inequality before the law.

The unequal distribution of knowledge, resources, and access to academia, debate, and policymaking within the Dutch kingdom necessitates a change in perspective and an equitable distribution.

This book makes clear that slavery and colonialism are at the root of cultural, social, economic, and political inequalities that have only been exacerbated by their afterlives. It also asserts that much more research is needed to gain a better understanding of the precise workings and effects of these afterlives. It is obvious that the unequal distribution of knowledge, resources, and access to academia, debate, and policymaking has concrete consequences. The differences within the Dutch kingdom are significant. The Caribbean part of the kingdom, for example, lacks a solid infrastructure, financial resources, and institutions to conduct island-focused research on

the history of slavery. Local researchers often depend on external funding. However, the grantors of subsidies have their own objectives and are not always interested in issues relevant to the Caribbean population or context.

Without a doubt, these mechanisms influence knowledge production, as we personally experienced in the making of this publication. We aimed to compile a volume featuring a wide diversity of authors including a large percentage of contributors with current or past connections to the Caribbean parts of the Netherlands, Suriname, and Indonesia either by origin, residence, or employment. The fact that we did not achieve as much as we had hoped for in this regard is related to the unequal distribution of knowledge, resources, and access. Sometimes, it was impossible for an author to write a paper within the timeframe that we set because not enough information was available on the topic due to unequal knowledge production. There were also authors who we approached—some of whom had been more or less denied access to academia for a long time—who declined to contribute to a project commissioned by the Dutch government and entrusted to four established knowledge institutions. These matters merit our attention. It is important to acknowledge that various mechanisms in the academic community lead to inaccessibility and even the exclusion of certain individuals and perspectives. Those who have an established position in academia and governance must be urged to take responsibility for breaking down these barriers, because showing openness to everyone who contributes to knowledge formation can bring about an exchange of interpretations and yield more balanced narratives based on multivocality and new perspectives and insights.

In Conclusion

Slavery & the Dutch State offers several insights and recommendations regarding the history of slavery, its afterlives, and the role of the Dutch state. First and foremost, we conclude that the state has been slow to take active measures to counteract the adverse societal effects of the legacies of slavery and colonialism. Now that governments and other institutions are finally developing an awareness of the history of colonial slavery, its repercussions, and their own complicity in it, we emphasize that redress is about more than gestures in the realms of culture, knowledge, and commemoration. Redress requires the Dutch government to act more consciously and decisively to eliminate contemporary social, economic,

and societal inequalities stemming from the afterlives of colonial slavery. Recognition and redress require a multifaceted, “kingdom-wide” dialogue, involving various communities, descendants, and governments, and a similar “global-scale” dialogue involving other formerly colonized areas affected by Dutch colonial slavery. The specter of fragmentation looms in this process because it entails a multitude of initiatives and projects addressing a variety of histories and repercussions, for diverse audiences and descendant communities. However, fragmentation, be it substantive, geographical, or otherwise, should be prevented as much as possible. An integrated approach would help counteract potential one-upmanship in a “hierarchy of suffering.” A coherent approach would address a variety of aspects of Dutch slavery and its repercussions, the relationship between slavery and colonialism, and thus also the links between (descendant) communities.

This book also advocates for a more inclusive approach to knowledge production. To this end, we must make room for a change in perspectives, learn to listen to underrepresented voices, and redistribute resources to enable thorough research on various issues related to slavery and colonialism. We must also take a critical look at the mechanisms through which research funding is allocated within the Dutch kingdom. It would be easy to remove certain obstacles to the submission of research proposals in the Netherlands and between the Netherlands and the Caribbean part of the kingdom. These include requirements related to applicants’ formal research affiliations and qualifications (i.e., tenured PhDs employed at a research institution) and the evaluation of their work experience (now mainly based on the number of peer-reviewed publications). Validating knowledge based on the societal impact of research or having relevant networks within certain communities could also be valid selection criteria. In the Netherlands, hiring policies at universities and research institutes also need to be revised to structurally change the composition of teaching staff and researchers. In addition, there are practical obstacles between the Netherlands and the Caribbean islands—such as procedures for obtaining travel grants, visas, and accommodation—which could be addressed by appointing officials who can provide support in these matters, for instance. After all, such obstacles can also be seen as part of a persistent and unwanted legacy of colonial slavery.

