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Slavery in the cultural imagination: debates, Ssilences, and dissent in the Neerlandophone space

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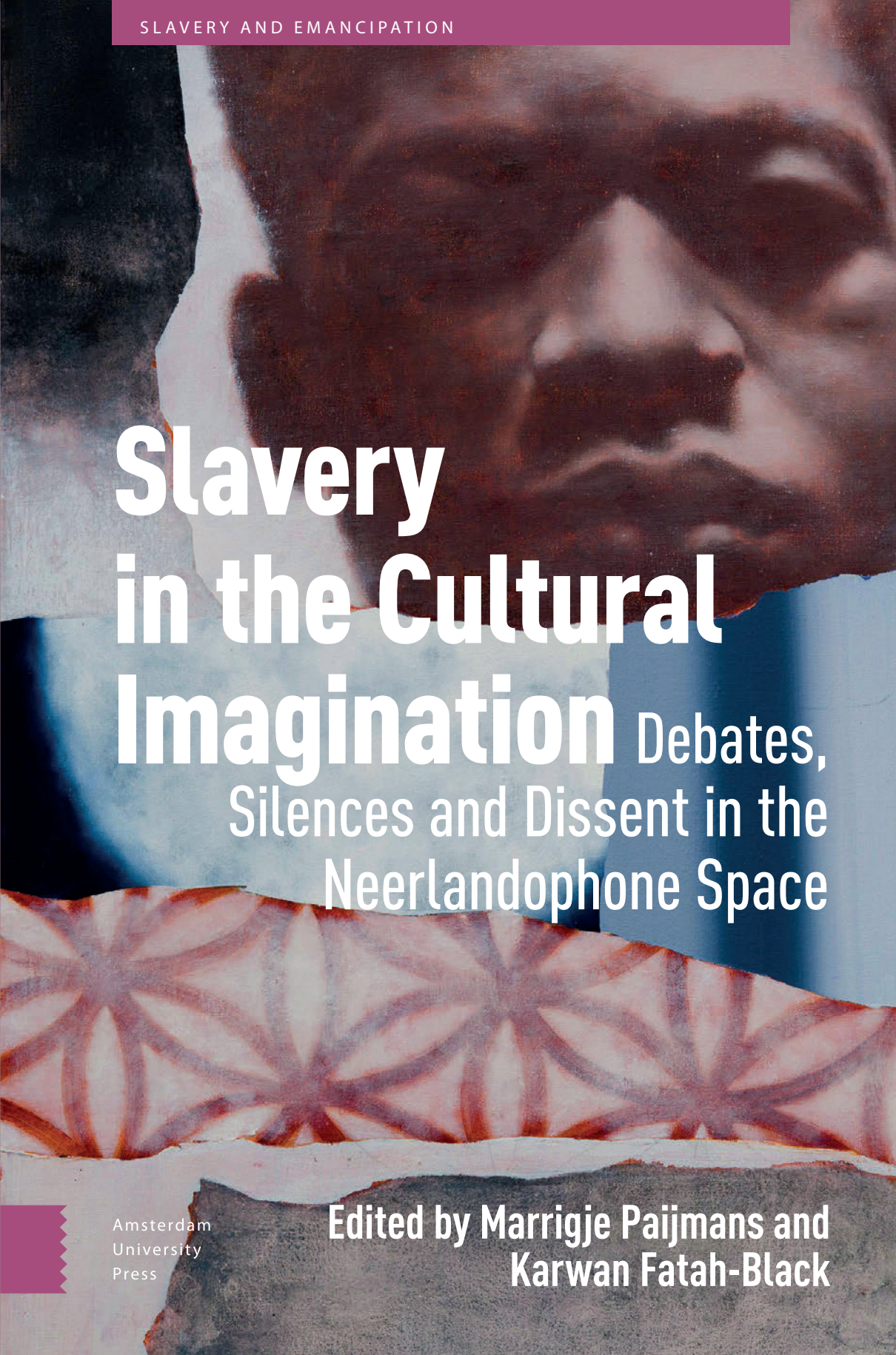
SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION



Slavery in the Cultural Imagination

Debates, Silences and Dissent in the Neerlandophone Space

Edited by Marrigje Paijmans and Karwan Fatah-Black

Amsterdam University Press

Slavery in the Cultural Imagination

Slavery and Emancipation

This series contributes to breaking the mold of slavery studies by offering a platform for a wide range of historiographical approaches springing from a critical re-examination of primary sources. As the history of slavery and the legacy of its global abolition continue to fascinate scholars, this series takes as a starting point the idea that any understanding of slavery and its societal afterlife necessarily calls for an analysis of the distribution of historical power, as well as an acknowledgement of the fact that – while varying in scale and intensity – forms of enslavement can be found throughout human civilization and across the globe.

As such, it pays close attention to the legacies of slavery, such as cultural production, cultures of remembrance and forms of exclusion, as well as the struggle for equality and emancipation. We welcome proposals that deal with topics such as, but are not exclusive to, enslaved lifeways, legal foundations, economies of slavery, abolition of slavery, representations, cultures of resistance, and emancipation.

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1. Introduction: Here Are Lions[1]

Marrigje Paijmans

Abstract: With the rising tide of scholarly and societal interest in the history and legacy of colonialism and slavery, this collection offers a much-needed diachronic analysis of the cultural representations of the lives and afterlives of those subject to slavery and indenture. It focusses on the history of the 'neerlandophone' space, defined as the complex linguistic space spanning former Dutch colonies. This collection gives a *longue durée* overview, the cases encompassing the period from the early modern era to the present day, revealing the deep roots of the colonial 'cultural archive'. A wide variety of scholars demonstrate how attention to the layered and polyphonic qualities of narratives can reveal silent and disruptive voices in colonial discourse, as well as collective emotions and imaginations that have hitherto remained unrecorded in most historical sources. They discuss different aesthetic, poetical, and storytelling practices, including literature, photography, performance, philosophy, and other forms of knowledge production that were formed both in the metropolis and by enslaved and indentured peoples in the colonies.

Keywords: Cultural imagination; lives and afterlives of those subject to slavery; Dutch imperialism; legacies of Dutch slavery

'The Healing Process Must Start Now'

The Dutch apology for slavery delivered on 19 December 2022 by then Prime Minister Mark Rutte (2022) has been criticised, both for the insufficient prior consultation that took place with those to whom he was apologising (*NOS*

1 I would like to thank Karwan Fatah-Black, Liesbeth Minnaard, Susan Legêne, and Ilse Lazaroms for their feedback on this introduction and, particularly, Saskia Pieterse for her inspiring contribution to the preparation of this volume.

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Nieuws 2022), and for a lack of commitment to the process of reparatory healing (Ostiana 2023). However, little of the speech itself garnered any criticism. Indeed, its writer, Jan Walravens, penned an astonishing piece of rhetoric, recognising that the event was badly organised ('And I acknowledge that the build-up to this day could have been better') and brushing up Rutte's seemingly irreparable ethos ('I have experienced that change in thinking personally – I want to be open about that'). The fact that Rutte is a trained historian – and has long resisted this change in thinking based on his training (and authority) as a historian – is relevant here. The speech rightly acknowledged the contemporary effects of slavery ('we cannot ignore the effects of the past on the present'). It recognised Maroon heroes as 'those who put up resistance', and the apology itself was emphatically presented as 'not a full stop, but a comma' in the collective progressing of the shared past of slavery. These are important utterances, and yet the speech evoked 'ambivalent feelings' (*een dubbel gevoel*) amongst members of the Black community (*NOS Nieuws* 2022).[2]

This disquiet becomes more insightful following a textual analysis of the speech. For example, the speech presents the relationship of perpetrator and victim from the days of slavery as unidirectional. In accepting 'responsibility for the terrible suffering inflicted on enslaved people and their descendants', the speech represents the Dutch state and its representatives as perpetrators, who 'facilitated, stimulated, preserved and profited from slavery', and the enslaved people and their descendants as victims of 'racist stereotypes', 'discriminatory patterns of exclusion', and 'social inequality'. In doing so, the speech neglects a basic premise of postcolonial theory, expounded by many scholars including Aimé Césaire and Gloria Wekker, that both the colonised and the coloniser take victim positions in this relationship: 'a nation which colonizes, [...] a civilization which justifies colonization – and therefore force – is already a sick civilization, a civilization that is morally diseased [...]' (Césaire 1972, 39, quoted by Wekker 2016, 3–4). This vulnerable aspect of white Dutch identity remains unacknowledged in the speech, which explains why the intended 'healing process' never implies any self-scrutiny of whiteness – a term omitted from the speech completely. The white colonial subject remains unscathed and 'in charge', interpreting the process of mutual recovery in terms of 'working', 'fostering', 'encouraging', and 'progress'. With the powerful Dutch state finally on board, 'all facets of

2 In this volume Black is capitalised when referring to groups in racial, ethnic, or cultural terms. 'Black' reflects a shared sense of identity and community, whilst 'white' carries a different set of meanings.

the history of slavery and its effects up to the present day will be brought to light' (Rutte 2022). Writing, and specifically the promise of writing a new account of Dutch history, is a returning theme in this speech, as well as in other similar speeches by Dutch officials.

The writing of this new history is presented as a form of redress that is both inclusive and open-ended, and thus leaves space for ambiguity. Even if 'we are writing a comma', it is imperative that a full stop is accomplished in the near future: 'The healing process must start now. […] It is vital that the steps we take now are truly taken *together*' (Rutte 2022, emphasis in original). Why 'must'? Why 'now'? Why '*together*'? The Dutch state insists on collaboration, because a purely white undertaking in this phase of the decolonisation is no longer defensible. As writer and activist Jermain Ostiana (2023) explains in *The Guardian*, '[i]mposing such an impactful decision as a one-way announcement from above tells you everything about the hierarchy that still governs relations between the Netherlands and its former colonial possessions'. A textual analysis of the speech demonstrates that the issues surrounding it are also present in the speech itself, suggesting they are structural rather than incidental (see also chapter 9 in this volume). Opening with this example, *Slavery in the Cultural Imagination: Debates, Silences, and Dissent in the Neerlandophone Space* suggests that textual analysis is a crucial tool in the process of self-scrutiny, and the subsequent writing of a history of slavery.

With the rising tide of scholarly and societal interest in the past and legacy of colonialism and slavery, this volume offers a much-needed diachronic analysis of the cultural imagination of the lives and afterlives of those subject to slavery and indenture. It focusses on the history of the 'neerlandophone' space, defined as the complex linguistic space spanning former Dutch colonies. It provides a *longue durée* overview, encompassing the period from the early modern era to the present, revealing the deep and expansive roots of the colonial 'cultural archive'. The main motivation of this volume, which originated within the field of Dutch literary studies, is to (re-)examine the imagination of slavery using instruments from literary theory and profound knowledge of the 'Dutch' imagination to gain a better understanding of its entanglement with Dutch culture and identity.

Simultaneously, it is necessary to express awareness of the white-centeredness of Dutch academia and Dutch literary studies in particular. White positionality is dominant in this volume as well, both in terms of contributors and sources, even if the aim was to provide a diverse overview. With regard to the representation of non-white authors, this volume only takes small steps, but for Dutch literary studies, it is a giant leap forward,

and hopefully this book will inspire young academics to take the work further. To provide better insight into the decolonial pursuit that lies at the core of this volume, the following section examines the colonial roots of Dutch literary studies.

A Nineteenth-Century Mandate

Since the founding of the Dutch nation state in 1815, literary studies has acted as a 'pacesetter' in processes of nation building (Laan 1997, 42, 222–25; Leerssen 2006, 14). In his inaugural lecture at the University of Groningen, B. H. Lulofs – one of the first professors of Dutch literature – equated the work of seventeenth-century poets Joost van den Vondel and P. C. Hooft to the colonial conquests of Governor General Rijcklof van Goens and Admiral Piet Hein: 'Our Hoofts and Vondels knew how to discover the most hidden mines of riches and beauties, both in our language and in those of others, and to pour out this wealth, with a lavish hand, into their own works' (Lulofs 1815, 22–23, translation by the author).[3] Lulofs, however, remained silent about the atrocities. Even if the history of the relationship between Dutch literary studies and colonialism has yet to be written, it is clear the field contributed to a heroic representation of 'overseas trade and expansion' as an integral part of Dutch identity. Heroes of the Dutch literary canon such as Willem Bilderdijk (1756–1831) were violently opposed to Black autonomy and humanism (Fatah-Black 2021, 2024) and it was this mentality that paved the way for the concealment of the Dutch involvement in slavery, for example through the reproduction of cultural representations such as the 'Golden Age' and the 'Enlightenment' (Helmers and Janssen 2018, 398; van der Molen 2019; Pieterse 2019; see also Sharp in this volume).

To this day, disciplines within the broad remit of the humanities have shown very little ambition to break loose from their initial mandate, which is why, until very recently, the topics of colonialism and slavery received scant attention. As pointed out by Ann Stoler (1995, 5, 12, 117), historical studies in Dutch academia were 'compartmentalised' in such a way that the history of the metropole was structurally set apart from the history of the colony, keeping the study of colonialism and postcolonialism out of the central curriculum and thus structurally underfunded (Wekker 2016, 25–26). Literary scholars Lisanne Snelders (2018, 331–40) and Liesbeth Minnaard (2021) apply this argument to Dutch literary studies. Minnaard's (2021, 224)

3 Lulofs mentions both Rijcklof van Goens and Piet Hein by name.

analysis of the leading Dutch journal *Nederlandse letterkunde* shows that, until recently, slavery hardly featured in Dutch literary studies. Discussion was at best fragmentary, specifically not undertaken in relation to national history, and structurally excluded the perspectives of Others. Minnaard (2012, 228) also addresses the disciplinary division between historical and modern literary studies, which serves only to deny any relation between racist tendencies in contemporary literature and its colonial origins.

Dutch literary studies has been, and indeed still is, centred on whiteness, which 'is consistently bracketed and is thereby invisibilized and installed as the norm' (Wekker 2016, 23). It is only recently that Dutch and Flemish literary scholars such as Gloria Wekker, Liesbeth Minnaard, Saskia Pieterse, Thalia Ostendorf, Mikki Stelder, and Lieselot De Taeye have started to build on the legacy of international scholars such as Toni Morrison (1992), Saidiya Hartman (1997), and Richard Dyer (1997), who analysed whiteness in the context of American society and scholarship. Philomena Essed occupies a significant intermediate position, as a Dutch Surinamese scholar whose book on structural racism (*Alledaags racisme*, 1984) was soon forgotten in the Netherlands, while the English translation (*Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*, 1990) resulted in a professorship of Critical Race, Gender, and Leadership Studies at Antioch University. As Wekker (2016) rightly suggests, to displace whiteness from the 'unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance', whiteness must be named (24). It is in this context that the above paragraphs examining the positionality of Dutch literary studies should be read, and in which some contributors to this volume position their own disciplinary and cultural backgrounds.

Scholarly Motivations

Scholarly knowledge of the cultural imagination of slavery provides a necessary addition to the important research conducted by historians. In fact, the field of history was itself deeply implicated in forging and sustaining colonial perspectives on the past. Contributors to this volume build on data from slave and emancipation registers, ships' logs, laws, regulations, and practices of slavery exposed by historians such as Alex van Stipriaan et al. (2007), Stuurman (2009), Dienke Hondius et al. (2014), and Dragtenstein (2024). Susan Legêne's (2010) *Spiegelreflex* offers an astute discussion of key events in the legacy of Dutch slavery and provides the basis for both Gertjan Schutte's chapter on eighteenth-century legal discourse and Sophie van

Elzen's examination of nineteenth-century women's antislavery petitions. As one of the founders of historical research into slavery in the Netherlands, Legêne, in the epilogue of this volume, reflects on developments in the field since 2010.

Yet rather than simply contributing to the historical study of the socio-economic development of slavery, this volume aims to shed light on the cultural backgrounds and experiences of slavery from diverse perspectives and, particularly, imaginations. The cultural imagination of slavery does not follow historiographic chronologies, but rather merges different (virtual) realities, regardless of their historical momentum. The chapters in this volume analyse and interpret this dynamic. Accepting that the imaginations or ideas underlying practices of slavery have a tendency to linger unseen long after the practices have been abolished (Fatah-Black 2021), it is crucial to gain a better understanding of the content and dynamics of such ideas.

Dutch literary studies can make a significant contribution to the study of slavery, given the discipline's extensive expertise in analysing the cultural imagination. Two hundred years of experience with Dutch literature has resulted in a set of finely honed instruments, geared towards the excavation of ideas through in-depth analysis of literary qualities such as ambiguity, polyphony, and subversion. This volume addresses the need to examine textual qualities that have been structurally overlooked in Dutch literary studies, such as racial stereotypes, and to expand the research with neerlandophone material that is usually excluded, such as the manifestos of Indonesian nationalists, Caribbean music and dance.

For many contributors to this volume, the imagination is not simply an object of study, but also forms a key element of their methodology (see Bikoko, Van Binsbergen, Guadeloupe and Granger, and Schrikker in this volume). When written sources are absent and history remains silent, researchers may appeal to 'critical fabulation' (Hartman 2008, 11) to gain access to the past of slavery: 'to imagine what cannot be verified' (Hartman 2008, 12). Artists and activists have been precursors in the search for new methods – a process this volume wholeheartedly embraces and aims to advance in cross-discipline collaborations. The outcomes of such research are humbling. Especially the understanding that slavery's past may never fully reveal itself to scholarly methods prompts for a modest attitude, greater sensitivity, more generous hospitality, and a readiness to 'daaance' (see chapter 16 in this volume).

Consequently, this volume does not pretend to come to terms with slavery's past, nor does it attempt to write its definitive history. Rather, it seeks to gain a more diverse and inclusive understanding of the *colonial* past,

as a step towards a decolonised (literary) history. It should be noted that, whilst the studies collected in this volume do not profess to offer a complete picture of the 'cultural archive', they do offer a wide-ranging overview of the types of research that are currently being conducted into slavery in the neerlandophone space. It involves research into imaginations that can be considered Black, of colour, white, or hybrid – with the white imagination unfortunately prevailing. Some imaginations served as pretexts for slavery, whilst others contributed to silence on the topic, and still others dissented from colonial discourses. If there is something all the chapters comprising this volume indicate, it is that any categorisation is, in fact, a simplification, because imaginaries are inherently fuzzy, volatile, and prone to entanglement. In the following sections, the three central concepts of this volume are explained – the cultural imagination, dissent, and the neerlandophone space – as is the volume's diachronic and interdisciplinary approach.

The Cultural Imagination

Research into the cultural imagination of slavery concerns ideas by individuals and groups, formed both in the metropolis and by colonised, enslaved, and indentured peoples, and published through established and popular as well as marginal and subversive media. It extends beyond literature, encompassing the notion of 'text' in the broadest possible sense, including (moving) images, performances, scholarly treatises, historical narratives, and discourse. Ideas may be considered representations of a social reality, as well as radically new expressions of the virtual. Although representations and expressions may differ depending on time, place, genre, or medium, the notion of the imagination makes it possible to interpret them as reiterations of a similar idea.

Methodologically, the volume seeks to connect with research in the cultural imagination, and postcolonial and decolonising theory as they intersect with current theories of gender, sexuality, class, and ecology. It also expresses a particular interest in artistic research and literary experiments that involve the imagination, such as those undertaken in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) by Christina Sharpe, or *Last* ('Burden', 2023) by Ellen Ombre in the Netherlands. This interest is reflected in the experimental methods through which contributors to this volume engage with fictional, artistic, and personal texts.

Most contributors to this volume considered their object of analysis a manifestation of the cultural imagination, without delving deeply into

epistemological or aesthetic theory of the imagination itself. Yet a few common themes can be observed in the contributors' approaches to the imagination, which may be considered representative of methods currently used in the research of slavery in the neerlandophone space. However, the examples used to illustrate these approaches should not be understood as an attempt to reduce those chapters to one single method or scholarly tradition. In fact, most chapters combine multiple approaches.

In many chapters the cultural imagination is considered a projection screen of ideas held by individuals or groups. It is not a 'pure' space that transcends discourse, but rather a manifestation of social hierarchies and power structures, often perceived in terms of Michel Foucault's (1990, 95) notion of power/knowledge, or discourse. In many contributions the influence of Edward Said's (1978) seminal work *Orientalism* is still – or rather, only now – immanent. *Orientalism* has been ground-breaking in revealing how ways of speaking about the colony and the colonial Other always imply hierarchies, and how colonial scholarship and politics mutually support each other in generating oppression. Most prominently, the chapters by Claudia Zeller, Pichayapat Naisupap, Sophie van den Elzen, Nancy Jouwe, Emmanuel Akwasi Adu-Ampong, and Anke Bosma are committed to the urgent recovery of the ground lost in Dutch research of slavery, by connecting the legacy of *Orientalism* to the more recent work of, for instance, Homi Bhabha (1994), Saidiya Hartman (1997), Katherine McKittrick (2022), Charles Taylor (2004), and, in the Netherlands, Gloria Wekker (2016).