Understanding the history of slavery in all its diversity can provide starting points for better understanding the comprehensiveness and pervasiveness of colonial slavery's legacy. A depth and diversity of perspectives can create a fertile ground for dialogue and mutual understanding. In *Slavery & the Dutch State*, the authors call for research based on a close collaboration between universities and other research and knowledge institutions, archives, museums, heritage institutions, and descendants' organizations. As a follow-up to *Slavery & the Dutch State*, a research agenda has been published to coordinate future research.³ An ambitious research plan can only be established by working in a less fragmented and ad hoc manner. Cooperation is key to raise consciousness, share knowledge, and generate new fundamental academic research. Long-term research is needed in various fields and from various disciplines. Important topics include the intergenerational, social, cultural, somatic, psychological, and institutional afterlives of slavery; the present-day effects of apologies and restoration; the history of Dutch-Asian slave trade and slavery; various social and cultural aspects of Dutch slavery worldwide (family formation, mobility, sense-making, religion); the history of colonial policy, interests, and impact of slavery; the ties and circulation between Europe and the Atlantic and Asian colonies and colonial empires; and the effects of Dutch colonial slavery on (formerly) colonized societies.

Notes

- 1 Laura van Baars, "Iedereen op Saparoea kent het gruwelijke verhaal van de moord op de resident en zijn gezin," *Trouw*, April 5, 2023, <https://www.trouw.nl/binnenland/iedereen-op-saparoea-kent-het-gruwelijke-verhaal-van-de-moord-op-de-resident-en-zijn-gezin~b6ofro53/>.
- 2 Tonny van der Mee, "Nazaten tot slaaf gemaakten kunnen naam gratis veranderen: 'Draait om zelfbeschikking,'" *Het Parool*, December 20, 2022, <https://www.parool.nl/excuses-slavernijverleden/nazaten-tot-slaaf-gemaakten-kunnen-naam-gratis-veranderen-draait-om-zelfbeschikking~b4e3ob7b/>.
- 3 Dutch Colonial Slavery and its Afterlives, 2025-2035 Research Agenda, <https://www.staatslavernij.nl/assets/files/pu-kitlv-kennisagenda-slavernijverleden-en-def2.pdf>.

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About the Authors

Rose Mary Allen is a cultural anthropologist and extraordinary professor of Culture, Community and History at the University of Curaçao. In April 2024, Professor Allen became the first Thinker in Residence at the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies, Radboud University, Nijmegen.

Luc Alofs is a cultural anthropologist and historian. He is a senior research lecturer at the University of Aruba. Previously, he was a lecturer at the Instituto Pedagógico Aruba and a curriculum developer for the Department of Education in Aruba.

Markus Balkenhol is a social anthropologist researching colonialism, race/ racism, citizenship, cultural heritage, and religion. He is a researcher at Meertens Institute. His PhD dissertation *Tracing Slavery: An Ethnography of Diaspora, Affect, and Cultural Heritage in Amsterdam* (2014), focuses on different forms of cultural memory of slavery in Amsterdam Southeast. Most recently, he coauthored *The Secular Sacred: Emotions of Belonging and the Perils of Nation and Religion* (2020) and published the monograph *Tracing Slavery: The Politics of Atlantic Memory in the Netherlands* (2021).

Ulbe Bosma is a senior researcher at the International Institute of Social History (IISG) and a professor of International Comparative Social History at the Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam. He has authored numerous books and articles on colonial history. His most recent book, *The World of Sugar*, was published in 2023 by Harvard University Press.

Martin Bossenbroek is a historian and author. He has published extensively about (Dutch) colonial history and the history of slavery. His best-known works are the award-winning book *The Boer War* (2018) and *De wraak van Diponegoro: Begin en einde van Nederlands-Indië* [Revenge of Diponegoro: The Rise and Fall of the Dutch East Indies] (2020). March 2023 saw the publication of *De Zanzibardriehoek: Een slavernijgeschiedenis 1860-1900* [The Zanzibar Triangle: A History of Slavery 1860-1900], which won the Libris Geschiedenisprijs, an award for historical writing.

Pepijn Brandon is a professor of Global Economic and Social History at the Vrije Universiteit (VU) and a senior researcher at the International Institute of Social History (IISG) in the Netherlands. He has led various research projects on the Dutch history of slavery.

Jan Breman is a sociologist and emeritus professor at Erasmus University Rotterdam and the University of Amsterdam. He has written numerous publications on the nature and impact of Dutch colonial governance in Indonesia and British imperialism in India. His most recent publication on this topic is *Colonialism and Racism: A Postcolonial Chronicle* (2021).

Esther Captain is a historian and senior researcher at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in Leiden. She is a member of the committee overseeing independent research into the role of the House of Orange-Nassau in Dutch colonial history and an author/ editor on this research team. She is specialized in late colonial Indonesia, the Indonesian revolution, and postcolonial Netherlands in relation to the Dutch Caribbean islands, Indonesia, and Suriname.

Titas Chakraborty is an Assistant Professor of History at Duke Kunshan University in Kunshan, China. She has written on gender, labor, and slavery. Her book, *Empire of Labor: How the East India Company Colonized Hired Work* will appear in 2025.

Gerhard de Kok is a maritime historian who earned a PhD at Leiden University in 2019 for his research into the local economic effects of the transatlantic slave trade in Zeeland (1755–1780).

Annemarie de Wildt is an independent researcher and curator. She was a curator at the Amsterdam Museum for almost 29 years. In that capacity, she helped set up the exhibition of the Golden Coach. She also collaborated on the *Amsterdam Slavery Heritage Guide* (2014).

Charles do Rego studied Social Geography and holds an MBA. He has studied Antillean history and regularly publishes on colonialism, slavery and resistance, education, immigration and integration, and constitutional matters. He was a member of the Advisory Council of Curaçao and (Deputy) Chairman of the Electoral Council.

Caroline Drieënhuizen is a historian specialized in Dutch colonial history (particularly in Indonesia) and decolonization processes. She is particularly interested in material culture and visual culture and collections in colonial contexts. She is a university lecturer at the Open Universiteit.

Edu Dumasy is the chair of the *Ontmoeten & (Her)denken* foundation and conducted research in schools in Indonesia from 1975 to 2018. He was also a school principal and teacher of transcultural pedagogy at various teacher training colleges in the Netherlands.

Kate Ekama is a postdoctoral fellow at the Laboratory for the Economics of Africa's Past, at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Trained as a historian, her research focuses on slavery and the slave trade in South Africa and Sri Lanka. She has published articles and chapters on desertion in the VOC Cape, the experience of slavery and manumission in Sri Lanka, and the use of slaves as collateral. She coedited the volume *Slavery and Bondage in Asia, 1550–1850: Towards a Global History of Coerced Labour* (2022). Ekama's current project focuses on the financial lives of enslaved people before emancipation in the British Cape Colony.

Felicia J. Fricke specializes in interdisciplinary Caribbean Heritage Studies, with a focus on Dutch Caribbean archaeology and osteology. In 2020, she published *Slaafgemaakt: Rethinking Enslavement in the Dutch Caribbean*.

Helmut Gezius is an organizational mental healthcare social worker who has supported community development in approximately 250 communities throughout Suriname. In 2023, he conducted an exploratory survey of Afro-Surinamese in Suriname to contribute to a research agenda about the history of slavery for the period 2023–2033. He is a researcher/lecturer in the Bachelor's program in Sociology and the Master's programs in Sustainable Development, and Social Development and Policy at Anton de Kom University in Suriname.