To give an example, Anke Bosma's chapter 'Imagining Dutch Slavery Legacies Through the Rural-Urban Divide in the TV Show *Grenslanders*' analyses the Dutch crime series *Grenslanders* ('Borderlanders', 2019), which relates the present-day trafficking of women for sex work to the Dutch history of slavery. She argues that, despite the series' overt rejection of trafficking, it also produces the problematic storyline of the fourteen-year-old African girl Afi starting a sexual relationship with her trafficker (see chapter 13 in this volume). Or rather, one should say, it 'reproduces' that storyline, considering that the portrayal of a female character who is dehumanised on the one hand, and sexualised on the other almost reiterates that of the seventeenth-century theatre play *Moortje* ('Little Moor', 1617), analysed by Marrigje Paijmans (see chapter 2 in this volume). The two enslaved women in the play – one Black, the other white – embody Afi's dual personality, and in both cases this storyline is set against the background of Dutch involvement in human trafficking. It clearly demonstrates that, to this day, filmmakers have not quite grasped the processes by which the cultural archive actively co-writes such shows.

In this context, a remarkable similarity should also be noted between several historical contributions in their approach to the archive as a representation of colonial discourse. This approach can be understood as a counter movement to the 'bookkeeping model' – a narrative of slavery and slave trade that has been coined thus by Kwame Nimako, Amy Abdou, and Glenn Willemsen (2013), and which has been dominant in Dutch historical research. The bookkeeping model narrates slavery as 'a legitimate business, reflecting on the profits, losses, and sometimes, bad luck endured by the WIC [Dutch West India Company]', and was used by prominent Dutch historians to whitewash the past of Dutch slavery (Nimako, Abdou, and Willemsen 2013, 35). The chapters by Gertjan Schutte, Alicia Schrikker, and Carine Zaayman break with these research practices by making archival sources visible, not as objective or factual depictions of the past, but as products of a white and thoroughly colonial imagination. The approach characterises a new generation of historians with the courage to challenge both rigid empirical tradition and the stubborn belief in factual knowledge.

Other chapters adhere more closely to Said's (1994) later work *Culture and Imperialism* and his method of 'contrapuntal reading', which 'must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it', thus aiming to bring marginalised and silent voices to the fore (66). This method, which explores manifold escapes from Orientalist discourse, does not consider the imagination a projection screen, but rather sticks to the idea that there is always an element of the imagination that escapes representation. In his chapter 'Convict Labour and Concubinage in the Dutch East Indies: Historical and Literary Reappropriations of Martha Christina Tiahahu's Anti-Colonial Revolt', Gerlov van Engelenhoven analyses a Dutch memoir figuring Martha Christina Tiahahu, a Moluccan warrior sentenced to hard labour for her role in the 1817 revolt against Dutch colonial rule. By focusing on moments of silence in the text, Van Engelenhoven demonstrates how it systematically conceals Tiahahu's grim fate, thus hiding the ideological purpose of the memoir to reaffirm the legitimacy of colonial rule. To disentangle Tiahahu's voice from the text, Van Engelenhoven also reads Maria Dermoût's literary retelling of the revolt in *De juwelen haarkam* (1956). In this story the revolt materialises through its most prominent source's continued refusal to speak about it, creating an open-ended indication towards an alternative reading of the revolt as a legitimate protest. Van Engelenhoven's contrapuntal reading thus shows how marginalised voices may appear in ambivalent silences – not yet present, but possible.

Several contributors emphasise how extremely slippery and evasive the cultural imagination is if one tries to come to grips with it. Researchers of

slavery are frequently confronted by sources that escape all scholarly representation, events that defy all logic, and feelings that cannot be expressed in words. Related to this, contributors explicitly indicate that they leave particularly painful and offensive stories and images uncited, unwilling to re-expose them to a society that still cannot treat them with the care and respect they need. Carine Zaayman's chapter 'Not Absent, But Not Seen: Narrating the History of Slavery at the Cape', for example, attempts to write the agonising story of the enslaved Susanna van Bengal using VOC documents. Susanna, labelled 'uncivilised' and 'barbaric', is found guilty of murder whilst the inhumanely cruel system that led Susanna to her act escapes any form of scrutiny. Not only do the archival sources exclude Susanna's voice, but they also represent her in ways that are so unbearable to read that they effectively contribute twice to the unimaginable nature of Susanna's suffering. With Robert Shell (1992), Zaayman contends that the most fundamental stumbling block in the representation of people like Susanna is presented by the category of 'slave', as it omits everything about a person not delimited by that designation. Researchers must look beyond the limits of sources, including their language, to create sensitivity for the people who suffered the horrible fate of slavery.

Finally, the imagination is considered an opportunity – a force even – for escape that can propel us into decolonial futures. This approach can be traced back to the thinking of Édouard Glissant, one of the foremost non-metropolitan thinkers in the francophone world and, in the wake of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, in the Anglo-American dominated field of postcolonial studies (Nesbitt 2010, 103–104). Glissant used the adjective as a noun – 'the imaginary' – manifesting his resistance to institutionalising what is, in fact, a capacity. He understood the imaginary as 'all the ways a culture has of perceiving and conceiving of the world. Hence, every human culture will have its own particular imaginary' (Wing 2010, xii). In this sense, the imaginary has the capacity to transform and transcend 'nonhistory' (Glissant 2010, 150) – the history that is endured rather than steered by the people living it, despite their attempts at resistance. To Glissant, the imaginary is key to actualising a Pan-Caribbean reality with a self-defined past and future (Nesbitt 2010, 103; Wing 2010, xii).

The only explicit use of Glissant's notion of the imaginary in this volume occurs in Francio Guadeloupe and Charissa Granger's chapter 'Human-ing Out Loud: Ontologies of Disorder in a Musically Exemplified Trans-Caribbean Option'. They introduce the 'trans-Caribbean option' as a radical escape from the colonial past and present, from the mind, from language, from national borders, from race, and even from the human. In a similar vein, Brenda

Bikoko explores contemporary art for its capacity to unsettle entrenched colonial representations. In a broader sense, Thomas van Binsbergen's chapter offers a decolonial interpretation of Spinoza's understanding of the imagination, considering the imagination a capacity for dissent. In his interpretation, the 'black scabby Brazilian' eventually escapes Spinoza's colonial dream.[4] These final three approaches to the imagination carry clear potential for 'dissent' – a notion that will be discussed next.

Voices of Dissent

As expressed in the title, one of the main purposes of this volume is to bring voices of dissent in colonial discourses to the fore. 'Dissent' here refers to a response that precedes criticism, as described by Sarah Ahmed (2014, 99) in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Opponents of slavery, not least enslaved people themselves, often lacked the material resources, the freedom, or even the subject position to express 'proper' criticism. Dissent is a less demanding and more sensitive notion that also recognises ideas, feelings, and silences as forms of resistance. As Ahmed (2014) explains, '[t]he feeling of being disgusted', for instance, 'may also be an element in a politics that seeks to challenge "what is"' (99).

Voices of dissent are not always easy to recognise and analyse in texts, because such voices tend to be hampered by the aporia between writing and the inability to write, between language and pain, between verbal and physical violence. It requires methods with great sensitivity and generosity to hear and acknowledge such voices. Although few contributors rely on affect theory explicitly, many combine a narrative approach with special attention for sensual experience, emotions, or feelings. Gerlov van Engelenhoven's chapter on the Moluccan revolt against Dutch colonial rule in 1817, for example, shows how voices of dissent can be discerned in the silence surrounding the revolt in colonial texts. Similarly, Carine Zaayman attempts to offer a response to the muteness enfolding the history of slavery at the Cape by 'reframing' the stories told by the VOC archives. In exposing the colonial epistemologies underlying the archives, Zaayman creates a space for dissenting stories, which lie hidden in the archives. Marrigje Paijmans shows how a colonial comedy such as *Moortje* (1617), which contains racist descriptions of enslaved characters, also

4 The similarity between Spinoza's and Glissant's understandings of the imagination is not coincidental, since Glissant is influenced by Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of immanence, which strongly resonates with Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677), as expounded by Lorna Burns (2012, 22).

raises questions about the hypocrisy of merchants involved in the slave trade. Of course, it is difficult to say whether these questions provoked criticism in seventeenth-century audiences, but they certainly involved a degree of dissent from the stereotypical image of the straightforward Dutch merchant. Finally, in their respective contributions, Nancy Jouwe and Brenda Bikoko take a transhistorical perspective, enabling them to investigate how visual representations of slavery are deployed by present-day artists and activists to unsettle and dissent from written accounts of slavery.

The above examples demonstrate how dissent can be entwined with texts defending or accepting slavery, corresponding to Ahmed's (2014) insight that 'dissent cannot be exterior to its object. Dissent is always implicated in what is being dissented from' (99). In opposition to traditional notions of criticism, dissent from colonial discourse is always also implicated in that very discourse, leaving no one unaffected. This is not to say that oppression is complete (see also Raben 2019), but rather that a clear cut between pretext and dissent would be oversimplifying the issue. Colonial texts may contain elements of doubt, compassion, or shame, whilst oppressed people may use a colonial platform or the dominant language to express their concerns with slavery. The different imaginations of slavery are intricate and entangled, and must be studied in close relation to each other.

The Neerlandophone Space

The volume concerns research into the Dutch involvement in slavery, the slave trade and indenture, and its global heritage. This research is conducted in the entire 'neerlandophone space', here defined as 'a complex network of interconnected Netherlands language or neerlandophone space, regions and countries' (Boehmer and de Mul 2012, 3). The notion was introduced by Elleke Boehmer and Sarah de Mul (2012) in *The Postcolonial Low Countries* to 'explore and interrogate how metropolitan cultures of the Low Countries are not, nor have ever been, self-sufficient entities' (3), but rather form part of this complex linguistic network. Seeking to document as much as shape the transnational formations through which the study of Dutch literature is currently being challenged, Boehmer and De Mul (2012, 2) also acknowledge that the neerlandophone space still implies a limitation of a conversation that should be conducted globally.

Francio Guadeloupe and Charissa Granger question the notion of the neerlandophone space in chapter 16 in this volume. Observing that the 'neerlandophone world' is too invested in 'organised neerlandophone

identities', they introduce the 'trans-Caribbean option' of 'co-creating Caribbean becomings with the blackened in the region: Afro, Indo, Sino, Indigeno, and yes, Euro, and those with Mediterranean and Near-Eastern extraction too'. They regard the neerlandophone space as exclusive as it presupposes (human) language as the primary form of communication. Instead, they propose worlds 'imagined and temporarily created in music and daaance', which involve the more inclusive capacities to move, sense, and relate.

The call for papers that preceded this volume contained an explicit invitation for papers about unpublished, archival, and oral sources in vernacular languages, such as Sranantongo, Papiamento, and Malay, with the aim of opening the neerlandophone space to multilingual approaches. The lack of responses to this part of the call underlines the need for multilingual research. It turns out that, even if the notion of the neerlandophone space has its limitations, it accurately expresses the conundrum in which Dutch literary studies presently finds itself: being based on a national language, whilst acknowledging the need to engage in multilingual collaborations.

A Diachronic and Interdisciplinary Approach

Four hundred years of colonial history and involvement in slavery and indenture have left palpable traces in the emotions and imagination of the Dutch (Legêne 2010; Nimako, Abdou, and Willemsen 2014; Wekker 2016). Yet 'Dutch exceptionalism' and the ubiquitous myth of the Netherlands as a 'colourblind' country have heavily glossed over these traces (Mathijssen 2019). The lack of awareness about the role the Netherlands played in the slave trade, and the anti-Black and Orientalist cultural production that accompanied it, stem from a complex merger of political, economic, and cultural interests that prohibit a critical understanding of Dutch racism and its history. This volume acts upon the urgent need for knowledge of slavery and its current impact by bridging the 'compartmentalisation' of the study of the Dutch colonial past on several different levels.[5] It proposes a *long durée* perspective, albeit one that tries not to interpret *longue durée* as a linear development towards a better world. Instead, and in accordance with Susan Legêne (2017, 119–20), it seeks to distinguish between the different 'layers of time' produced by colonial, postcolonial, and decolonising structures, conjunctions, and events. These layers assume different imaginations or

5 On compartmentalisation of the study of Dutch colonial literature, see Snelders (2018, 323–47).

realities that exist simultaneously. In exploring these realities, the volume aims to move beyond 'Dutch exceptionalism' without ignoring the specific Dutch context (Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn 2019). This transhistorical approach is reflected in the structure of the volume, which allows readers to make connections between imaginations of slavery from the seventeenth century to today. The most important transhistorical connections are highlighted per section under 'Section Summaries' below.

No attempt to trace the *longue durée* of slavery in the cultural imagination could content itself with a focus on a single genre or medium. Different times and ideas each called for different forms of representation and expression. This volume therefore includes texts by scholars from disciplines as varied as history, art history, literary studies, cultural analysis, and postcolonial studies, to share their disciplinary expertise on the topic of slavery. Consequently, the chapters in this volume discuss genres and media varying from literary sources such as travel accounts, theatre pieces, and children's literature to archival sources, petitions, legal documents, cartography, philosophical treatises, photographs, television series, architecture, and dance. The four sections, based on genre or media, characterise this volume as an aesthetic project, the central idea being that literary form contributes to meaning. Within the sections, it becomes clear which imaginations certain genres or media evoked over time. A bird's eye view of the sections shows that certain genres and media were more prominent than others in the discussion of slavery during certain periods. In the 'Age of Enlightenment', for example, Europeans wrote philosophical treatises (see chapters 14 and 15 in this volume). The fact that slavery was also discussed in classical comedy (see chapter 2 in this volume) only shows how much this genre was considered a philosophical instrument by contemporaries. It is no coincidence therefore that both the philosopher Spinoza and the playwright Bredero appealed to the Stoic metaphor of enslavement to the passions. Other particularly time-bound genres and media include petitions launched by women during the 'First Wave of Feminism' (see chapter 8 in this volume) and the tearing down of statues after the worldwide protests of Black Lives Matter (see chapter 10 in this volume). It is remarkable that not a single chapter focuses on a novel – the prominent genre in Dutch literature – perhaps because this genre has had great difficulty breaking away from its national and colonial legacy. Other media with an emphatically colonial background, however, such as the architecture of Amsterdam's canal houses (as discussed in chapter 11 in this volume), or music and dance handed down from the time of slavery (as discussed in chapter 16), have been successfully deployed for decolonising practices in our time.

Hic Sunt Leones

Slavery in the Cultural Imagination shows that the discussion of slavery, from the seventeenth century until today, has always evoked strong emotions. Today's debate is no exception in that it is conducted sub-optimally, underestimating both Black and white trauma, encouraging taboos, (self-) censorship, sadness, rage, and further polarisation. The compartmentalisation of Dutch colonial history has also led to slavery being framed as a historical and isolated phenomenon,[6] while case studies in this volume show how discussions of slavery often centred around related economic, religious, or legal questions. Exposing slavery in its entanglement with other pressing world problems could result in a more inclusive and constructive debate that does not distract us from the fact that slavery is still an – unacceptable – reality which, in a globalised world, implicates everyone.

Scholarship does not transcend debates on slavery. Its instruments of critical analysis and self-evaluation have partially been shaped by colonial discourse. Nonetheless, scholarship still has the responsibility to bring nuance to the debate, by providing knowledge that does not feign objectivity or obscure prejudice but actively works to reduce its blind spots. The contribution of literary studies in particular lies in the critical analysis of fiction, thus demonstrating the workings of the imagination – the partly unconscious level of knowledge where bias and prejudice can linger unchecked, yet which also harbours potential for change. The imagination is still a blank spot on the map of the legacy of slavery. In early modern European cartography, such places were marked with *Hic sunt leones* (here are lions). No matter how terrifying the unknown is, it is time to walk into the lion's den and unleash the imagination's capacity for change.

Section Summaries and Cover Design

The first section, 'Literary Imaginations', analyses literary representations of slavery from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, using postcolonial and decolonising theory. It questions the possibilities and limits of the literary medium as a vehicle for pro-slavery and abolitionist arguments, sentiments, and imaginaries. Marrigje Paijmans discusses how the comedy

6 The Global Slavery Index shows that slavery is an actual and global condition in which an 'estimated 50 million people were living in modern slavery on any given day in 2021', an increase of 10,000,000 people since 2016 (Walk Free 2023, 2).

Moortje (1617) represents slavery as both an actuality and a metaphor for subjection to the passions, on the brink of Amsterdam's involvement in the slave trade. Claudia Zeller suggests that the ways in which attitudes towards slavery in nineteenth-century travel accounts were adjusted for children's books correspond to the justifications that circulated in Dutch society at large. Gerlov van Engelenhoven analyses the representation of the Moluccan warrior Martha Christina Tiahahu in a Dutch captain's travel account, reflecting on the (im-)possibility of untangling indigenous voices from the colonial voices that dominated them. Spanning four centuries, these chapters point out the continuing hegemony of the white supremacist underpinning of colonial power structures, while also demonstrating that attention to the layered and polyphonic qualities of texts can reveal silent or dissenting voices.

The second section, 'Intersecting Imaginations', presents the work of cultural and intellectual historians at the intersection of colonial and other discourses. Pichayapat Naisupap examines the intersection of animal labour and human slavery in treatises on the elephant published in the Dutch Republic, demonstrating how the discourse of slavery hinged upon highly ambivalent qualities of rationality and liberty. Both Gertjan Schutte and Alicia Schrikker investigate how economic and political interests, as well as ethical reservations regarding the slave trade, played out in legal arguments presented in lawsuits, confirming social and colonial hierarchies. Sophie van den Elzen studies the intersection of the First Feminist Wave and abolitionism, showing that stories about the role women played in the campaign against slavery were used to assert the social importance of the work they undertook. These chapters reveal the historical situatedness of the 'imagination' as a faculty that never operates outside political, scientific, and cultural power relations, and which has shaped the archival material that historians have long regarded as factual representations. Due to this bias in colonial sources, it is 'only through an imaginative and layered engagement with the past', Schrikker argues, that we can do justice to the historical experience of enslaved people.

While the first two sections both discuss cultural objects from the colonial period, the third section, 'Visual and Spatial Imaginations', extends its scope to present-day practices and legacies of Dutch slavery and cultural remembrance. Carine Zaayman probes the scarcity of commemorations of the enslaved in South Africa by critically analysing the construction of the enslaved Susanna van Bengal's story based on the VOC archives. Nancy Jouwe connects a critical reading of visual sources from the slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean to shifting perspectives on the history of slavery in

present-day discourse, arguing that these sources can help us cut through colonial lenses of white innocence. Akwasi Adu-Ampong studies the role of slavery heritage tourism, arguing that cultural practices and performances in the Netherlands, and Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours in particular, appropriate the tools of tourism to serve activist goals of resistance and emancipation. Brenda Bikoko takes the artistic installation *The Recognition Machine* (2019) as the starting point for a critical examination of colonial and neo-colonial surveillance techniques using facial recognition software. Anke Bosma's chapter demonstrates how the imagined rural-urban divide in the Netherlands can foreclose a critique of colonial legacies, based on an analysis of the Dutch television show *Grenslanders* (2019). This section illuminates how images and spaces carry affects from the past which, under specific circumstances in postcolonial societies, can start resonating anew.

The fourth section, 'Philosophical Imaginations', makes a foray into philosophy. Hasana Sharp turns to one of the great puzzles of the Enlightenment: How to reconcile the affirmation of universal freedom with the reality of slavery? Contrary to most Enlightenment thinkers, Spinoza affirmed that we are all born in bondage, an insight that allows Sharp to grapple with the realities of colonial slavery in a different way – without letting Spinoza off the hook too easily. Thomas van Binsbergen discusses Spinoza's infamous dream of the 'black, scabby Brazilian'. He mobilises Spinoza's notion of the imagination to attempt a decolonial intervention into the Dutch dream of slavery. Charissa Granger and Francio Guadeloupe aim to think belonging in terms of entangled histories, yet beyond colonial frameworks. Their chapter presents 'Trance-Caribbean daaance' as a practice through which to sense, think, and act 'firmly in the flesh of the world', and it provides a future-oriented and hopeful closure to this volume.

Finally, the artwork on the cover is considered a contribution to the volume as well. Dion Rosina's *Is It a Dream?* (2023) is a painting based on a digital collage of existing images, combining myths, spirituality, and history relating to the African diaspora. It contains a picture of a white circle reminiscent of the moon, a fragment of decorative pattern, three unidentifiable scraps of photographs, and, most prominently, the photograph of a Black man's face. The photograph was taken from the cover of a 1933 special issue of the literary magazine *Links richten* ('Aim Left'), discussing issues of 'racial hatred and racial oppression' (*Links richten* 1973, 206).[7] More

7 I would like to express my gratitude to Thalia Ostendorf, who generously shared her knowledge of the publication history of the photograph, and Loes van Harrevelt of the Dutch National Photography Museum.

recently, the photograph was used for the cover of the revised edition of Karin Amatmoekrim's novel *De man van veel* ('The Man of Many Things', 2021) about the Surinamese anti-colonial author Anton de Kom, suggesting it is his face. De Kom contributed to the 1933 special issue,[8] but the face on the cover is definitely not his. Rather, it is likely to be the same person as the one depicted on the cover of the 'Scottsboro' special issue of another magazine, entitled *AF/Afweerfront* ('Defence Front') of 1932, as both covers are the work of the Communist photographer, illustrator, and graphic designer Cas Oorthuys (Schreuder 2014, 185–88). Both issues featured the Scottsboro trial case, in which Black youths were sentenced to death on extremely doubtful grounds for raping two white women in Alabama in 1931. To this day, it remains unknown who the man on both covers is, and this is likely to remain so, as Oorthuys is now deceased. Oorthuys, who was much influenced by the Russian photographers Alexander Rodchenko and El Lissitsky, and the German photomontage artist John Heartfield, incorporated this face in an avant-garde style collage for the cover of *Links richten*. Cut out, duplicated, and diagonally positioned on the page, the face becomes a mask, which is impersonal and reproducible, to represent Black people collectively. Rosina, in depicting the face upright, makes the man's pensive gaze stand out, as an expression of an inner self, thus confronting the image's enigmatic and problematic history.

Everyone involved in the cover design of this volume remarked on the unfortunate interaction between Rosina's artwork and the word 'slavery' in the title, presenting Blackness as the essence of enslavement. One might counter that the Black man functions as both object and subject of the imagination, in the same way that the volume discusses both Black and white imaginations. White perspectives predominate in this volume, however, reflecting power relations in Dutch academia as well as Dutch society at large, 150 years after the abolition of slavery. Even within present-day discourse, the chances that the Black man on the cover will be objectified remain considerable. Yet in triggering this discussion, *Is It a Dream?* had become integral and particularly meaningful to the volume. After consulting the artist, the publisher, and fellow scholars, it was decided to retain the present cover design, which conveys the primary objective of this volume: to unleash the imagination's capacity for change.

8 De Kom contributed a pre-publication of the chapter 'Onze Helden' ('Our Heroes') from his book *Wij slaven van Suriname* (translated as *We Slaves of Suriname* in 2022), which would be published in 1934 (*Links richten* 1973, 207–209).

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About the Author

Marrigje Paijmans works as an Assistant Professor in Dutch Literature at the University of Amsterdam. She studies early modern literature from a critical analysis perspective to recover marginalised voices, thus balancing our understanding of the past. Her project 'Literary Unsettlements' analysed voices of dissent in seventeenth-century colonial discourse. She has published on early modern theatre in *Cultural History*, on Spinozism and slavery in the *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies*, and on the ethics of affect in *Foucault Studies*.

Literary Imaginations

2. Enslaved to the Passions: Slavery, Emotions, and Trade in a Seventeenth-Century Dutch Comedy

Marrigje Paijmans

Abstract: This chapter investigates how the gross inequality of slavery in Dutch society was stylised in Bredero's comedy *Moortje* ('Little Moor', 1617), an adaptation of Terence's *The Eunuch*. Considering the polyphony of comic theatre, it shows how *Moortje* brings diverging views of slavery into discussion, countering the prevailing view that fundamental discussion of slavery did not occur in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. *Moortje* is a product of white imagination, written and performed in Amsterdam, the metropole of an emerging trade imperium. This chapter shows how the play adopts two classical commonplaces of slavery – the Stoic metaphor of enslavement to the passions and the comic reversal of master and slave – to establish a white, masculine, and Christian norm that served to legitimise the enslavement of the Other. However, *Moortje* also presents the classical commonplaces as outdated: in a mercantile society such as Amsterdam, nobody could escape 'enslavement' to the passions of trade. *Moortje*, this chapter argues, presents slavery in its entanglement with the omnipresent affect of colonial trade. Demonstrating how Amsterdam's inhabitants were implicated *en masse* in global networks they could no longer oversee, the play both reproduces and questions the legitimisation of the enslavement of the emotional Other.

Keywords: Early Modern Dutch Comedy; Gerbrand Adriaensz Bredero; slavery; passions; Neostoicism

Introduction

Two enslaved women, one Black, the other white, are conveyed through the city centre of 1570s Amsterdam to their new owner. On their way they

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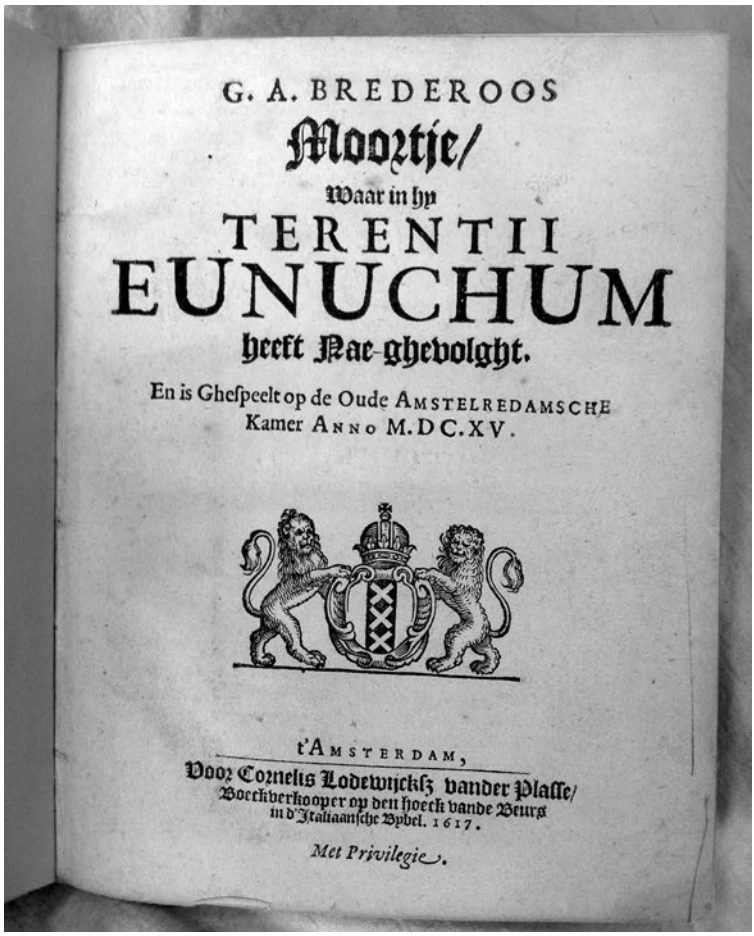
G. A. BREDEROOS
Moortje/
Waar in hy
TERENTII
EUNUCHUM
heeft Nae-ghevolght.
En is Ghespeelt op de Oude AMSTELREDAMSCHE
Kamer ANNO M.DC.XV.
t'AMSTERDAM,
Voor Cornelis Lodewyckz vander Plasse/
Boeckverkooper op den hoeck vande Beurs
in d'Italiaansche Bybel. 1617.
Met Privilegie.

Figure 1.1 Front page of the first edition of *Moortje*, University Library Leiden, 1091 B 56, DBNL. Translation: 'G. A. Bredero's *Moortje,* in which he has followed Terentius' *Eunuchus*. And [which] was staged at the Old Amsterdam Chamber in the Year 1615.'

encounter Amsterdam's commercially savvy inhabitants, eager to sell anything under the sun: from the produce of Dutch farms to imported colonial spices, and from their own bodies to those of enslaved human beings. This is the setting for *Moortje* ('little Moor' or 'Moorish woman'), a comedy by one of the most famous Dutch playwrights of the time, Gerbrand Adriaensz Bredero (1585–1618), first staged in 1615 and published in 1617 (see fig. 1.1).[1] This chapter will critically analyse the representation of slavery and

1 The play was first staged at the Amsterdam chamber of rhetoric De Eglentier. All quotations are based on the 1999 edition by E. K. Grootes and were translated by the author.

the slave trade in the play, arguing that *Moortje* renders a contemporary discussion about the consequences of the booming trade in Amsterdam – a discussion from which critical voices were not altogether absent. In doing so, this chapter aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the early modern cultural imagination of slavery.

As historical research is providing an increasingly accurate picture of early modern slavery, questions arise concerning the impact such affairs have had on the cultural imagination of slavery.[2] Slavery historians have alleged that the inhabitants of the Dutch Republic were either ignorant or approving of Dutch involvement in slavery overseas (Emmer 2018, 9–10; see also Emmer 2000). They have been very effective in pointing out the power structures and representations that supported and justified slavery, but have paid little attention to voices of dissent. Maritime historian Michiel van Groesen (2017) mentions a handful of examples, but concludes that, although 'some in the city [of Amsterdam] certainly felt that the trade in humans was morally wrong', slavery was hardly a topic of discussion (108, 117). Similarly, art historian Elmer Kolfin (2020) states that 'the public showed little interest in African slavery' (17). If slavery was depicted, for instance in Frans Post's Brazilian landscapes, 'the main characteristics of the institution – inequality, captivity, and the use of force – remain invisible' (Kolfin 2020, 19). These and comparable findings contributed to the idea of a monophonic discourse without room for reservations or criticism,[3] at least until the rise of abolitionism in the late eighteenth century.[4]

More recently, however, historians such as Dienke Hondius (2011) and Karwan Fatah-Black and Matthias van Rossum (2015) have indicated that the discourse on slavery was in fact far from monophonic. They contend it was virtually impossible for Dutch citizens to remain ignorant of slavery. From the late 1570s, Sephardic families escaping Habsburg rule settled in Holland, introducing Abrahamic patriarchal households that included enslaved servants – a practice Dutch merchant elites were quick to adopt, even though slavery was officially banned by most Dutch cities (Fatah-Black and van Rossum 2015, 59, 61–62; Hondius 2011, 383–84). Local authorities would 'tolerate' the keeping of enslaved servants if it occurred on a small scale and the servants were kept within the confines of the private house

2 For a broader discussion of societies' attitudes towards slavery, see Davis (1966).

3 On the absence of criticism of slavery in seventeenth-century literature, see van Kempen (2000, 160–98); Nieuwenhuis, Paasman and Zonneveld (1990, 26); and Paasman (2002, 13).

4 On eighteenth-century abolitionist literature, see Adams (2021); Leemans and Johannes (2017, 570–83); and Paasman (2001, 481–89).

(Fatah-Black and van Rossum 2015, 60–63; Hondius 2011, 380). The presence of enslaved people in a society that disapproved of slavery in principle suggests Dutch society harboured strongly conflicting opinions about slavery.

Principled disapproval particularly emerged within specific academic genres. Explicit condemnations of slavery are found, for example, in scholarly treatises by Hugo Grotius, Caspar Barlaeus, the de la Court brothers, and Franciscus van den Enden.[5] Such discussions of slavery participated in a larger intellectual exchange on colonial trade, conducted in terms of natural law. More hidden disapproval, as well as discussion and doubt about slavery, can be identified in literary texts ranging from travel reports and political pamphlets to occasional poetry and classical theatre. It is unlikely the authors of such texts would have delved into the scholarly debate. Bredero, for example, did not read Latin. His classical comedy *Moortje* adopts a rather different approach to slavery, inviting both laughter and discussion. In contrast to the scholarly treatises, *Moortje* was widely received. Initially, the play was performed for the exclusive chamber of rhetoric, but it soon became a popular stock piece in the public city theatre, and was reprinted seven times between 1620 and 1663.[6]

To unwrap *Moortje*'s polyphonic representation of slavery, this chapter combines studies of early modern slavery, classical comedy, and Neostoicism, within a framework of postcolonial theory. Crucially here, the 'post-' in postcolonial does not refer to the object of research – *Moortje* was written and performed during early colonialism – but instead to the position of the researcher, who works 'after' the decolonisation of Indonesia and Suriname, and wishes to theoretically respond to, and depart from, colonial discourse. At the same time, it is important to realise this research was conducted by a white researcher within Dutch academia, seventeenth-century literary studies in particular, where colonial discourse is still active. As such, postcolonial theory provides a conceptual framework enabling a critical analysis of *Moortje* as a product of a polyphonic colonial discourse, while helping to intercept bias and blind spots in the researcher's perspective.

Polyphonic implies that colonial discourse also involved criticism and dissent. Dissent is a less demanding and more sensitive notion than criticism as it also recognises ideas, feelings, and silences as forms of resistance. This notion of 'dissent' is based on the work of Sarah Ahmed (2014), who contends that 'dissent is always implicated in what is being dissented from' (99). This

5 On Grotius, see van Ittersum (2006); on Barlaeus, see Phaf-Rheinberger (2007); on the de la Court brothers, see Weststeijn (2012); on van den Enden, see Paijmans (2021).

6 The play was performed thirty-two times between 1646 and 1691. See Onstage (2021).

means dissent necessarily involves participation in the discourse that it seeks to resist, by which it is therefore also affected. Ahmed's understanding of dissent can be traced back to Foucault who, assuming there is no subjectivity outside discourse, sought a theoretical foundation for criticism from *within* discourse (see also Paijmans 2019, 50–51). For example, when a character in *Moortje* calls slavery 'inhumane', he does not reject slavery in principle, but considers it acceptable with respect to certain dehumanised groups. In that sense this character's criticism is implicated in colonial discourse and can easily be dismissed as cynical or arbitrary, as will be demonstrated from previous research into *Moortje*. Ahmed's (2014) notion of dissent, however, is more sensitive to the reality of seventeenth-century discourse, allowing for the recognition and analysis of such utterances as dissent. In doing so, this chapter aims to complement the work of slavery historians, offering a more nuanced picture of the early modern imagination of slavery.

The first section of this chapter argues that *Moortje* tapped into an early seventeenth-century discussion of slavery by demonstrating how the text references contemporary knowledge of actual slavery (as distinct from slavery as metaphor). Subsequently, the second and third sections investigate how *Moortje* stylised knowledge of slavery by means of two classical commonplaces – the Stoic metaphor of enslavement to the passions, and the comic reversal of master and slave – establishing a white, masculine, and Christian norm that served to legitimise the enslavement of the Other. Bredero's elaboration of these commonplaces, however, not only illustrates how perceptions of slavery were mediated through age-old conventions, but also how conventions were confronted with the reality of early modern colonialism. In a society completely permeated by the desires of overseas trade, Stoic philosophy no longer offered a credible strategy for coping with the passions. Instead of the Stoic pursuit of control, this chapter argues, *Moortje* features a need for the legitimisation of the passions. The final section discusses how the play, which is itself implicated in the process of legitimisation, also questions the normative legitimisation of enslavement.

Contemporary Knowledge of Slavery in *Moortje*

Judging by the font sizes on the front page (fig. 1.1), *Moortje*'s publisher considered the Roman play and author far more prestigious than Bredero's Dutch translation. Publius Terentius Afer (*c.* 195/190–159 AD), or Terence, was probably of African descent, 'Afer' referring to Africa. He was brought to Rome to work as a house slave, where his intelligence won him a liberal

education and his freedom.[7] Terence based *The Eunuch* on an Athenian comedy of the same name by Menander (*c.* 342/41–290 BC), which explains why the Roman play is set in Athens and features ancient Greek stock types.[8] Even if Bredero did not read Latin and based his (rather free) adaptation on French and Dutch translations, the ancient stock types clearly shine through in his characters. The slave (*servus*), the prostitute (*meretrix*), the old and the young man (*senex* and *adulescens*), and the parasite (*parasitus*) were all stock characters in the *comoedia palliata* – Roman comedies adapted from the Greek (Duckworth 1994, 18). According to George E. Duckworth (1994, 250) in his seminal study of Roman comedy, Terence's slave characters usually followed the common pattern of loyal 'bunglers', although in *The Eunuch*, they also adopt character traits from Plautus' cunning slaves (*servi callidi*), who performed trickery and provided humour.[9] In both cases, slave characters displayed no personal ambitions and remained faithful to their masters, in contrast to the parasite, whose behaviour was primarily aimed at obtaining free meals (Duckworth 1994, 265–67). Duckworth (1994, 288–90) emphasises that slave characters in comedy, particularly their many freedoms and their immunity from punishment, bore little relation to reality. This discrepancy leads William Fitzgerald (2019) to claim that comedy was 'the pre-eminent place in Roman culture where the experience and interaction of masters and slaves was stylised' (188).

Bredero situated his story in Amsterdam during the late 1570s (Grootes in Bredero 1999, 388). At this time, the Republic was not yet participating in the slave trade, although this had changed by the time the play was written and performed. In 1602, the United East India Company (VOC) had been founded, which immediately became involved in Asian networks of indenture and the slave trade.[10] The reason why Southeast Asian slavery goes unmentioned in *Moortje* may be that the VOC tried to keep these activities secret in the Republic.[11] *Moortje*'s plot is similar to that of *The Eunuch*. The servant, Koenraat, works for the rich merchant's son Ritsart

7 See Barsby's introduction in Terence (2001, 1–2). On Terence's assumed African origins, see Bosman (2006, 127).

8 Bredero used the French translation by Jean Bourlier, *Les 6 comédies de Térence en prose Françoise* (Antwerp, 1566) as his main source, in addition to the Dutch translation by Cornelis van Ghistele, *Eunuchus* (Antwerp: Symon Cock, 1555). See Zaalberg's introduction in Bredero (1984, 13, 18) and Grootes's epilogue in Bredero (1999, 387). On Terence and Menander, see Fontaine (2014, 539–54).

9 On Terence's use of slave characters, see Duckworth (1994, 249–53). On Terence's slave characters, see also Fitzgerald (2019). On Terence's prostitutes, see Dutsch (2019).

10 See Dijk (2008); Harrison (2019, 389–91); and Van Rossum (2018). The Dutch would officially enter transatlantic slave trade in 1636.

11 See Vink (2007, 21). Regarding the West Indies, see Schmidt (2001, 185–243).

and is escorting the Angolan woman Negra, whilst the parasite Kackerlack (literally: 'Cockroach') works for Roemert, a privateer who calls himself 'captain', and accompanies the Dutchwoman Katrijntje.[12] Negra and Katrijntje are gifts to Moy-aal, a brothel keeper with whom Ritsart and Roemert have both fallen in love. At the play's opening, Moy-aal has already met Katrijntje and recognised her as Moy-aal's former stepsister and member of a wealthy family. Scheming to return Katrijntje to her family unscathed and receive a reward, she asks Ritsart for a Black handmaid to guard Katrijntje. However, this plan backfires when Ritsart's brother, Writsart, falls in love with Katrijntje, whereupon Koenraat encourages him to dress up as Negra to gain access to the brothel to sexually assault Katrijntje. To cover up the scandal, Katrijntje is married off to her rapist Writsart, whilst Ritsart hides Negra at home to conceal the evidence of his brother's wrongdoing. In the final scene, Kackerlack, the parasite, convinces Moy-aal to keep both Ritsart and Roemert as customers, and to enjoy their extravagant gifts and dinners together with Kackerlack.