Margo Groenewoud is a social historian specialized in twentieth-century Dutch Caribbean history.

Jeanne Henriquez is a historian and gender scholar. She studied History and Women's Studies at Utrecht University and George Washington University. She was a museological designer for Museo Tula and Museum Kas di Pal'i Maishi. She also worked in domestic violence and child abuse prevention and served as chairwoman of the Nihaila House shelter.

Nicole Immler is a professor of Historical Memory and Transformative Justice at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht. She studied History and Cultural Studies in Austria and completed her PhD on the phenomenon of family memories (*Familiengedächtnis*). Since 2020, she has been leading the “Dialogics of Justice” research team.

Nancy Jouwe is a Dutch cultural historian and author who researches various topics including racism and intersectionality. She was involved in the publication of various city walking guides on the history of slavery and took part in research commissioned by the cities of Utrecht and Amsterdam into their ties with slavery. She was also coeditor of *Slavernij herbezien / Revisualizing Slavery* (2021).

Marjoleine Kars is a senior scholar at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and professor emerita at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She wrote the award-winning book *Blood on the River: A Chronicle of Mutiny and Freedom on the Wild Coast* (2020) about the 1763 slave rebellion in Berbice. She is currently working on a biography of an eighteenth-century African man in Berbice, the Dutch Republic, and Suriname.

Ellen Klinkers specializes in the colonial history of the Netherlands. She completed her PhD with a dissertation on the abolition of slavery in Suriname. She wrote a book on the colonial police in Suriname commissioned by the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) and a book on the Military Forces in Suriname commissioned by the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH). She also works as an image researcher.

Myrthe Kraaijenoord completed a Master’s degree in Colonial and Global History at Leiden University. She researched relations between the enslaved and free Black population of Curaçao during slavery.

Lauren Lauret is an assistant professor of Dutch History at Leiden University. Her research focuses on nineteenth-century Dutch politicians with a colonial past. In collaboration with Karwan Fatah-Black, she is working on a project about the forms of citizenship in the Dutch colonial empire, funded by the KNAW Staatsman Thorbecke Fund.

Geertje Mak is a professor of Political History of Gender in the Netherlands at the University of Amsterdam.

Kenny Meyers is the deputy director of HAVO/VWO adult education in Aruba. In addition to twenty-three years of teaching, he developed history curricula, teaching methods, and exams for secondary schools in Aruba.

Marit Monteiro is a professor of Cultural and Religious History at Radboud University.

Andrea Mosterman is Joseph Tregle Professor in Early American History and Jerah Johnson Professor in Maritime Studies and World History at the University of New Orleans. Her book *Spaces of Enslavement: A History of Slavery and Resistance in Dutch New York* (2021) won the 2020 Hendricks Award for best book-length manuscript relating to New Netherland and the Dutch colonial experience. She currently researches the voyage of the Dutch slave ship, the *Gideon*, and the seventeenth-century Dutch slave trade with North America.

Ramona Negrón is a postdoctoral researcher at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV). She specializes in the colonial, maritime, and slavery history of the early modern period. She coauthored *De grootste slavenhandelaren van Amsterdam: Over Jochem Matthijs en Coenraad Smitt* [The Private Slave Trade in Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam: On Jochem Matthijs and Coenraad Smitt] (2022).

Kwame Nimako is the founder and director of the Black Europe Summer School (BESS). He earned degrees in sociology and a PhD in economics at the University of Amsterdam, where he has lectured in the department of Political Science and the Centre for Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES). He has been a visiting professor in the department of African American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley and at Anton de Kom University in Suriname. He is the author or coauthor of more than thirty books, reports, and guidebooks on economic development, ethnic relations, social policy, urban renewal, and migration including: *The Dutch Atlantic: Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, with Glenn Willemsen (2011).