Bredero made two important adaptations regarding the representation of slavery. First, the typical slave Parmeno in *The Eunuch* becomes Koenraat, the free servant in *Moortje*, introduced as 'the Father's Agent'. Nevertheless, Koenraat retains the disposition to trickery of the comic slave, suggesting Writsart dress up as Negra and molest Katrijntje. He presents this nefarious scheme as if it were in jest: 'I am kidding, are you crazy? I do not mean it' (v. 1111), but he also expresses hope for a material reward from Writsart: 'What treats will there be in it/ for me? I bet he will certainly buy me/ a new cloak […]' (vs. 2721–23).[13] In contrast to Parmeno (Terence 2001, vs. 923–29), Koenraat pursues his own gain at his master's expense. Depicting Koenraat as a free man with ambitions, Bredero's adaptation reproduces the myth that slavery did not exist in the Republic.[14]

The second adaptation involves the eunuch. In the plot summary, Bredero (1999) explains: 'because this sort of people is not very well-known here, I have confidently replaced him with a Moor. […] Thus, I have improved it [the play] for my fellow citizens and neighbours, assuming it happened in the Netherlands' (18).[15] 'Replaced' is not entirely correct, since Terence's

12 Moy-aal calls him 'Pirate', 'Robber', and 'Freebooter' (*een Ruyter, Róóver, Vrybuyter*; vs. 163–64).

13 'wat slempjes willender dan oplóópen/ Voor myn? 'kwedt daty hy mijn voorseker sal kóópen/ Een nieuwe Mantel. …'

14 For the myth, see Emmer (2000, 12, 251), as cited in Fatah-Black and Van Rossum (2015, 58).

15 'also die slach van menschen hier so seer niet en zyn bekent, heb ick dien vrymoedelijck verandert in een Moor … So heb icket dan myn medeburghers en naghebuuren ten goede verschickt, en ghestelt oft hier in Nederlandt waer ghebeurt.'

play also contains an enslaved African woman from Ethiopia, who clearly served as a model for Negra, whilst Negra also retains some of the castrate's characteristics. Rather, Bredero unites two stage figures into one character. Anston Bosman (2006, 123–24, 154) has demonstrated that 'the pairing of a eunuch and a blackamoor' was a cultural trope that aimed to resolve sexual and racial ruptures through processes of exclusion, integration, or reform, involving comic strategies of impersonation, assimilation, and conversion. The fact that *Moortje* utilises this trope, Bosman (2006) argues, marks it as an imperialist text.

Here we must ask how a seventeenth-century Dutch audience would have conceived of eunuchs and Moors. Classically trained readers were familiar with eunuchs as servants in Persian courts and harems.[16] Deprived of descendants and, supposedly, sex drive, their loyalty to the sultan was undisputed, which made them reliable administrators and harem servants. It explains why Negra must protect Katrijntje's virginity, which is not an obvious task for an African woman. The term 'Moor' originally referred to inhabitants of Mauretania, but soon came to designate any North African, non-white, or even Islamic person ('Moor', in *WNT*; Kolfin 2020, 26). A textbook example of Gayatri Spivak's (1988) notion of the subaltern, Negra is hardly given any lines through which to narrate her previous life and circumstances. According to Ritsart, she was captured in Angola and sold to a Portuguese slaver, who in turn sold Negra to a skipper employed by Ritsart's father, only for Ritsart to then purchase her in Amsterdam harbour (vs. 385, 880). Historically, this is very plausible, because in 1576, the Portuguese had founded the Angolese trade post of São Paulo de Luanda, which would become the greatest supplier of enslaved Africans to Portuguese Brazil and the Spanish Caribbean colonies (Harrison 2019, 235, 242).

Negra's character reflects numerous African stereotypes (Paijmans 2023, 28–29; Smith 2020, 84), some of which seem to legitimise her enslavement. Negra is represented as submissive, barely defending herself when scolded and wrongfully accused of rape. Ritsart also suggests that she used to work as a sex slave when he remarks she 'had a child or two' by the skipper (v. 1857). Another stereotype is the uncontrollable sex drive of African men, which is used in the play to explain the rape: 'Moors are strongly attracted to women' (v. 1880). The fact that Negra is mistaken here for a man can be related to the nature of the crime and the palimpsestic presence of the eunuch, but also to the gender fluidity attributed to people of colour (Paijmans 2023, 30).

16 In Terence's Rome, eunuchs were imported mainly from the Near East, to work as servants and educators. See Harrison (2019, 88–89) and Taugher (2006).

The apparent conflict between submissiveness and strong drives is resolved through reference to the Moors' alleged 'fear of death and punishment' (v. 1881), which justifies Negra's harsh disciplining. These examples reveal the making of a dehumanising language that sought to connect ethnicity to some innate aptitude for slavery.

Katrijntje provides the less well-known picture of white slavery. After Katrijntje's parents were killed in the Spanish Terror, she was adopted first by Moy-aal's mother and then, when she died, by a greedy uncle. He intended to sell Katrijntje 'to the *Turks* or *Barbarians*' (v. 232, emphasis in original), referring to the Barbary pirates – Ottoman and Berber privateers based in the ports of North Africa,[17] and operating throughout the Mediterranean and the North Atlantic. Their main business was to capture travellers for the Ottoman and Arab slave markets. Before Katrijntje and her uncle reach North Africa, their ship is captured by Roemert, who may well have been a Barbary pirate.[18] He brings Katrijntje to Amsterdam, believing she would make the perfect 'lady's maid' for Moy-aal (v. 298). When Ritsart hears Katrijntje's story, he cries out:

> Inhumane custom! Godless rascality!
> To hawk human beings into horselike slavery!
> In this city too there are those who engage in this trade,
> In *Farnabock*: but it cannot be concealed from God.[19] (vs. 233–36)

Ritsart blames the Sephardic Jews in Amsterdam for the slave trade with 'Farnabock', a phonological variation of Pernambuco, the Portuguese sugar colony in Brazil. His disregarding of his own implication in the Portuguese slave trade and his complete indifference to Negra's enslavement indicate he considers both slavery and the slave trade non-Christian affairs, and something Dutch merchants normally do not get involved in. Ritsart expresses a white, masculine, and Christian norm that distinguished Dutch merchants from Others who were involved in slave trade (Barbary pirates and Sephardic Jews) or who were themselves enslaved (women and people of colour).

17 The Barbary pirates were mainly based in Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers, and Morocco (Harrison 2019, 157–61).

18 Many Dutch adventurers joined the Barbary pirates and this may have inspired Roemert's character (Harrison 2019, 161–62).

19 'Onmenschelyck ghebruyck! Godlóóse schelmery!/ Datmen de menschen vent, tot paartsche slaverny!/ Hier zynder oock in stadt, die sulcken handel dryven,/ In *Farnabock*: maar 't sal Godt niet verhoolen blyven.' Emphasis in original.

In previous research, the above passage has been interpreted as criticism, but such an interpretation is only reached by scholars who failed to recognise the inconsistency with Ritsart's actions (van Groesen 2017, 109; Vink 2007, 30). Scholars who have recognised the inconsistency considered this passage cynical (Paasman in Post 1984, 116; Zaalberg in Bredero 1984, 47), random (Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1985, 230–33), or have argued that it is 'difficult to determine whether the utterance concerned the voice of the author or the dubious statement of a dramatic character' (Grootes in Bredero 1999, 400). This chapter considers Ritsart's criticism of slavery in the context of a larger ethical debate about changing morals, brought about by Amsterdam's booming trade. The discussion of slavery, as the effect of abnormal greed, was part of that debate. The following section analyses how *Moortje* relates norms for slavery and the slave trade to early modern ideas about the passions.

The Stoic Metaphor of Enslavement

As demonstrated, *Moortje* taps into a discussion on actual slavery, but slavery also functions as a metaphor in the play. In the opening scene, when Ritsart's servant Koenraat warns his young master to remain his 'own guardian' and not to 'deliver' himself to 'the lecherous passions of the heart' (vs. 13–14, 65–66), he characterises love as an enslavement by the passions. Advising Ritsart to strive for 'constancy' (vs. 11, 14), Koenraat betrays a Stoic influence (van Stipriaan 2018, 218–19). Roman Stoics not only discussed actual slavery (Davis 1966, 75–83), but also used 'enslavement' as a metaphor for complete dependence on the passions. Considering a 'passion', in the literal sense, as 'something one undergoes', the Stoics strived for 'a-pathy': freedom from the passions (Baltzly 2019, ch. 5; Sierhuis 2016, 334), and active control over one's reasoning capacities. Apathy was considered a prerequisite for constancy, the superior state of mind in which one 'stood firmly'. Cicero, for example, rejected the claim that joy was the greatest good, because it was a passion. In *On Duties*, he exclaims: 'What a sorry state of servitude for a virtue – to be pandering to sensual pleasure!' (Cicero 1913, 399 [3. 33. 117]).[20]

The metaphor was adopted by the Dutch humanist Dirk Volckertsz Coornhert (1522–1590), who translated Cicero's *On Duties* (1561), Seneca's *On Good Deeds* (1562), and Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* (1616).[21] Although

20 See also Cicero in the *Stoic Paradoxes* (1942), 287 [5. 35].

21 See Jansen's introduction in Bredero (2011, 27, 35).

Bredero did not read Latin, he was very well acquainted with these translations, all of which contain metaphors of slavery (Jansen in Bredero 2011, 27, 35; van Stipriaan 2018, 34). Coornhert, Justus Lipsius, and Hendrik Laurensz Spiegel rekindled interest in Stoicism in response to the hardships of the Dutch Revolt, a period of political and religious upheaval.[22] In Lipsius's translation of *On Constancy* (Lipsius 1584, 124 [2. 25]), the principal work of Dutch Neostoicism, the metaphor of enslavement is expanded to 'the uttermost extremity in servitude' under the Spanish oppressor, thus emphasising the urgency of Stoic doctrine for the Dutch audience.[23] Stoicism remained relevant as the Republic developed into a trade empire, providing an ethic that prepared merchants for the contingencies and adversities of trade. In Coornhert's (2016) *Ethics: The Art of Living Well* (*Zedekunst dat is wellevenskunste*, 1586), the merchant was compared to 'a compass which, in a stormy sea that makes this ship of earth tumble this way and that, keeps pointing towards the lodestar of truth in perfect tranquillity' (422 [5. 9. 20]).[24] In the same work, Coornhert frequently uses the metaphor of enslavement to the passions, in this instance in the form of avarice (*ghierigheyd*) in particular. The avaricious are described as enslaved, 'bound with golden shackles', since they exchanged their spiritual freedom for external 'goods' (Coornhert 2016, 332 [4. 12. 58]). This Neostoic view on the ethics of trade in relation to the passions of the merchant is prominent in *Moortje*.

The characters in *Moortje* are, without exception, affected by the passions of trade, endlessly striving for self-enrichment and pleasure. The best example concerns the greedy uncle who tried to sell Katrijntje. Moy-aal calls him a slave of avarice:

> What severe punishment do you, oh just avarice, impose
> On your slaves, considering them unworthy of livelihood and food?
> The man had money and treasures in great abundance,
> What difference did it make? He remained a servant of his goods.[25] (vs. 211–14)

Moy-aal's description seems loosely based on Coornhert's *Ethics*, in which avarice is similarly personified: 'The restless, dissatisfying, and miserable

22 See Porteman and Smits-Veldt (2016, 70). Morford (1991) speaks of a 'cult of Seneca' and 'Stoic revival' (7, 10).

23 I quoted the English translation (Stradling 1594, 7 [1. 3]). On Bredero and Lipsius, see van Stipriaan (2018, 215–16).

24 I quoted the English translation.

25 'Wat strenghe straf lecht ghy, o gierichеyt! Rechtvaardich/ U slaven op? en acht haar kost noch voetsel waardich./ De man hadt ghelt en schat in grooten overvloet,/ Wat wast? hy was en bleef een dienst-knecht van zyn goedt.'

nature of this witches' brew can be seen in the great number of her miserable slaves' (Coornhert 2016, 322 [4. 12. 3]). It does not end well for the uncle, who is captured by Roemert and sold into slavery on the Barbary coast, whilst Katrijntje is brought home (Bredero 1999, v. 282).

The uncle's degeneration from spiritual to actual enslavement is not an isolated case in early modern thought. Godfried Udemans was a Calvinist minister whose moral treatise for sailors, *'t Geestelyck roer van 't coopmans schip* ('The Spiritual Helm of the Merchant's Vessel', 1638), discussed the matter of slavery at length. He condemned any form of servitude as conflicting with God's creation of human beings after in His own image (Udemans 1655, 313–14), except for the servitude of non-Christians, who were 'spiritual slaves' and deserved 'to fall into the dirtiest and most profound [actual] slavery' (Udemans 1655, 315).[26] Even if some of the most outspoken critics of the slave trade were found amongst religious groups, including Calvinists (de Jong 1971, 423–36; Joosse 2005; Vink 2007, 32), Udemans here provided sailors with a Christian excuse for the enslavement of non-Christian Others (van Eijnatten 2007, 197; van Groesen 2017, 111–12). In this context the uncle's enslavement in *Moortje* can be seen as punishment for his spiritual enslavement by avarice. Employing a similar rationale as Udemans, *Moortje's* characters condemn slavery in principle, whilst justifying the enslavement of the emotional Other.

Comic Master and Slave Reversal

The reversal of master and slave was a popular motif in ancient comedy (Fitzgerald 2019, 189). In *Moortje* it is Koenraat, the enslaved character in *The Eunuch*, who outwits his young masters, thus becoming their 'master'. When love deprives Ritsart of his wits, Koenraat offers him rational advice. To Ritsart's lecherous counterpart Writsart, however, Koenraat suggests a depraved plan. When it backfires, Koenraat is deceived into thinking that Writsart will be punished with castration. Comparable to the greedy uncle, Writsart will be punished for his indulgence in the passions through an actualisation (emasculation) of his emotional state (sensuality). The castration is described as eunuchism, 'as the Turks do' (v. 2811), and circumcision, 'in the Jewish way' (v. 2864), placing the emasculation in the colonial context. Writsart's punishment appears to be a joke, and the rape – which

26 'want hy was waerdigh te verallen in de vuylste, ende swaerste slavernie, overmidts hy het soete jock van synen schepper niet en wilde onderworpen zijn.' Translation by the author.

was meaningfully committed in blackface – goes unpunished, because the scandal can be averted by a marriage between the two wealthy families. However, Writsart's crimes are not without consequences for Katrijntje, who marries her rapist; nor for Negra, who is blamed for the crime and locked away; nor for Koenraat, who fears he will be severely punished. Thus, although Koenraat indeed outwits his masters, he hardly controls his own passions.

A similar reversal, of the prostitute and her patron, occurs when Roemert compares Moy-aal to the mythological queen Omphale – remarkably, their names are almost anagrams:

> Shall I then serve less well
> My little Moy-aal! My love! Princess of my senses!
> Than Hercules served the Lydian queen
> Omphale, who forced the Hero to pick up spindles.[27] (vs. 3108–11)

Hercules was enslaved by Omphale, who forced him to wear women's clothes and to spin thread, a symbol of female sexuality. Like the Greek hero, Roemert loses his male privileges, because he cannot control his passions: greed, lust, and vanity have made him an unscrupulous pirate. Although Moy-aal controls Roemert's heart, she is not her own master either. Her greediness makes her susceptible to Kackerlack, the parasite, who manipulates her into sharing the profits of her sex work (vs. 3293–96).

As this chapter argues, every character in *Moortje* succumbs to enslavement, because everyone is affected by the passions of trade. Whilst the arena of Roman comedy is the *familia* (Fitzgerald 2019, 189), *Moortje*'s plot centres on the marketplace, where passions of avarice, lechery, and vanity thrive. Bredero (1999, vs. 639–755) has added several passages that emphasise this mercantile environment, most prominently Kackerlack's visit to the Amsterdam food market, where he praises the goods piled up in the stalls.[28] In this passage Bredero shifts from the alexandrine to longer, free verses, strewing his sentences with anaphors, hyperboles, and apostrophes. It is exemplary of the 'amplifying style' often ascribed to *Moortje* (Grootes in Bredero 1999, 380; Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1985, 232; Zaalberg in Bredero 1984, 51–55, 63), featuring the cornucopian style of commercialism, also prevalent in seventeenth-century still-life paintings. The characters blend

27 'sal ick dan minder dienen/ Mijn Moyaeltje! mijn lief! Mijn Princes van mijn sin!/ Als Hercules dede der Lydier Koningin/ Omphaele, dien den Heldt de spillen dwong te rapen.'

28 On this passage, see Grootes (in Bredero 1999, 392–93).

seamlessly with this commercial environment. Ritsart and his father are merchants preoccupied with 'shops and cash,/ Boxes and drawers, dozens of files,/ Full of payment orders, full of obligations, full of loans […]' (vs. 503–505).[29] If they represent the growing mercantile class, then Koenraat, Moy-aal, and Kackerlack mirror the business instinct of the people in the street. Their speech is laced with trade jargon. For example, when Kackerlack suggests Ritsart and Roemert share Moy-aal, he depicts her as a trading vessel and them as joint shareholders (vs. 3246–50). *Moortje* shows that, business having become second nature to Amsterdam's inhabitants, they are continuously confronted with ethical challenges. When the fishmonger compares her fish to girls with 'fair breasts' (v. 728), she is not using an innocent metaphor, because a fishy business in human flesh is conducted in Moy-aal's brothel around the corner. Everyone, from seller to buyer and passer-by, is implicated in the global food chains and trade networks through which goods and money accumulate in Amsterdam.

Kackerlack's walk ends at the pinnacle of trade, the Amsterdam stock exchange. This is an anachronism, as the exchange first opened its doors only in 1611 (Petram 2011, 30–31). This is where the parasite makes a living, buttering up rich merchants in exchange for food (vs. 625–28). Kackerlack anticipates the insecurities of the new mercantile class by flattering their impeccable style and innate class. He compares this 'trade' to idolatry:

> You must flatter, wheedle, and caress
> The grand wealthy people, even if they are ungodly,
> …
> You will make idols of the People of property.
> After I created this genus [of sycophants] so artfully,
> I came up with the idea of founding a sect
> Of my own name, that is the Kackerlackists,
> And why would I not, like the other sectarians?[30] (vs. 740–41, 745–49)

In calling his patrons 'idols', Kackerlack implies he is an idolater. Deviating from the Christian norm, he even considers founding a sect, 'like the other sectarians', referring to the freedom of religion in Holland. Amsterdam

29 'Wat het hy in zyn hóóft winckeltjes, en kassen,/ En hockels en laadjes, dosijnen van Lyassen,/ Vol Assingnatie, vol Oblygatie, vol boomery.'

30 'Ghy moet pluym-strijcken, en schoon-praten, en liefkóósen/ De groote rijcke luy, al warent Goddelóósen, …/ En maackt afgoden van de veel vermoghen Mensche./ Na dien ick dit gheslacht so Aartich heb verweckt,/ Soo heb ick oock ghedocht te voeren in de Seckt/ Van myn eyghen naam, dats vande Kackerlackisten,/ En waarom ick so wel niet als d'andere seck-tisten?'

was profiting from this religious tolerance, since Catholics, Jews, and non-Calvinist Protestants had brought capital resources, advanced trading techniques, and trade relations to the city (Lesger 2001, 75). In this sense the entire city was blasphemous in trading with 'heathens', prioritising profit over piety. The comparison of trade to idolatry – the worship of earthly matter – was a very common one. According to Coornhert (2016) in his chapter 'Of Avarice', greedy people hoarded and worshipped money because they had lost their faith in divine providence (330 [4. 12. 45]), whilst the Amsterdam poet Joost van den Vondel (1930, 548–49), in his 1643 poem 'Aen de Beurs van Amsterdam' ('To the Amsterdam Stock Exchange'), calls credit 'stock market faith' (*Beursgeloof*, v. 11) and the duped shareholders 'martyrs' (v. 15). *Moortje* echoes similar public sentiments against trade. The final section investigates how *Moortje* envisions moral change due to Amsterdam's booming trade in terms of legitimisation.

Politics of Legitimisation

The analyses of the Stoic metaphor of enslavement to the passions and the comic master and slave reversal in *Moortje* convey how knowledge of actual slavery was entwined with ideas about the passions and commerce in the early modern imagination. It presents the Stoic ideal of complete apathy as unfeasible. In fact, the delusion of being one's own master is considered the greatest enslavement of all. *Moortje* seems to criticise Stoicism rather than endorse it. In doing so, it touches upon Freya Sierhuis's (2016, 334) argument that Dutch Neostoicism was, from the sixteenth century onwards, faced with opposition from those who viewed its rejection of emotion incompatible with Christian ethics and theology. Coornhert (2016), for example, compared the emotions to tools which, 'if used correctly serve to bring their users virtue, joy and salvation. […]' (71 [1. 3. 3]).[31] He did not disapprove of feeling emotions if 'in doing this you subject yourself to God and his governance' (Coornhert 2016, 359 [5. 1. 30]). Early modern theatre assumed the restorative effect of the emotions, provided they were channelled into the right form and quantity. Medical theories, endorsed by Bredero, prescribed comedy to clear up the mind and combat melancholy.[32] Melancholy was even associated with apathy or 'hardness of heart' – a condition also described

31 See also Grootes' introduction in Bredero (1979, 35).

32 See Jansen in Bredero (2011, 157, 160); van Stipriaan (1993, 252). On Bredero and emotions more broadly, see Van Stipriaan (2018, 217–24).

as 'coldness', 'heaviness', 'drowsiness', and 'deadness' (Sierhuis 2016, 338). Comedy functioned exactly to repel the negative effects of apathy. Yet here we must necessarily ask how Amsterdam's inhabitants coped with the passions of trade once Stoic philosophy had lost its credibility.