Erik Odegard studied History at Leiden University. He earned his PhD there in 2018 with a dissertation on the careers of seventeenth-century Dutch colonial governors. He was a researcher at the Mauritshuis, and since 2021, he has worked on an NWO-funded research project on private investors in colonial Dutch Brazil at the International Institute of Social History (IISG) in Amsterdam. In 2023, he also started researching the colonial history of the House of Orange-Nassau at Leiden University.

Mark Ponte is a historian and exhibition producer working for the Amsterdam Municipal Archives. He researches migration and slavery in Amsterdam and the Dutch Atlantic region.

Jeroen Puttevils is Associate Research Professor at the Centre for Urban History at the University of Antwerp. He researches the economic culture of the late medieval and early modern periods. Puttevils is Principal Investigator of the European Research Council project *Back to the Future: Future expectations and actions in late medieval and early modern Europe, ca. 1400–ca. 1830*.

Filipa Ribeiro da Silva is a Senior Researcher at the International Institute of Social History (IISG), specialized in global labor history, the slave trade, and business history. She is the author of *Dutch and Portuguese in Western Africa* (2011), coeditor of *Networks and Trans-Cultural Exchange* (2014), and of *African Voices from the Inquisition*, Vol. 1 (2021).

Sophie Rose conducted her PhD research on marriage and sexual relations in the Dutch colonies. She now researches the development of immigration law in the Caribbean region at the University of Tübingen.

Elviera Sandie is a sociologist, who has been active in the Surinamese youth, education, and cultural sectors for thirty years. She has worked for both government institutions and NGOs. She has also taught at high school and academic level at the Anton de Kom University of Suriname, and held executive positions at the Cultural Center Suriname (CCS) and the Culture Directorate of the Surinamese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MINOWC).

Alicia Schrikker is a Senior University Lecturer of Colonial and World History and Director of Research at the Leiden University Institute for History. She researches the history of colonial societies in Asia, and of Sri Lanka and Indonesia in particular. In collaboration with Nira Wickramasinghe, she edited the collection *Being a Slave: Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (2020). In 2021, her book *De vlieders van Boven-Digoel: Verborgene verhalen over kolonialisme* was published, in which she highlights various aspects of slavery and colonialism in Indonesia.

Raymund Schütz is a legal historian who works at the Municipal Archives of The Hague. He earned his PhD in 2016 with the dissertation *Kille mist: Het Nederlandse notariaat en de erfenis van de oorlog* [Cold Fog: The Dutch Notaries and the Legacy of the War]. Schütz regularly publishes on archives, transparency, and World War II. In collaboration with Joëlle Glerum, he contributed an article on The Hague's administrative complicity in slavery in: Esther Captain, Gert Oostindie, Valika Smeulders, eds., *Het koloniale en slavernijverleden van Hofstad Den Haag* (2022) [The Hague's Role in Colonialism and Slavery].

Valika Smeulders heads the Department of History at the Rijksmuseum. She specializes in the Dutch colonial past and its representation, museum collections and their social relevance, and restitution policy. She has written about the representation of slavery in the Netherlands, Curaçao, Suriname, Saint Martin, Ghana, and South Africa.

Martijn Stoutjesdijk studied Theology, Philosophy, and (Ancient) History. He has a PhD from Tilburg University for research on slavery in early Christian and early rabbinical parables. He is now a postdoctoral researcher at the Protestant Theological University in Utrecht, where he is working on a project funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) titled *Church and Slavery in the Dutch Empire: History, Theology and Heritage*.

Joris van den Tol earned his PhD at Leiden University in 2018 for his research into lobbying in relation to the WIC colony in Brazil. He was a postdoc at Harvard University and the University of Cambridge, where he studied Dutch merchants in seventeenth-century English colonies in the Atlantic. He coauthored *Serving the Chain? De Nederlandsche Bank and the Last Decades of Slavery, 1814–1863*, and *Geketend voor Hollands Glorie*, which explores South Holland's role in slavery. In September 2022, he was appointed assistant professor of Economic History at Radboud University in Nijmegen.

Tom van der Geugten studied history at the University of Amsterdam. He was a secondary school teacher and a college instructor at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and at the Fontys Teacher Training College in Tilburg. In addition, he is an author of history textbooks.

Marie Christine van der Sman studied history at the University of Groningen and museology at Leiden University. She is the former director of Haags Historisch Museum, Museum Meermanno-Westreenianum, and Museon.

Coen van Galen is an Associate Professor of Social History at Radboud University in Nijmegen. He is the initiator of the Historical Database Suriname and the Caribbean, a citizen science project that digitizes and publishes slave registers and other population registers from the Caribbean for public access and academic research.

Michiel van Kempen is a professor of Dutch Caribbean Literature at the University of Amsterdam. He wrote a literary history of Suriname and compiled numerous anthologies. His latest publications include the poetry collection *Het eiland* (2020), *Het andere postkoloniale oog* (2020), an anthology of the works of Jit Narain titled *Een mensenkind in niemandsland* (2021), a revised biography of Albert Helman titled *Pionier en rebel* (2022), an educational edition of Anton de Kom's *Wij slaven van Suriname* (2022), the Album of Caribbean Poetry (2022), and *Dat wij zongen* (2022).

Matthias van Rossum is a Senior Researcher at the International Institute of Social History (IISG) in Amsterdam and professor of Global Histories of Labor and Colonialism at Radboud University in Nijmegen. He is specialized in the history of slavery in Asia and its ties to slavery in the Atlantic world. He heads the GLOBALISE project, which is developing a digital research infrastructure for the VOC archives. Van Rossum is also one of the coordinators of *Exploring Slave Trade in Asia*, which is creating a reconstruction of the Asian slave trade. In the summer of 2022, he received an NWO grant to start the research project *Resisting Enslavement: A Global Historical Approach to Slavery in the Dutch Atlantic and Asian Empires (1620-1815)*, which focuses on the resistance put up by enslaved people and draws from courtroom eyewitness testimonies. In November 2023 he received an ERC Consolidator grant to continue this research as part of the larger *Voices of Resistance* project.

Anne-Marieke van Schaik is an art historian who has worked as a curator at the Tax and Customs Museum in Rotterdam since 2007. In 2002, she curated the exhibition titled *Belast koloniaal verleden* [Charged Colonial Past].

Alex van Stipriaan is a retired professor of Caribbean history at Erasmus University Rotterdam, who initiates and provides consultation on intercultural and heritage projects. He focuses primarily on the history, cultures, and art of the Caribbean. His latest publications are *Rotterdam in slavernij* [Rotterdam in slavery] (2023) and *Caribbean Cultural Heritage and Nation* with Luc Alofs and Francio Guadeloupe.

Urwin Vyent is the director of the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee). In addition to his work for NiNsee, he is part of the team planning and developing the National Slavery Museum in Amsterdam.

Arthur Weststeijn is an assistant professor of Political History at Utrecht University. He studies the intellectual history of European colonialism, with a specific focus on the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and its colonial empire.

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Slavery & the Dutch State is intended as a compass for society, politics and academia. Its wide-ranging authors critically dissect our knowledge about slavery and its afterlives. Why do we know so much more about some aspects of this legacy than others? This book explores the past and present of the Atlantic world, the Indonesian archipelago, the Indian Ocean, and the Netherlands.

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Rose Mary Allen (1950) is an anthropologist and extraordinary professor of Culture, Community and History at the University of Curaçao.

Esther Captain (1969) is a historian and senior researcher at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in Leiden. She is specialized in late colonial Indonesia, the Indonesian revolution, and postcolonial Netherlands in relation to the Dutch Caribbean islands, Indonesia, and Suriname.

Matthias van Rossum (1984) is a historian and senior researcher at the International Institute of Social History (IISG) in Amsterdam. He focuses on the history of slavery in Asia and its links to the Atlantic slave trade.

Urwin Vyent (1958) is the director of the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee).