If we look more closely, it is not necessarily to their detriment that *Moortje*'s characters are guided by their emotions. It is mainly the passions of trade that are punished, whilst those characters who recognise their own entanglement in Amsterdam's web of affect and who can make the emotions work for them, are the most successful. Moy-aal, for example, who is familiar with gut feelings and an advocate of love – 'I know what force strong Love can bring forth' (v. 2530)[33] – is keen to free Katrijntje, even if it is partly out of self-interest. The most successful character is the parasite, who makes a living by manipulating other people's emotions, whilst never being deceived himself. One could argue Kackerlack is the only 'free' character, but he is free only in the sense that he realises that he is a dependent parasite. In a contemporary painting by Nicolaes Moeyaert, Kackerlack is portrayed as a 'winner', embracing Moy-aal, who turns her back on Roemert and Ritsart (see fig. 1.2).

As Michel Serres (1982) explains in *The Parasite*, this stock character 'buys his dinner, paying for it in words [...] his voice for matter, [...] air for solid, superstructure for infrastructure' (34, 35). Parasites typically play on the emotions, the affects that bind people to their environment (Serres 1982, 39), thus revealing social and political tensions in that environment. The parasite in *Moortje* highlights a tremendous need for legitimacy amongst Amsterdam's inhabitants: the nouveau riche need to hear that they measure up to old money; privateers need to know that they are 'captains'; the uneducated that they know Latin; whilst the central subject in need of legitimisation is, of course, slavery.

The need for legitimisation in the Dutch 'Golden Age' has been described by Simon Schama (1988) as the 'embarrassment of riches', a 'continuous pricking of conscience on complacency' that manifested itself in all sorts of rituals and ceremonies which performed wealth in such way to garner public benediction (8, 178). However, as noted by Susan Buck-Morss (2000, 823), Schama never related this embarrassment to the riches amassed in the colonies, whilst more than the wealth itself, its violent origin should be the cause of discomfort. Art historian Julie Berger Hochstrasser (2007) has investigated how discomfort about the violent background of colonial products manifested in Dutch still-life paintings, revealing a 'visual language

33 'Of 'k weet wel wat voor kracht de stercke Min kan baren.'

Figure 1.2 Nicolaes Moeyaert, *Moy-aal and Her Admirers*, *c.* 1630–1640. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

of the commodity [which] commanded what now reads as a political agenda of legitimation. […]' (263).

Moortje, this chapter argues, is implicated in this discourse of legitimisation. The parasite praises the abundant display of goods at the Amsterdam market in much the same manner that Dutch still-life paintings stylise colonial trade. The parasite thrives in the market, where his talent to legitimise the painful histories of colonial products holds sway. Legitimisation, in both word and image, was a business in Amsterdam. Those who managed to find the right balance between honour and vanity could make good money. Bredero participated in this market of legitimisation too, reproducing a white, masculine, and Christian norm that justified the enslavement, trading, and exploiting of Others. In this sense, Bredero's play may itself be considered a parasite on colonial trade. Conversely, *Moortje* can also be regarded as offering a dissenting voice from colonial discourse in exposing the intricate workings of legitimisation. Particularly, Negra being locked away to take the blame for Writsart's crime dramatises the processes of legitimisation that prevent Amsterdam's inhabitants from

reflecting upon their desires. The subject position for this reflection is filled by Negra, a 'black' – here meaning 'absent' – subject. At the same time, Negra embodies the 'black' – here meaning 'obscure' and 'sinful' – object of white desire who remains unacknowledged, thus creating a dark spectre at the centre of Dutch society. The characters' unwillingness to face their part in colonialism can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of what Gloria Wekker (2016, 2) would refer to as 'white innocence', suggesting that this self-image and the associated blindness have indeed, as Wekker suspects (21), been part of the Dutch cultural archive for centuries.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated how slavery was stylised in Bredero's *Moortje*. It has hypothesised that the play utilised two classical commonplaces of slavery – the Stoic metaphor of enslavement to the passions and the comic reversal of master and slave – to bring diverging views of slavery into discussion, thus countering the view that any meaningful discussion of slavery did not occur in the Dutch Republic. *Moortje*, the chapter argues, presents the discussion of slavery in the broader context of changing morals due to the booming trade in Amsterdam, demonstrating how views of slavery were entwined with early modern notions of the emotions and commerce in the cultural imagination. Portraying how Amsterdam's inhabitants find themselves entangled in affective global networks they cannot fully grasp, the play contributes to both the construction and the questioning of an emotional Other.

On the one hand, *Moortje* reproduces a white, masculine, and Christian norm that served to legitimise the enslavement of the Other. In the theatre – the 'arena of the passions' – these qualities became associated with a Stoic attitude, whilst the absence of these qualities in a character was 'othered'. The enslavement of the emotional Other, epitomised by the greedy uncle, Negra, and to a lesser extent Katrijntje, is presented as merely the actualisation of their emotional enslavement. On the other hand, *Moortje* presents the classical commonplaces that underlie the notion of an emotional Other as outdated, thus subverting the legitimisation of slavery. In a commercial environment like Amsterdam, the play suggests, no one could escape 'enslavement' to the passions of trade. From this ethical perspective, people like the greedy uncle, who considered themselves the masters of other human beings or even entire overseas territories, are considered miserable slaves in the small territory of their personal emotions.

Instead of Stoic philosophy, *Moortje*'s characters cope with the passions, including the desires of colonial trade, through legitimisation. They manifest the need to motivate and justify their acts of greed, desire, and vanity, and they even spare money for third-party legitimisation, a service offered by the parasite. In seventeenth-century Amsterdam this service was offered, amongst other institutions, by art and literature. *Moortje* was itself implicated in the legitimisation of slavery and the slave trade through the construction of an emotional Other. In this sense, *Moortje* may be considered a colonial text legitimising and 'parasitising' on colonial trade.

To this day, the research of early colonial literature has been guided by, and has contributed to, nationalist and neoliberal discourses that celebrated a supposedly glorious Dutch Golden Age (Pieterse 2019; Stoler 1995, 117–23; Wekker 2016, 25). This research has focussed attention on the ways in which early modern texts celebrated the overseas enterprise, rather than on the manners in which they illuminated the dark side of colonialism. As this chapter has demonstrated, even in a colonial text like *Moortje* the moral outrage of slavery can become visible through the use of postcolonial theory. It is not seventeenth-century literature, but rather our perspective on it, that has obscured the atrocities of colonial history.

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About the Author

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3. ‘Pleasant and Useful Reading for Dutch Youth’: Attitudes on Slavery in A. E. van Noothoorn’s Fictional Travel Accounts for Children (1843–1851)

Claudia Zeller

Abstract: Over the course of the nineteenth century, fictional travel accounts became a popular genre within European children’s literature. Presented as a didactic tool to assist in the teaching of geography to a new generation of school children, such travel accounts were part of a broader discourse on colonialism and slavery. This chapter discusses how attitudes towards slavery were expressed in a series of fictional travel accounts of journeys to various parts of the world, as written and published by Antony Egbertus van Noothoorn between 1843 and 1851. A geography teacher who never set foot outside the Netherlands himself, van Noothoorn relied on factual travel accounts upon which he based his own stories describing the travels and adventures of his young protagonists. This chapter charts the narrative and rhetorical strategies van Noothoorn employed to ‘translate’ the various attitudes towards slavery expressed in his ‘source’ material to make them suitable for young readers and how, in the process, those attitudes were ‘transplanted’ from one location to the next.

Keywords: Dutch children’s literature; fictional travel writing; A.E. van Noothoorn; colonialism; slavery; nineteenth century

Introduction

In 1843, Antony Egbertus van Noothoorn (1811–1851), a Dutch school teacher and children’s author, published two fictional travel accounts for children. These were soon to be followed by another set of four fictional

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travel accounts. The publication of this book series coincided with what has been referred to – at least within the context of British and American literature – as 'the golden age in children's literature' (Ang 2000, 15). At the same time, van Noothoorn's books, the first set in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), the second in the Dutch West Indies (Suriname), can be seen as part of an educational agenda that sought to disseminate an imperial and colonial ideology. Fictional yet 'realistic' travel accounts were a popular genre amongst both an adult and children's reading public of the post-Enlightenment era. Indeed, over the course of the early nineteenth century, such 'realistic' travel accounts, both factual and fictional, would replace the genre of the *voyage imaginaire* as the foremost vehicle for educational purposes (Anderson 2020, 58).

As Nilay Erdem Ayyıldız (2018) observes in the introduction to her study on British children's adventure novels from the nineteenth century, 'there is a close relationship between imperialist ideology and the literary products of the nineteenth century' (1). Children's literature especially can be seen as a medium through which 'the value patterns considered worthy enough to be passed down to the next generation' were selected and redefined (Wesseling 2009, 140). Explicitly presented by van Noothoorn as a didactic tool to teach Dutch school children, in a supposedly fun way, the importance of 'our Dutch possessions' (van Noothoorn 1843b, iv), an analysis of this series of books can help to show that, over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, it was through children's literature that the importance of the colonial project was installed in the minds of the nation's young readers. In the introduction to the first volume about Indonesia, van Noothoorn (1843b) states this intention in a particularly unequivocal manner:

> That I have chosen the Dutch possessions in the East Indies should be unsurprising; our nation, through the courage of our forefathers, having conquered these regions and their descendants having made them, from time to time, into a veritable gold mine, still vests the hope of its current generations in it. Take from the Netherlands its possessions in the Eastern archipelago, and you will cut off its aorta.[1] (v)

1 'Dat ik juist de Nederlandsch Oost-Indische bezittingen uitkoos, zal wel niemand bevreemden; ons volk, door den moed der voorvaderen, die gewesten veroverd hebbende, zijn deze door hunne nazaten, van tijd tot tijd, in eene goudmijn herschapen, waarop, meer dan ooit, ook de hoop van het tegenwoordig geslacht, gevestigd blijft. Ontneem Nederland wat het in den Oosterschen archipel bezit, en gij snijdt het de hartader af.' Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

Referring to the Dutch East Indies as the Netherlands' aorta – thus presenting the Dutch Empire as a bodily entity that was kept alive thanks to the archipelagic arteries of the Indonesian islands – was but one of many rhetorical strategies employed to 'naturalise' the colonial project. However, it was not only the colonial project that had to be defended. Much like the factual travel accounts of Dutch travellers to Suriname and Indonesia published during that period (for travel accounts about Suriname, see van Breugel 1842; van Lennep-Coster 1837; Nagel 1840; Stedman 1796; for travel accounts about Indonesia, see Nagel 1828; Olivier 1827–1830; Roorda van Eysinga 1830–1832), van Noothoorn also explicitly addresses the issue of slavery. Indeed, given that van Noothoorn never set foot outside the Netherlands, the adventures of his various young male protagonists lean heavily on these factual travel accounts.[2] The narrative techniques he used when 'translating' his source material for an audience of 'young people from well-to-do families' (van Noothoorn 1846b, vii) can show how the attitudes towards slavery they expressed are related to the economic and colonial interests of the Dutch Empire.[3]

Internationally, research on colonialism in children's literature can still be considered something of an emerging field (Lévêque 2011, 143). Although studies such as Clare Bradford's (2007) address the legacy of colonialism and slavery in children's literature written in English from 1980 onwards, the current dearth of research becomes especially apparent in the context of children's literature *from* the colonial era. The first section of this chapter briefly discusses how van Noothoorn's fictional travel accounts relate to broader developments in children's literature of the early nineteenth century and posits them as a 'vehicle for colonial discourse and [...] imperialist purposes' (Ayyıldız 2018, 1–2). The subsequent sections chart this discursive field with regard to attitudes towards slavery expressed in travel writing, both fictional and factual, set in the 'Dutch possessions', before juxtaposing those views to van Noothoorn's fictional travel accounts about Russia (1844), the United States (1846a), and Spain (1851) – geographical locations outside the Dutch Empire. The extent to which van Noothoorn's writings were more than a mere reflection of colonial attitudes of his era becomes clear once they are related to, and compared with, views on slavery expressed in other non-fictional travel writing. This comparative approach also makes it possible to consider how the geographical setting influenced the manner in which the maintenance of slavery was defended, contested, or simply ignored.

2 As Coen van 't Veer (2018, 246) points out, this was common practice amongst children's authors from the nineteenth century.

3 'jonge lieden van den meer gegoeden stand'.

Van Noothoorn's 'Library of Geography'

Over the course of his relatively short life, van Noothoorn published a staggering number of children's books. As the bibliography assembled by Renate van der Geer (1994) as part of her study on van Noothoorn's worldview indicates, van Noothoorn wrote and published about twenty-five books between 1838 and his untimely death in 1851.[4] In her study, van der Geer describes the worldview espoused by van Noothoorn through his books, and relates it to other children's books of his era, yet she does not address the broader discursive field of the genre upon which van Noothoorn modelled his 'Library of Geography' – that of non-fictional travel account. Studying van Noothoorn's fictional travel accounts in relation to the broader colonial discourse of his time – especially travel accounts written by 'eye-witnesses' – will highlight not only the ways in which van Noothoorn 'translated' his source material to make it palatable for children, but will also show how his writings were embedded in, and contributed to, an educational agenda concerned with maintaining and defending the colonial project of the Dutch Empire.

As a budding children's author, van Noothoorn was not primarily concerned with geography, but rather with history. His debut novel *Walfoort. Geldersch romantisch tafereel uit de 14e eeuw* ('Walfoort, Gelderland. A Romantic Scene from the Fourteenth Century', 1838), a historical novel, draws inspiration from the works of Walter Scott (van Noothoorn 1838, iii). Set in the province of Gelderland in the fourteenth century, it attempts to sketch 'the spirit of the age, in which the acting characters are presented' (van Noothoorn 1838, iv).[5] Yet even though the novel starts with the bold claim that 'Gelderland is to the Netherlands what Scotland is to England' (van Noothoorn 1838, 1), thus positioning himself as a Dutch version of Walter Scott, van Noothoorn spends a considerable part of the first two chapters providing a detailed geographical description of the province itself.[6] These

4 It was not until 1856, five years after his death, that his most prominent book *Het leven van Sint Nikolaas, voor kinderen* – a story about Sinterklaas in the vein of Jan Schenkman's *Sint Nicolaas en zijn knecht* (1850) – was published. This book, which contains no references to the figure of Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) whatsoever, is the only one of van Noothoorn's books referenced in *Lust en leering: Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse kinderboek in de negentiende eeuw* – P. J. Buijnsters and Leontine Buijnsters-Smets' (2001) impressive 500-page overview of the history of Dutch children's literature from the nineteenth century.

5 '[…] den geest des tijds, in welken de handelende personen ten tooneele worden gevoerd, te schetsen.'

6 '*Gelderland* is voor *Nederland*, wat *Schotland* voor *Engeland* is.'

exhaustive geographical descriptions already foreshadow the techniques he would later employ in his fictional travel accounts.

This penchant for geography over history undoubtably has its roots in van Noothoorn's personal background as a geography teacher in Arnhem, yet it also reflects the growing influence of a pedagogical current that 'redacted, repositioned and *revisualized* commercially successful travel narratives for an audience of young (male) readers' (Anderson 2020, 57).[7] This turn towards children's books that privileged such narratives over historical novels set in the past, or imaginary travel stories set in the realms of fantasy, was part of a broader European development. Whereas during the Enlightenment, adventure stories for children had been considered somewhat of a 'bourgeois bugaboo', over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, stories about (realistic) adventures in far-away places 'gradually but dramatically acquired a new pedagogical and literary status' (Anderson 2020, 58).

Such a 'claim to veracity' (Anderson 2020, 63) is already obvious in the first volume of van Noothoorn's 'travel and adventure' series. *Reizen en lotgevallen van Lodewijk Vermeer in de Nederlandsch Oost-Indische bezittingen* ('Travels and Adventures of Lodewijk Vermeer in The Dutch East Indies', 1843b) recounts the adventures of Lodewijk Vermeer, a sixteen-year-old boy from Rotterdam who, after the untimely death of his parents, is advised by his uncle to 'try his luck' in the Dutch East Indies. Starting in 1819 and spanning at least two decades, the story accompanies Lodewijk all the way to Indonesia and back.

Reprising the structure of many non-fictional travel accounts about Indonesia of that era, the story begins with a description of the sea passage to Java. At the same time, van Noothoorn borrows from another genre popular within children's literature – the Robinsonade or stranding – which he integrates into his narrative. On his journey back from Indonesia to the Netherlands, a violent storm leaves the protagonist and his ship mates stranded on the Cape of Africa. This brief interlude provides not only the most exciting and gripping part of the book, but it also provides van Noothoorn with an opportunity to briefly describe Cape Town and its surroundings. Eventually, Lodewijk manages to return to Gelderland, where he uses his fortune acquired in 'the East' to buy 'a lovely country house' and live happily ever after (van Noothoorn 1843b, 158).[8]

Shortly after *Reizen en lotgevallen van Lodewijk Vermeer in de Nederlandsch Oost-Indische bezittingen* was published, a further volume of van

7 Emphasis in original.

8 'een lief buitenplaatsje'.

Noothoorn's 'Library of Geography' appeared. Titled *Reizen en lotgevallen van Gustaaf Westerman in de Nederlandsch Westindische bezittingen* ('Travels and Adventures of Gustaaf Westerman in the Dutch West Indies', 1843a), van Noothoorn's second fictional travel account centres around Gustaaf, another young Dutch boy who accompanies his Uncle Jan, a well-meaning, father-like figure, to his sugar plantation in Suriname. Like *Reizen en lotgevallen van Lodewijk Vermeer*, this book contains another explicit reference to a 'second Robinson Crusoe' – a Frenchman left stranded on the island of Curaçao – again affording van Noothoorn the possibility to describe yet another location impacted by Dutch colonialism.

Besides the integration of first- or second-hand Robinsonades, there are other pedagogical strategies that van Noothoorn borrows directly from narrative techniques employed in children's literature from the Enlightenment. As Feike Dietz (2021) points out in her insightful study of Dutch children's literature in the late eighteenth century, Dutch children's books from the Enlightenment tended to be adapted from German, Anglo-Saxon, or French sources and paired natural history with themes of morality and religion. The focus of van Noothoorn's fictional travel accounts no longer reflect this 'physico-theological programme' (Dietz 2021, 122) so prevalent throughout the eighteenth century. Instead, it offers a new pairing of school subjects that were just about to be formalised within the system of Dutch education: that of history and geography.[9]

It might seem somewhat odd that van Noothoorn's 'Library of Geography' started with a pair of books about Indonesia and Suriname. Yet, as van der Geer (1994) points out, the educational agenda van Noothoorn pursued was grounded in a colonial and racialised logic: 'the underlying goal of his travel accounts is asserting the superiority of the Netherlands and the Dutch' (139).[10] This attitude of superiority is reflected in the various dialogues between the young protagonists and older white Dutch men, who function as virtuous role models, benefactors, or mentors. For instance, in a conversation with Lodewijk, the captain of the ship taking them to Java points out that '[…] our possessions in the East Indies are a priceless pearl that is the envy of all other nations. And Java specifically, beautiful and

9 Even though it was not until 1857 that history and geography would become mandatory subjects, publications such as the *Schoolboek der aardrijkskunde voor eerstbeginnenden* ('Geography School Book for Beginners', 1816) already reveal a shift towards an educational system that worked towards normalising the emergence of the Dutch Empire.

10 'Het achterliggende doel van zijn reisbeschrijvingen is aantonen dat Nederland en de Nederlanders superieur zijn.'

bountiful Java, is vital for our precious fatherland [...]' (van Noothoorn 1843b, 27).[11]

These lofty words betray a conception of citizenship that is emotionally grounded in the perception of the Netherlands as an empire. The importance van Noothoorn attaches to the economic status of white, male, usually Protestant Europeans is equally reflected in the titles of his travel accounts about Suriname and Indonesia, in which both are explicitly posited as 'our Dutch possession'. As will become clear, van Noothoorn's worldview was not only imbued with a colonial and racial logic, but also with a capitalist one. Hence, the continuous defence of slavery permeating most of van Noothoorn's writing is the direct result of the inherently entangled nature of these ideologies.

To sustain this worldview, van Noothoorn often resorted to religious reasoning pertaining to a 'God-given order of society' that was clearly aimed at establishing the superiority of white – and preferably wealthy – Dutch colonisers. The colonial capitalist economy that van Noothoorn sought to naturalise is defended through a Protestant worldview that presupposes a Protestant (work) ethic that counteracts alternative value systems that would otherwise oppose slavery on moral grounds. Van Noothoorn's books can thus be said to be grounded in an educational discourse geared towards raising Dutch citizens who accept – and potentially even embrace – colonialism, racism, and capitalism, and hence everything these ideologies entail, as basic facts of life.

Yet the viewpoints held and expressed by van Noothoorn were in no way exceptional or peculiar. Like other children's authors of the early nineteenth century who never travelled abroad themselves, van Noothoorn relied on all kinds of written sources that were circulating in the Netherlands during the first half of the nineteenth century. His reliance on both the form and content of non-fictional travel accounts can be seen as part of a broader European development within children's literature – one mirrored by similar publications in France or Germany. For instance, from 1840 onwards, the German school teacher Theodor Dielitz (1810–1869) published a series of books called *Land- und Seebilder* ('Images of Land and Sea') that were inspired by, and borrowed from, the works of 'successful contemporary travel writers, most notably the French author Gabriel Ferry; Anglophone writers Thomas Mayne Reid, William Gilmore Simms, James Feinmore Cooper, and

11 '[...] onze Oost-Indische bezittingen, zijn een parel zoo onschatbaar, dat ieder volk ze ons benijdt. En Java vooral, het schoone en vruchtbare Java is onontbeerlijk voor het lieve Vaderland [...].'

Frederick Marryat […]' (Anderson 2020, 63). Like Dielitz and many other early nineteenth-century children's authors, van Noothoorn relied on such non-fictional travel accounts. The following section addresses how the attitudes towards slavery and other colonial practices expressed in those travel accounts are translated 'into symbolic structures' that potentially enhance 'the tenacity of colonialist discourse' (Wesseling 2009, 140). I will start by focusing on travel accounts about Indonesia and Suriname before juxtaposing the views expressed on slavery therein to those found in van Noothoorn's books set beyond the realms of the Dutch Empire.

Attitudes towards Slavery in Factual and Fictional Travel Accounts about the 'Dutch Possessions'

In 1836, G. van Lennep-Coster, an officer in the Dutch navy who had spent a considerable number of years in the Dutch West Indies, published his two-volume memoir of his travels to 'various parts of the world'. This book, titled *Herinneringen mijner reizen naar onderscheidene werelddeelen* ('Travels to Various Parts of the World: A Memoir', 1836), contains one of the most lurid – yet not at all uncommon – apologies for the maintenance of slavery in the Dutch colonies.[12] Arguing that the men, women, and children brought to the Dutch Caribbean by force were not only better off because of it, van Lennep-Coster goes as far as to state that, to put it crudely, slavery saves lives:

> [T]he slave trade has the advantage to have saved thousands of lives of those whose death would otherwise have been certain, and has given them a life of servitude equal to and in much respects better than the life of many a craftsman or worker in Europe, with the difference that although they lack freedom, they do not care for it and would never aspire to be free if their master is a good man.[13] (van Lennep-Coster 1836, 117)

12 As Gert Oostindie (1993) notes, such 'comparisons with the quality of life among the European proletariat' (12) were a common way to defend slavery within the Dutch Caribbean context from the 1820s onwards.

13 'De slavenhandel bezit derhalve dat voordeel, dat hij verscheidene duizenden voor den dood behoed heeft, waartoe zij anders gewis zouden veroordeeld geweest zijn, en hen daarentegen tot een leven van dienstbaarheid geleid heeft, gelijk staande met, en in vele opzigten beter zijnde, dan de levenwijze van menig ambachts- en werkman in Europa, met dat onderscheid, dat zij de vrijheid missen, een goed, hetwelk zij niet waarderen, en zoo zij een goeden meester hebben, niet verkiezen.'

The chain of reasoning van Lennep-Coster presents – starting with the prevention of an otherwise certain death and ending with the assertion that no enslaved person would care to be free if they could count on a benevolent slave holder – is echoed in similar terms in van Noothoorn's fictional travel account about Suriname. In a lengthy fragment, Uncle Jan, portrayed as a kind-hearted, smart, and virtuous owner of a sugar plantation, prefaces his defence of the necessity of the maintenance of slavery in Suriname with a disclaimer in the guise of an ethical appeal: 'you and I and every reasonable person abhors the practice of buying and selling man created in God's own image as if he were an animal devoid of reason' (van Noothoorn 1843a, 64).[14] Unlike van Lennep-Coster, who matter-of-factly describes the continuation of the illicit practice of 'buying and selling' other human beings even after the slave trade was formally abolished,[15] Uncle Jan appears to oppose the brutal practice of the Mid-Atlantic triangle. Yet what could be read as a tentative critique of slavery only concerns the transactional part of it. It is revealed that he has fewer qualms when it comes to *owning* other human beings when, much like van Lennep-Coster, Uncle Jan points out that slavery also existed on the coasts of Africa – a much less 'beneficial'

14 'Gij en ik en elk welkdenkend mensch vinden het afschuwelijk, dat de naar Gods evenbeeld geschapen mensch […] als ware hij een redeloos dier, wordt gekocht en verkocht […].'

15 Although an agreement signed by the Netherlands as part of the 1815 Congress of Vienna formally abolished the slave trade, van Lennep-Coster acknowledged that an illicit slave trade continued well into the 1840s and that he, as a representative of the Dutch colonial apparatus, was complicit in its continuation. In his travel account, van Lennep-Coster details how, on 31 April 1820, he witnesses the arrival of a slave ship in the port of Paramaribo. In a rather matter-of-fact way, van Lennep-Coster describes how this illicit practice was organised: 'Op dezen dag kwam er eene Brik onder Hollandsche vlag binnen met 478 koppen slaven, komende van *St. Thomas*; gedurende ons verblijf in de kolonie waren er voorzeker al 2500 à 3000 koppen slaven ingevoerd, komende meestal van de Fransche eilanden. Men handelt er aldus mede: bij derzelver aankomst worden zij ontscheept, en in een pakhuis gebragt, alwaar zij, na behoorlijke reiniging, in loten van 10 à 12 verdeeld worden. De voornaamste administrateuren en particulieren komen hen dan bezigtigen, men tracht den prijs eens te worden, die thans meest van *f* 800 tot *f* 1000 was, betaalbaar in wissels op Nederland, op 6 en 12 maanden zigt; hierna loot men, en diegene, welke hen dan gekocht heeft, geeft hun namen en zendt ze naar zijne plantaadje.' ('On this day a brig sailing under Dutch flag arrived from St. Thomas, carrying 478 slaves; during our stay in the colony there were about 2500 to 3000 slaves being imported, mostly via the French islands. This is how the trade works: upon arrival they are disembarked and brough to a warehouse where they, after being given a good wash, are divided into lots of 10 to 12. The foremost administrators and private individuals come and take a look at them, one tries to agree upon a price, normally around *f* 800 to *f* 1000, to be paid in promissory notes to the Dutch state, within the next 6 to 12 months. Afterwards, the purchase is decided by drawing straws, and whomever has purchased the slaves gives them names and send them to his plantation.' van Lennep-Coster 1836, 112–13).

form of slavery, since it was apparently much preferable to be owned by a European slave holder:

> They were destined to die; or destined to become enslaved in their own part of the world. In that case their destiny was much more lamentable than had they become the property of a European planter. Thousands of them would have died from hunger in their fatherland anyway, since they are inconceivably idle and uncivilised, and are only concerned with the present, which leads to their land being dry and barren.[16] (van Noothoorn 1843a, 64)

Apart from presenting slavery in the Dutch Caribbean as an almost benevolent act, van Noothoorn also assumes a static world view in which the superiority of not only white, but also Dutch – and, if possible, rich – people was not to be questioned. He does so by referring to theological logic, thereby mobilising a Protestant world view to justify and explain the stark differences between rich and poor, white and Black, free and enslaved. In a fragment describing daily life in Paramaribo, van Noothoorn directly addresses the reader when suggesting that such differences are not only inevitable, but also God-given:

> [...] but you must understand, my dear young friends, that craftsmen, servants and the less wealthy can have no part in this; there's differences in rank and class everywhere in the world; this is inevitable for our societies, and ordained like this by a wise God. Fortunate is the rich man, who with a grateful heart enjoys his good fortune while trying to make the life of his less privileged peers as pleasant and tolerable as possible. Fortunate is the poor man who accepts his position without complaint.[17] (van Noothoorn 1843a, 36)

16 '[...] dat zij bestemd waren, om te sterven, of in hun eigen werelddeel slaven moesten worden. In dat geval was hun lot nog meer te beklagen, dan als zij het eigendom van eenen Europeeschen planter werden. Duizenden van die negers zouden in hun vaderland ook van honger zijn gestorven, omdat zij onbegrijpelijk lui en onbeschaafd zijn, slechts voor den dag van heden zorgen, en hun land dor en schraal is.'

17 '[...] maar gij begrijpt, mijne jeugdige vrienden en vriendinnen, dat handwerkslieden, bedienden en minder gegoede lieden dat alles zoo niet kunnen hebben; overal in de wereld is onderscheid van rang en stand; dit is onvermijdelijk in onze maatschappijen, en voor God alzoo wijsselijk ingerigt. Gelukkig de rijke, die met een dankbaar hart van het goede geniet, en voor zijne minder bevoorregte natuurgenooten het leven zoo aangenaam en dragelijk mogelijk tracht te maken! Gelukkig de arme, die zich naar zijnen staat kan voegen zonder morren!'

According to van Noothoorn, societal structures are God-given and must thus be accepted by all – and in the case of the poor, without complaint. Van Noothoorn likewise paints the 'fortunate rich' as good-hearted patriarchs, thereby replicating the position of a wise, Christian deity. Yet it is not only the good-heartedness, but also the self-serving nature of every good capitalist that pushes wealthy plantation owners and slave holders to treat those enslaved 'as pleasantly and tolerably as possible'. After all, they are also the plantation owner's 'biggest fortune' (van Noothoorn 1843a, 46).[18]

In *Reizen en lotgevallen van Gustaaf Westerman* especially, this dynamic between the 'virtuous colonial capitalist' and the 'degenerate one' is played out in a stand-off between Uncle Jan and Woesterberg, the overseer Uncle Jan put in charge of his sugar plantation Vreugdenrijk during his absence. Woesterberg behaves just like his name ('savage mountain') would suggest. Portrayed as the opposite of Uncle Jan, Woesterberg is depicted as a truly despicable figure with a vicious character – not only a bad person, but also a drunkard who likes to abuse his power. Yet his worst vice seems to be his incapacity to generate enough income for Uncle Jan: 'WOESTERBERG is a bad person, he is very much addicted to alcohol, mistreats the enslaved when drunk, and as much as he served your interests in the first couple of years, he now completely neglects them' (van Noothoorn 1843a, 33).[19]

Yet rather than an indication of a failing, unjust, and racist economic and moral system built on a logic of extraction and exploitation, Woesterberg is instead presented as an isolated 'bad apple'. As mentioned earlier, Uncle Jan does not oppose slavery in general. Instead, he explains to his nephew and protégé Gustaaf that slavery is very much a necessity, not least because white Europeans are unfit or unwilling to work under the challenging circumstances that the climate in Suriname presents:

> Woods had to be cut, the ground freed of weeds, harmful and dangerous animals had to be eradicated. When all this was done, one still needed many hands to cultivate the ground, to plant, sow, harvest and to prepare the products to be sold. Who should do all this? The Europeans, who had come here as colonisers? No, these good people were too slow, in the possession of some fortune, and had left their motherland planning

18 'Die slavenmagt maakt de grootste rijkdom van den planter uit; het is daarom in zijn eigen belang, die menschen goed te behandelen […].'

19 'WOESTERBERG is een slecht mensch; hij is zeer aan den drank verslaafd, mishandelt in zijne dronkenschap de slaven, en even zorgvuldig, als hij in de eerste jaren uw belang behartigde, even onvergeeflijk verwaarloost hij dat nu.'

> to get rich, and not by making a living through manual labour.[20] (van Noothoorn 1843a, 62–63)

Much like van Lennep-Coster, van Noothoorn, using Uncle Jan as a mouthpiece, points out that most of the enslaved population, being 'willing to work without exceeding their physical force', are not only better off than any of the free marrons and the various native Indian tribes living in the rain forest, but also live a life preferable to that of the 'European servants who are also not really free, or even to that of completely free Europeans who, in spite of all their freedom, die of hunger and still have to work or beg in order to make a living' (van Noothoorn 1843a, 66).[21] In other words, in the version of Suriname van Noothoorn seeks to depict, slavery is not only necessary, but even beneficial to all involved. Relying on the same incongruous reasoning found in non-fictional travel accounts from the same period, van Noothoorn stages his defence of slavery mainly through Uncle Jan. Portrayed as a trusted figure of authority, young Dutch readers were invited to look to him for guidance. Although the defence of slavery is mostly voiced by Uncle Jan in direct dialogue with his nephew, it is young Gustaaf who remains the focaliser of the story. Using Gustaaf as a narrative proxy, van Noothoorn thus found a way to spoon-feed attitudes towards slavery circulating in texts geared towards a more adult readership to an audience of Dutch school children.

And what about Indonesia? After all, as Reggie Baay (2015) points out in his study *Daar werd wat gruwelijks verricht. Slavernij in Nederlands-Indië* ('Something Horrible Happened There. Slavery in the Dutch East Indies'), slavery in the Dutch cultural imagination is firmly anchored within the Caribbean context, whereas the history of slavery in the Dutch East Indies remains largely forgotten. Whilst van Noothoorn's fictional travel account

20 'Bosschen moesten geveld, de grond van struikgewas en onkruid gezuiverd, en schadelijk en gevaarlijk ongedierte uitgeroeid worden. Was dat alles in orde, dan werden er niet minder handen vereischt, om te pooten, te planten, te zaaijen, te oogsten en de voortbrengselen verkoopbaar te maken. Wie zouden nu dat alle doen? De Europeanen, die zich hier als kolonisten hadden gevestigd? Toch niet, die goede menschen waren daartoe te traag, bezaten meestal eenig vermogen, en hadden hun vaderland verlaten met het vaste plan, om rijk te worden, vooral niet, om door handenarbeid aan de kost te komen.'

21 'Op de meesten onzer Surinaamsche plantaadjes, kan men naar waarheid tot de slaven zeggen: doet slechts uw werk, dat uwe ligchaamskracht niet te boven gaat, en gij hebt geene straf te vreezen, ja, gij zult het beter hebben, dan de vrije Indiaan, de boschneger, ja zelfs beter, dan een groot aantal Europesche dienstboden, die toch ook alles behalve vrij zijn, of, dan geheel vrije Europeanen, die met al hunne vrijheid bijna van honger sterven en toch moeten werken of bedelen.'

of Indonesia does contain several references to slavery, unlike in *Reizen en lotgevallen van Gustaaf Westerman*, those instances are not accompanied by lengthy passages explaining and defending its necessity. Instead, there are various forms of slavery that need to be distinguished. The first concerns instances of enslaved local people who appear whenever doors need to be opened, food needs to be served, or some other menial task needs to be fulfilled (van Noothoorn 1843b, 77).[22] References to hard plantation labour, however – a second category of enslavement in Indonesia under Dutch rule – are limited to a brief aside concerning the nutmeg harvest on the Banda islands: 'From early in the morning until late at night, the enslaved are busy harvesting and peeling [the fruits of the nutmeg tree]' (van Noothoorn 1843b, 128).[23] Moreover, van Noothoorn refers to the population of the Banda islands as particularly prosperous,[24] failing to address the gruelling massacre committed by Jan Pieterszoon Coen in 1621 – an important focal point in Amitav Ghosh's (2021) *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*.

A further, somewhat peculiar category of enslavement does not exist as part of the broader colonial apparatus, but rather outside it, namely: enslavement by pirates. Presented as a case of bad luck, this type of slavery could happen to almost anybody – even to white Dutch merchants. Whereas the Dutch colonial apparatus was far from colour-blind when it came to slavery – indeed, it operated on a moral and legal basis that made whiteness incommensurable with enslavement – enslavement by pirates did not know such legal or moral boundaries. There are two instances of this final category in *Reizen en lotgevallen van Lodewijk Vermeer* that are of particular interest, especially since they provide a first-person account of two characters who have experienced this kind of slavery themselves. The

22 In most instances, the people who come from the local population and exist on a somewhat sliding scale between employment and enslavement are almost interchangeably referred to as either 'servants' (*bedienden*) or 'enslaved' (*slaven*) without either term being privileged. For example, describing the aftermath of a traditional Indonesian meal (served in the household of a Dutch merchant), van Noothoorn (1843b) notes: 'Heeft men van dit een en ander naar zijn genoegen gegeten, en een weinig adem geschept, dan komen slaven en slavinnen of bedienden, om hunne gebieders en gebiedsters in zeer ligte, doorgaans witte gewaden, te kleeden […]' ('When one has eaten to one's satisfaction, and has taken a little stroll, then slaves and slave women or servants come and help their masters get dressed in very light, usually white robes.' van Noothoorn 1843b, 77).

23 'Nu moeten de slaven van den morgen tot den avond onophoudelijk bezig zijn met het plukken en ontbolsteren.'

24 'Op deze eilanden heerscht veel welvaart, welke de bewoners hoofdzakelijk aan de notenmuskaatboom te danken hebben, die hier overvloedig groeit.' ('There is a lot of prosperity on these islands, that the inhabitants owe mainly to the nutmeg tree, which grows abundantly here.' van Noothoorn 1843b, 127–28).

first concerns Lodewijk's encounter with Frits de Vries, a friendly elderly Dutch gentleman who, like many others, had made his fortune in the East. However, as de Vries explains, as a young sailor, he was caught by a group of pirates and spent about three years of his life as an enslaved labourer. Recounting this period to Lodewijk, de Vries repeatedly stresses the hard physical labour he had to endure:

> [...] I had to carry water like a poor hired servant and thresh rice like a puny Javanese. [...] after an arduous day's work, I received some rice and water that kept me from dying from hunger. I thus spent three frightful years as a slave since none of my relatives knew that poor Frits had to work this hard threshing rice. After some time, I was bought by a Chinese man who took me to Java where, with a modest margin, he sold me back to my uncle.[25] (van Noothoorn 1843b, 114–15)

Although de Vries does point out how miserably he was treated by his pirate slave holders, who stripped him naked and shaved his 'beautiful blond hair' (van Noothoorn 1843b, 115), he does not condemn slavery as such. Instead, he compares his experience to that of the native population, thereby normalising the existence of slavery. Yet by also stressing his Protestant work ethic – that diligence and perseverance got him through this dreadful period and eventually made him a wealthy man – de Vries's experience distinguishes him from those who were not able to escape similar dreadful circumstances.

In this regard, it is interesting to contrast de Vries's experience of slavery with a similar episode recounted to Lodewijk by Saïb, a man from the Moluccas. Captured by pirates, he too spent two years as an enslaved labourer before managing to escape:

> It was Allah's will to have me captured by pirates and stay with them as a slave for two years. Oh, it was not for me, seeing my hands become rough from relentlessly scraping sago, but it was being apart from my beloved Zoë that made me burst into tears. After having spent two fearful years in

25 '[...] ik heb water moeten dragen als een schamele daglooner en rijst getombokt als een geringe Javaan. [...] als ik bijzonder vlijtig geweest was, ontving ik rijst en water, om niet van de honger om te komen. Aldus bragt ik drie bange jaren als slaaf door; want niemand mijner bloedverwanten konde te weten komen, dat de arme FRITS zoo fiks aan het rijst kloppen was [...]. Na verloop van dien tijd werd ik door eenen Chinees gekocht, die mij mede naar Java nam en aldaar, tegen eene matige winst, mij weder in handen van mijnen oom leverde.'

> slavery, I escaped, and thanked the great prophet for his rescue through passionate prayer.[26] (van Noothoorn 1843b, 137)

Whereas both Saïb's enslavement and liberation are presented as a case of divine will, de Vries ceaselessly emphasises his diligence and work ethic, thereby stressing the Protestant values that shaped the Dutch Empire and led him to become a wealthy man. Moreover, Saïb is explicitly portrayed as someone having other religious beliefs and who, as a result, suffers a substantially darker fate: after having been accused of murder, he is eventually executed (van Noothoorn 1843b, 140). This is completely in line with the crass characterisation of people from the Moluccas that van Noothoorn provides elsewhere, thus positioning the account of the Moluccan man as a cautionary tale: 'Even Sumatran people on Java had told me that I should be wary when dealing with Moluccans because the natives of those islands are – or so they said – lazy, cowardly, deceptive, hypocritical, rebellious, smarmy, slave-like, vengeful and uncompromising' (van Noothoorn 1843b, 154).[27] In light of this characterisation, the stark differences between those initially similar storylines all but reinforce the worldview van Noothoorn seeks to disseminate: that essentially, at least with regard to the Dutch Empire, there is nothing wrong with slavery, and hard work always pays off – at least as far as white people are concerned.

Slavery and Serfdom in the United States and Russia

At first glance, the fictional travel accounts about Russia, the United States, and Spain discussed in this section might appear to further complicate the picture painted above. *Reizen en lotgevallen van Frederik Langendam in Rusland* ('Travels and Adventures of Frederik Langendam in Russia', 1844) is the most sentimental and most personal book in van Noothoorn's series, whereas the travel account about the United States, *Reizen en lotgevallen*

26 'Het behaagde Allah, dat ik op mijnen togt door zeeroovers werd gevangen genomen, en twee jaren als slaaf onder hen moest blijven. O, het was niets voor mij, mijne handen stug van het eelt te zien worden, door het onafgebroken sago schrappen, maar gescheiden te zijn van mijne beminnelijke Zoë […], dat deed mij tranen storten. Na twee jaren in bange slavernij te hebben door gebragt, ontsnapte ik, en dankte in een vurig gebed den grooten Profeet voor zijne redding.'

27 'Zelfs Sumatrezen op *Java* hadden mij reeds gezegd, dat ik onder de Molukkers op mijne hoede moest zijn, want – zeide men – de inboorlingen zijn er lui, lafhartig, bedriegelijk, geveinsd, oproerig, vleijend, slaafs, wraakzuchtig en onverzoenlijk.'

van Henry Warton ('Travels and Adventures of Henry Warton', 1846a) stands out because its protagonist, a young English nobleman, is the only one in the series from a non-Dutch background.[28] Nonetheless, the attitudes expressed in these travel accounts form part of a discursive continuum that reinforces the worldview van Noothoorn seeks to express throughout this series.

It may seem odd that van Noothoorn would choose to write a travel account about Russia. After all, it was never part of the Dutch Empire and it occupied a largely marginalised place in the imagination of a nineteenth-century readership to which it was often presented as somewhat backwards, rough, and uncivilised.[29] The storyline of *Reizen en lotgevallen van Frederik Langendam in Rusland* starts with Frederik, a twenty-something clerk in Dordrecht, being asked by his boss Willem Overbeek to accompany him on a business trip to Russia.[30] The rather short duration of their trip, during which they visit all the major Russian cities, is comparable to the grand-tour-like set-up of Henry Warton's travels to the United States. As the youngest son of a well-to-do English nobleman, Warton is the only protagonist who does not accompany an older, mentor-like figure on his travels. Rather, he is accompanied by Quentin, his faithful Scottish servant. This, combined with the fact that Henry comes from a well-off background, makes for a very different dynamic to that discussed thus far.

Since van Noothoorn's fictional travel account about the United States was written and published well before the American Civil War and the ensuing abolition of slavery in the Southern states, it could be assumed that the discussion of the maintenance of slavery in the South would be comparable to the arguments put forward in the travel account about Suriname. After all, both were built on a plantation economy. However, this is not quite the case. Instead of reiterating the lengthy defence of slavery in the Dutch

28 Incidentally, this is the only book in the series that was published twice – in 1849, a Flemish edition was published by Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon in Ghent. This Flemish edition uses an adapted orthography also known as 'Willems-spelling' or 'Commissie-spelling'.

29 This is acknowledged time and again by van Noothoorn himself. A French traveller whom Frederik and Overbeek encounter on their boat journey from Hamburg to Kronstadt describes Russia in no uncertain terms: 'En even barbaarsch als het volk is, even ruw is het luchtgestel, even ellendig zijn de wegen. Neen, nimmer hoop ik weder een voet in Rusland te zetten.' ('And as barbaric as its people, as rough is its air, as miserable are its roads. No, never again do I hope to set foot in Russia.' van Noothoorn 1844, 9).

30 Incidentally, Overbeek's brother Ferdinand took part in Napoleon's campaign against Russia – just like van Noothoorn's father Arend Dirk who, in 1812, just a year after van Noothoorn was born, was forced to participate in Napoleon's campaign against Russia, from which he would not return (van der Geer 1994, 10).

Caribbean, van Noothoorn has Henry express surprise at the sight of enslaved labourers on the tobacco fields of Maryland:

> 'What', you might say, 'slavery in the United States of America, where freedom is so highly valued? Where one has fought a bloody battle for independence?'
> It surely is a strange and sad phenomenon, because although the Western and Northern states have freed the enslaved, Southern states such as Virginia, North and South Carolina, Louisiana and others would despair if forced to abolish slavery. But let's not judge those planters all too harshly; we have to take into account the heat, the kind of work and other causes, although we do wish for the day that the last enslaved person in this freedom-loving land will finally be free.[31] (van Noothoorn 1846a, 95)

Embedding his initial surprise within the political discourse of freedom associated with the founding myth of the United States, the argument put forward with regard to the maintenance of slavery in the American South soon reverts to reasons both economic and meteorological – the work is too hard, the climate too hot. As in *Reizen en lotgevallen van Gustaaf Westerman*, van Noothoorn's sympathy and allegiance lie squarely with the plantation owners.

Lastly, it is worthwhile to compare the attitudes on slavery discussed hitherto to van Noothoorn's travel account about Russia and the particular form of indentured labour described there – that of serfdom, which is presented as an integral part of Russian civilisation. Having described the wealth and splendour of St. Petersburg, van Noothoorn has his narrator turn his attention to a marketplace located in the midst of the city:

> One of these markets drew my attention in particular, because like a pig's market or animal market in our part of the world, it would be quite

31 '"Hoe?" zegt gij welligt, slaven in dat Amerika, waar men zoo hoog met de vrijheid loopt? waar men eenen zoo bloedigen strijd heeft gestreden, om onafhankelijk te worden?"
Voorzeker, het is een vreemd en treurig verschijnsel; want terwijl de westelijke en noordelijke staten de slaven vrij hebben gesteld, zouden de zuidelijke zooals Virginië, de Carolines, Louisiana en anderen wanhopend worden, indien zij gedwongen werden de slavernij af te schaffen. Laten wij echter deze planters niet al te hard vallen; de hitte, de aard van den arbeid en andere oorzaken kunnen hen eenigermate verontschuldigen, ofschoon wij van harte wenschen, dat de dag spoedig zal aanbreken, waarop de laatste slaaf in het vrijheidlievende Amerika zich ook in zijne vrijheid zal kunnen verheugen.'

> adequate to refer to this kind of market as a human market. Let me explain why. Some Russian noblemen who live in the countryside do not own enough land to employ all their serfs. Those serfs are allowed to go to large cities such as Petersburg or Moscow to offer their services as servants or workmen; whatever money they earn that way they may keep, as long as they keep paying a certain amount of money each year to their master, as proof of their continued serfdom. Thus, in Petersburg or Moscow, it is not a rare occurrence to encounter rich merchants that are still serfs.[32] (van Noothoorn 1844, 43)

Once again, van Noothoorn resorts to an economic argument that nevertheless can be read as a reversal of the situation in Suriname and the American South. This reversal plays out on two levels: first, it is a lack, instead of an excess, of land that warrants the maintenance of serfdom; second, serfdom and wealth are not mutually exclusive.

At the same time, Russians from the lower class are described by van Noothoorn in grotesque and dehumanising terms:

> I once went to the Nicolas Market where whole rows of real Russians from the lower estates were lying or standing; most of them clad in sheepskin and wearing footwear made from tree bark instead of shoes and stockings; all of them had long beards [...].[33] (van Noothoorn 1844, 43–44)

Needless to say, Russian noblemen are described in much less animal-like terms. The forms of othering and dehumanisation that van Noothoorn employs when defending slavery are thus not exclusively racially motivated. In the case of poor Russians, it is their economic status that causes them to approximate an animal-like state of being.

32 'Een dezer markten trok mijne bijzondere opmerkzaamheid tot zich, want even als wij bij ons van eene varkensmarkt, of beestenmarkt spreken, zoude ik deze een menschenmarkt kunnen noemen. Luistert waarom. Sommige Russische Edellieden, die op het land wonen, bezitten geen' gronds genoeg, om aan al hunne lijfeigenen werk te geven. Deze lijfeigenen gaan, met toestemming van hunne heeren naar de steden, vooral naar Petersburg en Moscou, om zich daar als bedienden of werklieden aan te bieden; het loon dat zij kunnen bedingen is voor hen, doch zij moeten aan hunne heeren jaarlijks een bepaalde som afstaan, ten bewijze dat zij steeds lijfeigenen zijn. Op deze wijze gebeurt het niet zelden dat men in Petersburg of Moscou schatrijke kooplieden aantreft, die evenwel nog lijfeigenen zijn.'

33 'Ik kwam dan eens op de markt, de Nikolaasmarkt genaamd; daar stonden of lagen bij geheele rijen echte Russen uit den lagen stand; de meesten waren gekleed in eenen schapenpels, met schoeisel van gevlochten boombast in plaats van schoenen en kousen; allen hadden lange baarden [...].'

At the same time, the dehumanising language van Noothoorn adopts is reinforced through Blackness. Whereas the lower-class Russians are only *wearing* clothes made of sheepskin, groups of enslaved Black people are, time and again, described as 'a flock of sheep' (van Noothoorn 1843a, 59). This dehumanisation through animalisation is especially notable in *Reizen en lotgevallen van Paul Porter in Spanje* ('Travels and Adventures of Paul Porter in Spain', 1851), the last fictional travel account van Noothoorn would publish. Describing an encounter with a group of six 'galley slaves [...] pushing a cart', van Noothoorn notes:

> They had giant bodies; their monstrous features so savage and lacking humanity, that their appearance made me freeze with terror, as if they were a troop of tigers. Their clothes, a kind of linen robe, added to their diabolic and fantastic guise. I do not know how they ended up on the galleys, but their unnatural ugliness is a crime that should have condemned them to it regardless.[34] (van Noothoorn 1851, 74)

The strategy of explicitly associating Blackness with ugliness permeates van Noothoorn's writing, although nowhere in as blatantly racist terms as in the example above. Not having any economic interest to defend, the fictional travel account about Spain thus helps to unveil the deeply racist undercurrents present in all the travel accounts discussed here – attitudes that were packaged in a series of adventurous stories that would make for some 'pleasant and useful reading' for the Dutch youth (van Noothoorn 1843a, iii–iv).[35]

Conclusion

Although there are various recent publications that address the lack of diversity in children's literature, research into the depiction of colonialism and slavery in children's literature from the colonial era itself is still somewhat lacking. By focussing on a series of fictional travel accounts modelled on factual travel accounts – a popular literary genre of the post-Enlightenment

34 'Zij hadden een reusachtige ligchaamsbouw, hunne monsterachtige gelaatstrekken, waren zoo woest, hadden zoo weinig menschelijks, dat ik bij hunnen aanblik van schrik als verstijfd stond, als ware het een troep tijgers geweest. De soort van linnen kiel, die hen tot kleeding verstrekte, gaf hen een nog meer diabolisch en fantastisch voorkomen. Ik weet niet, wat hen op de galeijen had gebragt, maar ik zoude er hen alleen toe hebben kunnen veroordeelen, voor de enkele misdaad, dat ze zoo onnatuurlijk leelijk waren.'

35 'eene aangename en nuttige lectuur'.

era – this chapter traced how attitudes towards colonialism and slavery were presented to young readers under the guise of an adventure series that also aimed to teach geography.

Given that the focus of van Noothoorn's 'travels and adventures' series was primarily on geography, rather than slavery, it is reasonable to assume that the opinions he expressed can be considered a discursive by-product that not necessarily reflect his personal stance on issues regarding slavery, whiteness, and colonialism. An analysis of these works can thus highlight how the entanglement of those discourses that shaped the Dutch colonial project permeated his writing, thus revealing what society at large thought about those issues – and what the new generation was supposed to think about those issues.

A comparison between travel accounts of locations that were part of the Dutch Empire and those situated beyond those realms can shed light on the ways in which the maintenance of slavery as defended by van Noothoorn and his contemporaries became entangled with, and thus exacerbated by, the economic interests of the Dutch coloniser. This is especially obvious in the case of the Dutch Caribbean. In order to make slavery palatable for a young readership, van Noothoorn often resorted to an argument that was already circulating in society at large, namely that enslaved people brought to the Dutch Caribbean were better off than many poor European workmen. Because of the considerable differences regarding the economic and political situations in the Dutch Caribbean and Indonesia, this argument did not transplant well to the Dutch East Indies, where slavery tended to be less prevalent – at least in the cultural imagination of both van Noothoorn's time and our own.

Further research on colonialism and slavery in children's literature is needed. This could take various directions. For one, van Noothoorn's books could be compared to those of Theo Dielitz or other European children's authors. Furthermore, it would be interesting to extend this research of the discourse on slavery and colonialism in children's books to the second half of the nineteenth century, notably those published after or around 1863, when slavery was finally abolished in the Dutch Empire.

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About the Author

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4. Convict Labour and Concubinage in the Dutch East Indies: Historical and Literary Reappropriations of Martha Christina Tiahahu's Anti-Colonial Revolt

Gerlov van Engelenhoven

Abstract: Martha Christina Tiahahu was a Moluccan warrior who was involved in a revolt against Dutch colonial rule in 1817. She was captured by Dutch soldiers and sentenced to convict labour in Java, but passed away on the ship taking her there, having resolutely refused all food and care. The ship's captain, Ver Huell, described Tiahahu's role in the revolt in his memoir. His exoticising and eroticising representation of her has been decisive for the way in which she has entered history. In this chapter, I will analyse how Ver Huell's account appropriates Tiahahu's story for the ideological purpose of justifying Dutch colonialism. Using Edward Said's method of contrapuntal reading, I will identify two central elements of this history that he obscures in his account as a way to support his colonial perspective, namely: convict labour as post-abolition slavery, and the figure of the *njai*, or concubine, as a common form of convict labour reserved for colonial women. The purpose of my analysis is to reflect on the (im)possibility of untangling appropriated stories from the dominant voices that appropriated them. Therefore, this chapter ends with a close reading of Dutch East Indies author Maria Dermoût's literary retelling of the revolt. I will read her short story, *De juwelen haarkam* (1956), as an attempt to untangle Tiahahu's story from the colonial voice that came to dominate it.

Keywords: Convict labour; Dutch East Indies; concubinage; Moluccan revolt; collective memory; contrapuntal reading

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Introduction

This chapter addresses the historical and literary representation of the Moluccan warrior Martha Christina Tiahahu (1800–1818). From 16 May until 26 November 1817, Tiahahu was involved in a revolt against Dutch colonial rule in the central Moluccan region. She was captured by Dutch soldiers and sentenced to convict labour in Java. She fell ill on the ship taking her there, and died on 2 January 1818, having resolutely refused all food and medicine. Her body was lowered into the Banda Sea. The ship's captain, Q. M. R. Ver Huell (1787–1860), described Tiahahu's role in the revolt in his memoir (Ver Huell 1835, 1836). He represents her as 'an "Oriental beauty", whose passionate impulses have not yet become restricted by a civilized upbringing' (Straver 2018, 182).[1]

In my analysis of his account, I turn to Edward Said's (1994) method of *contrapuntal reading*, which he defines as reading imperialist texts 'with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present' (66). Ver Huell's text contains at least two such silent or marginally present elements. Through my contrapuntal reading, I will identify these elements to be (1) convict labour – the fate Tiahahu escaped when she died on her way to Java; and (2) the figure of the *njai*, or concubine, as a particular form of convict labour reserved for colonial women. Subsequently, I will analyse how Ver Huell's minimising of these aspects supports the ideological purpose of his report, which is to reaffirm the legitimacy of colonial rule.

The purpose of my analysis is to reflect on the process of untangling appropriated stories from the dominant voices that appropriated them. As Tiahahu's story is told through the colonial voice of Ver Huell, her own voice is difficult to recover. Therefore, this chapter ends with a close reading of Dutch East Indies author Maria Dermoût's literary retelling of the revolt. In her short story, *De juwelen haarkam* (1956), Dermoût destabilises Ver Huell's historical authority by reimagining him as an unreliable narrator whose witness account becomes more fragmentary as the story develops. As a result, Dermoût's story can be read as an attempt to untangle Tiahahu's story from the colonial voice that came to dominate it.

1 This and all following translations from Dutch are by the author: 'een "Oostersche schoone" in die zin, dat haar hartstochtelijke opwellingen nog niet door een beschaafde opvoeding aan banden zijn gelegd.'

Historical Context of the Revolt

The Moluccan revolt of 1817 was an attempt to overthrow Dutch colonial rule in the central Moluccan region. The main reason was religious. The revolt was mounted by Moluccan Christians who disagreed with the secularisation that had started under Dutch Governor General Herman Willem Daendels (in office 1807–1810). According to the historian P. J. M. Noldus (1984), 'the rebels considered their revolt almost as a Holy War' (112). Revolt leader Thomas Matulesia 'saw himself as a guardian of the Christian faith which he felt was threatened by the government' (Noldus 1984, 115). At the start of the revolt, he compiled a list of thirteen complaints against the Dutch government. The first of these was that 'the Dutch government wanted to fire the schoolmasters and destroy the practice of religion' (Straver 2018, 138).[2] 'Schoolmasters' was the official term for Moluccan religious and educational community leaders.

The social status of these schoolmasters had traditionally been that of mediators between the local population and the colonial government, but this role had diminished under Daendels's government. Daendels was the first governor general to rule the East Indies after the Dutch Batavian Republic had taken over the colonial possessions and associated debt of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) (Dutch East India Company), which had been declared bankrupt in 1799. Daendels, 'forced through lack of finance, made the payment of schoolmasters' salaries the responsibility of the villages, with a consequent loss of their prestige' (Noldus 1984, 30). The schoolmasters, as a result, encouraged armed resistance in their communities to protest against this development: 'Matulesia, throughout his career as the leader of the rebellion, was surrounded by schoolmasters who acted as his principal advisers and go-betweens' (Noldus 1984, 137).

Their initiative was organised from the Moluccan island of Saparua. The immediate goal was to attack Fort Duurstede, a colonial establishment on the island, which hosted the Dutch 'resident', his family, and his garrison. Under Matulesia's supervision, the majority of villages on Saparua were persuaded to join the revolt. Their attack on Fort Duurstede took place on 16 May 1817. The rebels killed around thirty people. Four days after this attack a detachment of 180 Dutch soldiers arrived on Saparua in an attempt to suppress the revolt. However, the attempt failed and approximately 150

2 'dat het Nederlandse bestuur de schoolmeesters wilde ontslaan en de godsdienst vernietigen.'

Dutch soldiers were killed. In the following month, the revolt expanded to several neighbouring islands, albeit without further successes. One such neighbouring island was Nusa Laut. And one of the commanders from Nusa Laut was Paulus Tiahahu, who brought his daughter to battle: Martha Christina Tiahahu.

Following an impasse that lasted until September 1817, the Dutch achieved a series of victories over the rebels, and finally arrested Thomas Matulesia and Paulus and Martha Christina Tiahahu, along with several other revolt leaders on 11 November 1817. Punitive expeditions were held over the following month, and a large number of villages that had participated in the revolt were razed to the ground by burning. Approximately forty rebels were publicly executed. Paulus Tiahahu was executed on 17 November 1817, whilst his daughter Martha Christina Tiahahu was banished to perform convict labour in Java, dying en route on 2 January 1818.

In his analysis of this revolt, the historian Hans Straver (2018) compares the most prominent Dutch and Moluccan sources available.[3] Straver (2018) concludes that there exists a discrepancy between Martha Christina Tiahahu's representation as a legendary warrior in contemporary Dutch and Indonesian history on the one hand, and the scarce source material that exists about her actual participation on the other: 'There are no direct witness reports about the participation of Christina and her father in the revolt itself' (190).[4]

Despite this scarcity of source material, Tiahahu's legacy has become prominent to such an extent that she was made an official Indonesian national hero in 1969. According to Straver (2018), this legacy can be accredited to a report of the revolt that was written by Ver Huell. The latter was in charge of the ship that brought Tiahahu to Java, and as such he witnessed her death on 2 January 1818. However, according to Straver (2018), Ver Huell's report of Tiahahu's role in the revolt is greatly exaggerated, to a large extent even a fabrication.[5] In the following section, I delve deeper into Ver Huell's particular representation of Tiahahu, to see how it reflects his ideological position with regard to Dutch colonial rule.

3 These sources are collected in *Bronnen betreffende de Midden-Molukken 1796–1902* ('Sources regarding Central Maluku 1796–1902') – i.e., the open-access digital archive of all available historical sources concerning this region during this period.

4 'Er zijn geen directe getuigenissen over het aandeel van Christina en haar vader in de opstand zelf.'

5 For a thorough discussion of the question of Ver Huell's credibility, see Straver (2018) and my own continuation of his discussion in Van Engelenhoven (2020).

Tiahahu according to Ver Huell

On 17 December 1817, Martha Christina Tiahahu was brought aboard Ver Huell's ship, amongst a group of thirty-nine captured rebels to be banished to the coffee plantations in Java. Her father, Paulus Tiahahu, was one of the revolt leaders who had been publicly executed as a deterrent for the Moluccan population. She herself had been spared 'in consideration of her youth' (Ver Huell 1835, 251).[6] In his memoir, Ver Huell (1835) recalls in elaborate detail how he welcomed her as a captive on his ship:

> I tried my best to hearten her with convincing reasons, by assuring her that she would be treated carefully on board [...] and that she, once she would arrive on Java, could count on the magnanimity and charity of the governor general [...]. She then threw a meaningful and wistful glance at me, and remained completely silent. When heavy emotions agitate the soul, words can bring only little consolation: this is what her profound silence expressed. The look in her pitch-black, soulful eyes was striking. It indicated a deep-rooted, suppressed sorrow. I felt great compassion for this savage child of nature.[7] (271)

Straver (2018) casts doubt on the accuracy of Ver Huell's report of this situation: 'Keeping in mind that his grasp of the Malay language was very limited, Ver Huell's memory of this conversation with Christina Martha is not exactly credible' (171).[8] I would go a step further and argue that it is an overstatement to call the cited communication a conversation at all, seeing that Tiahahu does not verbally respond to Ver Huell at any point. Ver Huell appropriates her silence by inscribing it with his own meaning, thereby enabling himself to speak for her. Although her silence could have been an indication of any number of things, including defiance or a lack of mutual comprehension, Ver Huell interprets it as the unequivocal expression of her sorrow.

6 'uit aanmerking van hare jeugd'.

7 'Ik deed mijn best om haar met overtuigende redenen moed in te boezemen, haar verzekerende van eene zorgvuldige behandeling aan boord [...] en dat zij, eenmaal op Java aangekomen, op de edelmoedigheid en menschlievendheid van den Gouverneur-Generaal vertrouwen kon [...]. Zij zag mij toen met een' veelbetekendenden weemoedigen blik aan, en bewaarde het striktste stilzwijgen. Wanneer een diep gevoel de ziel ontroert, kunnen woorden weinig troost aanbrengen: een diep stilzwijgen drukte ook bij haar dit gevoel uit. De opslag van haar gitzwart, zielvol, oog was treffend. Het duidde eene, in haar binnenste verkropte, smart aan. Ik gevoelde een diep medelijden voor dit woeste kind der natuur.'

8 'Omdat zijn beheersing van het Maleis zeer gebrekkig was, is Ver Huells herinnering aan dit gesprek met Christina Martha niet bijzonder geloofwaardig.'

This pitiable image of Tiahahu comes to full fruition in the final passage he dedicates to her, concerning her death on 2 January 1818:

> Her isolated way of life had undermined her health. She steadfastly refused all medicine; with aversion she accepted a very small amount of food, as a result of which the poor girl withered away entirely, and became like a skeleton, upon which followed a deep, gloomy dejection, that soon carried her off. That night, I had her remains quietly lowered into the sea.[9] (Ver Huell 1836, 2–3)

The way in which Ver Huell describes Tiahahu's death presents her as someone whose tragedy could not have been prevented, despite all self-proclaimed benevolent efforts on his part. He presents the events that led up to her captivity on his ship as out of both his and her control: 'Raised among a savage people […] she had surrendered completely to frantic rage' (Ver Huell 1835, 271).[10] By framing the story in this way, Ver Huell enables a representation of himself as Tiahahu's protector, rather than her aggressor.

Said's (1994) method of contrapuntal reading makes it possible to read this account of Tiahahu's arrest and death differently. Contrapuntal reading means to situate a text 'critically within a wider field of imaginative possibilities' by focusing on 'information about the structure of reference that the work ignores, distorts, or minimizes *and* by reminding us that the structure of invoked attitudes has plausible alternatives that the work has effectively excluded' (Wilson 1994, 265–66, emphasis in original). In other words, contrapuntal reading is aimed at reading a text for what it *does not say* or tries to obscure. In the following section, I will analyse two main details that are obscured in Ver Huell's account, but which can be revealed through contrapuntal reading.

Convict Labour and Concubinage

The first obscured detail in Ver Huell's account of the Moluccan revolt is the intended destination of the prisoners of his ship: Ver Huell's ship was carrying the first thirty-nine prisoners of a total of 'more than a hundred

9 'Hare afgezonderde levenswijze had hare gezondheid ondermijnd. Zij weigerde standvastig alle geneesmiddelen; en met weerzin nam zij eene zeer geringe hoeveelheid voedsel, zoodat het arme meisje geheel uitteerde, en als een geraamte werd, waarop eene diepe, sombere, neêrslagtigheid volgde, die haar weldra wegsleepte. Ik liet haar stoffelijk overblijfsel 's nachts stil in zee zakken.'

10 'Onder een wild volk opgevoed, had zij […] zich geheel overgegeven aan de dolle drift.'

rebels' who 'were sentenced to convict labour for a period of seven to ten years' (Straver 2018, 140).[11] According to historian Matthias van Rossum (2018), during the nineteenth century, 'all convicts in the Dutch East Indies were employed as forced labourers, and most of them worked at extramural convict sides' (88). The use of convict labour not only had a disciplinary function, but also 'had a *productive function* in the colonial production regime, supporting the various colonial aims with regard to expansion, infrastructure, extraction, and actual production' (van Rossum 2018, 88, emphasis in original). The abolition of the slave trade in the Dutch East Indies in 1814 'stimulated the search for alternative forms of cheap and controllable labour. […] Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, slaves had been an important part of the workforce in the same place in which convicts were later employed' (van Rossum 2018, 69). Such places included mines, urban public works, and plantations.

This context makes it possible to add a layer of interpretation to Tiahahu's consistent refusal to accept food or medicine on board Ver Huell's ship with the result that she died. Although Ver Huell (1835) does mention his prisoners' 'banishment to the coffee plantations of Java' (270), he does not connect this destination to Tiahahu's 'deep-rooted, suppressed sorrow' and her resulting death (271).[12] Instead, he interprets her condition unequivocally as being 'driven by parental love', eventually culminating in 'a deep, gloomy dejection that soon carried her off' (Ver Huell 1835, 271; 1836, 3).[13] Although it makes sense that Tiahahu was mourning her father – who had been executed only a month earlier – an equally valid interpretation of her refusal to eat is that it was her attempt to protest and escape her fate as a forced labourer. The first of two minimised details in Ver Huell's account is thus the system of convict labour itself. Whereas Ver Huell describes Tiahahu's death as a tragedy for which he is not responsible, my contrapuntal reading encourages the interpretation of her death as the ultimate escape from a fate approximating slavery. The latter interpretation thus places responsibility directly with Ver Huell as a representative of Dutch colonial rule, which enforced this type of punishment.

The second minimised detail in Ver Huell's account concerns Tiahahu's particular presence on his ship as a young colonial woman. Tiahahu was

11 'Ruim honderd opstandelingen warden voor een periode van zeven tot tien jaar tewerkgesteld op Java.'

12 'ballingschap, in de koffijtuinen van Java'; 'in haar binnenste verkropte, smart.'

13 'door ouderliefde gedreven'; 'waarop eene diepe, sombere, neêrslagtigheid volgde, die haar weldra wegsleepte.'

one of the few female prisoners, perhaps the only one. Ver Huell does not confirm or deny this, however, he does mention that the prisoners were all revolt leaders, listing several prominent ones by name. He also mentions that it was 'to my surprise' that Tiahahu was amongst them (Ver Huell 1835, 271).[14] From his description of the revolt's leadership earlier in his memoir, it is clear that Tiahahu was the only female leader. As a woman, it was unlikely that Tiahahu would be sent to the coffee plantations along with her male co-captives. Her alternative fate is suggested in this previously cited sentence from Ver Huell (1835): 'I tried my best to hearten her with convincing reasons, by assuring her [...] that she, once she would arrive on Java, could count on the magnanimity and charity of the Governor General' (271).[15] Apparently, instead of working on the plantation, her fate was to be sent to the governor general.

Although Ver Huell's mentioning of his 'magnanimity and charity' could indicate that she would be pardoned, this interpretation seems unlikely. After all, she had apparently been central enough to the revolt to be arrested amongst thirty-eight co-conspirators, none of whom were deemed worthy of any such mitigation. Therefore, an alternative interpretation of her planned subjection to the governor general's 'magnanimity and charity' could be that she was to be employed in his household, or in that of one of his colleagues. Such employment was a common form of convict labour reserved for colonial women as an alternative to the hard physical work on the plantations. It would officially involve domestic work and nursing, but would in practice often also include sleeping with the master of the house. There was even a title attached to this occupation, as novelist Reggie Baay (2009) remarks: 'She has existed from the moment that employees of the VOC came to the archipelago around 1600: the *njai*. The native woman who was not only the housekeeper of the coloniser, but also shared his bed, and often became the mother of his children' (6).[16]

Regarding this sexually exploitative form of forced labour, the literary theorist Pamela Pattynama (2011) notes that 'throughout the centuries, concubinage between Asian women and European men was the typical

14 'tot mijne verwondering'.

15 'Ik deed mijn best om haar met overtuigende redenen moed in te boezemen, haar verzekerende [...] dat zij, eenmaal op Java aangekomen, op de edelmoedigheid en menschlievendheid van den Gouverneur-Generaal vertrouwen kon.'

16 'Vanaf het moment dat de dienaren van de VOC rond 1600 aankwamen in de archipel bestond ze: de njai. De inheemse vrouw die niet alleen de huishoudster was van de koloniaal, maar ook met hem het bed deelde en, in veel gevallen, de moeder werd van zijn kinderen.'

form of family-building in [Dutch] colonial society' (128).[17] Most colonisers 'chose a woman from the local female population, among whom, until the abolition of slavery in 1860, many were enslaved' (Pattynama 2011, 131).[18] Although 1860 marked the abolition of slavery in the Dutch East Indies, as mentioned above, the abolition of the slave *trade* had already occurred much earlier in 1814, a full three years before Tiahahu's arrest. Convict labour developed as a way to work around the 'limited scope to employ slave labour' that resulted from this abolition (van Rossum 2018, 69). The forced domestic, often sexual labour that was imposed upon female convicts became part of the post-slavery systemic exploitation of the nineteenth century. As with convict labour itself, this 'regulation of sexuality in the Indies was predominantly commercially motivated', as Pattynama (2011) explains: 'expensive passages of Dutch women to the colony were unnecessary, men learned the local language and customs from their *njai* without much effort and received free sex and care' (131).[19]

Although Ver Huell never makes Tiahahu's potential fate as a *njai* explicit, there is ample opportunity to identify his sexual motivation to capture her. For instance, in his account of her father's execution, which she also attended, he describes her as follows:

> She was very shapely and tall in stature. Her beautiful black eyes were full of expression. She had a wistful expression on her mouth, which was delightful, with teeth as white as snow [...]. Her dress consisted of a simple *badjoe*, or shirt of blue linen, and a little dress or *sarong* around her hips. She was standing there, in a noble, casual pose, extending soulful, inquisitive glances to all of us with her dark eyes.[20] (Ver Huell 1835, 50)

This is just one of numerous elaborate descriptions Ver Huell provides of Tiahahu's physical appearance, in which he usually focuses on her eyes,

17 'In de koloniale samenleving was eeuwenlang het concubinaat [...] tussen Aziatische vrouwen en Europese mannen de gebruikelijke vorm van gezinsvorming.'

18 'kozen een vrouw uit de lokaal aanwezige vrouwen, onder wie zich tot aan de afschaffing van de slavernij in 1860 veel slavinnen bevonden.'

19 'De regulering van seksualiteit had in Indië vooral een winstoogmerk: dure overtochten van vrouwen ware niet nodig, de mannen leerden zonder veel moeite de plaatselijke taal en lokale gebruiken van hun njai, zij hadden gratis seks en verzorging.'

20 'Zij was zeer welgemaakt en rijzig van gestalte. Hare schoone zwarte oogen waren vol van uitdrukking. Zij had eenen weemoedigen trek om den mond, die fraai was, met sneeuwwitte tanden [...]. Hare kleding bestond in een eenvoudig badjoe, of halfhemd van blaauw linnen, en een kleedje of sarong om de middel. Zij stond daar, in eene edele ongedwongene houding, de donkeere oogen met zielvolle, en vorschende blikken op ieder van ons slaande.'

hair and mouth, her clothing and the shape of her body. These descriptions often escalate into imaginative directions, as can be noticed in the following passage:

> Her long, raven black hair was hanging down completely, in wavy braids down her back. Perhaps she had made the same promise as the heroine from the Eastern epic poem Brata Youdha: 'She has vowed to not bind her hair until she will have bathed in the blood of hundreds of Kenowa!'[21] (Ver Huell 1835, 249–50)

The heroine Ver Huell refers to in this citation is Princess Drupadi, a main character in the Indian epic tale *Mahabharata*, adapted into a Javanese version called *Bharatayudha* in the twelfth century, misspelled by Ver Huell as 'Brata Youdha'. In the tale, Drupadi is dragged from the women's quarters and subjected to an attempted sexual assault by her enemies, a family called the Kurawa, misspelled by Ver Huell as 'Kenowa', and of which there were exactly one hundred, rather than the 'hundreds' that he mentions. In reaction to this assault, Drupadi swears that she will only bind her hair again once she has taken revenge on every single one of her aggressors. Ver Huell's reference to this narrative appears to be based only on the fact that Tiahahu's hair was hanging down, as was the case for Princess Drupadi. Other than that, the comparison between a twelfth-century epic poem based in the Hindu tradition of the Indian subcontinent, and a nineteenth-century revolt taking place in a Christianised region in the Dutch East Indies seems farfetched at best, and unnecessary for his report.

Such speculative elements of his writing can be interpreted as a paradigmatic expression of *Orientalism*. This concept was first introduced by Edward Said (1979) and refers to the imagined divide between the Orient and Occident, constructed to reinforce a hierarchy between the European imagination of its colonies and that of itself, in which the latter is understood as superior. This hierarchy is often established by conceptualising 'the Orient as feminine, erotic, exotic, and savage, allowing the West to accede to a position of superiority as Christian, civilized, and moral' (Lewis 1993, 54).

Ver Huell's description of Tiahahu resonates with this understanding of the Orient as feminine and savage. He describes her as both attractive

21 'Hare lange, gitzwarte, haren hingen geheel los in golvende vlechten op haren rug. Welligt had zij dezelfde gelofte gedaan, als de heldin uit het Oostersch Heldendicht Brata Youdha: "Zij heeft eene gelofte gedaan, de haren niet eer op te binden alvorens zij zich gebaad heeft in het bloed van de honderden van Kenowa!"'

and dangerous, by associating her physical appearance to a story about the attempted sexual assault of a bloodthirsty 'Oriental' warrior-princess. According to Said (1979), every writer on the Orient 'assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies' (20). Orientalism is thus an imaginative practice carried by 'Oriental fantasies – whose presence in time, in discourse, in institutions (schools, libraries, foreign services) gives it strength and authority' (Said 1979, 20). Ver Huell's text can be interpreted as a continuation of such 'Oriental fantasies', which make up the structure of Europe's collective imagination of its colonies or, in this particular case, that of the Netherlands regarding the Indies. Representing colonial subjects as sexualised savages reveals the project of colonisation itself to be a sexual endeavour that involves conquering or 'taming' the colonised.

This interpretation of Ver Huell's descriptions as innately Orientalist is based primarily on elements that are *internal* to his text: it is the text itself that provides the evidence for this interpretation. A contrapuntal reading, however, must 'superimpose the legitimate claims of internal or intrinsic readings of a work, on the one hand, and the claims of various forms of external critique, on the other' (Wilson 1994, 265). After all, each historical text 'refers to or depicts a complex of materials that have been drawn from the actual world, e.g., actual people, places, institutions and practices' (Wilson 1994, 265). In the case of Tiahahu's revolt, the internal indications of Ver Huell's sexualising gaze must be coupled with its external context: the knowledge that young, female colonial captives were often destined to become concubines. When such contextual information is included in the interpretation, the likelihood of Ver Huell perceiving Tiahahu's future as his or someone else's *njai* becomes apparent. In fact, references to this scenario can be found throughout the historiography of Ver Huell's involvement with the revolt, albeit usually attenuated with euphemisms. For instance, historian H. J. de Graaf (1977) notes that 'the young Ver Huell did not remain unperturbed by [Tiahahu's] beauty and tragic life. But his romantic feelings were not reciprocated, although he had made his own cabin available to her' (234).[22]

My interpretation of Tiahahu as someone who escaped becoming someone's *njai* is thus the result of a contrapuntal reading in which internal elements of Ver Huell's text that explicitly sexualise Tiahahu are connected

22 'de jonge Ver Huell niet onberoerd bleef voor haar schoonheid en tragische levensloop. Maar zijn romantische gevoelens werden niet beantwoord, al stelde hij de eigen hut tot haar beschikking.'

to external knowledge that affords a further interpretative direction. This external knowledge is twofold: first, there is the knowledge that Ver Huell's prisoners were destined to fulfil convict labour in Java; and second, there is the knowledge that many female prisoners ended up in domestic labour, which more often than not involved sexual exploitation. Ver Huell's bracketing of these details may or may not have been intentional. Regardless, his sexualised descriptions of Tiahahu as a victim of 'savage impulses' aids him in presenting himself as her protector rather than her aggressor.

Realising the colonial intention of this representation, it is perhaps ironic that Ver Huell's account has been actively reinterpreted against this intention by nationalist writers in the years following Indonesia's struggle for independence (1945–1949). In their reappropriation of Tiahahu's story, she is no longer a tragic victim, but a heroic precursor of Indonesian nationalism. In the next section, I will discuss this version of Tiahahu's story, to show how both Ver Huell's colonial representation and its nationalist re-reading in effect *speak for* Tiahahu, as a result of which her own voice becomes difficult to discern.

Tiahahu's Function for Indonesian Nationalism

In 1969, Tiahahu was made a national hero, an official title that is granted by presidential decree to Indonesians who have played central roles in anti-colonial resistance. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture appointed the historian L. J. H. Zacharias to write the accompanying biography (see Zacharias 1977). Zacharias starts her book by pointing out that, due to a scarcity of sources about Tiahahu's role in the revolt, she was forced to base her account mostly on Ver Huell's 'biased statements', which sketch a 'poor and moreover fragmentary image of this heroine' (Zacharias cited in Straver 2018, 216).[23]

Yet, despite this explicit awareness of the limitations of her source material, Zacharias's biography is still carried by strategically selective interpretations of it. For instance, she interprets the fact that Tiahahu was arrested and imprisoned on Ver Huell's ship as evidence that 'the Dutch were apprehensive of the dangerous influence she could exert on the population' (Zacharias cited in Straver 2018, 222).[24] As such, Zacharias casts Tiahahu as

23 'partijdige verklaringen'; 'een pover en bovendien fragmentarisch beeld van deze heldin.'
24 'de Nederlanders zouden beducht zijn geweest voor de gevaarlijke invloed die zij op de bevolking zou kunnen uitoefenen.'

an influential voice of resistance, despite the fact that Tiahahu's actual voice is significantly absent from Ver Huell's and other witness reports. Despite their opposing aims, both Zacharias's nationalist account of Tiahahu's legacy and Ver Huell's colonial representation see no issue in speaking for her. The basic facts that she was a young woman who followed her father into battle and who died an untimely death were sufficient for her to become a mouthpiece for the expression of both colonial and nationalist ideologies.

Indeed, the fact that Tiahahu hardly spoke a word during her encounters with Ver Huell has proven beneficial to the historians who have appropriated her story. Ver Huell (1835) took her silence as an invitation to speak for her: 'When heavy emotions agitate the soul, words can bring only little consolation: this is what her profound silence expressed' (271).[25] That same silence, which culminates in her eventual death, is understood in Zacharias's version as testament to her fearlessness (Straver 2018, 222). In her strategic re-reading of Ver Huell's representation of Tiahahu as a tragic victim, Zacharias thus reinterprets her as a heroic martyr, commendable for her 'noble character', her 'commitment to fighting injustice and oppression', and her 'animating impact on the people' (Straver 2018, 223).[26]

In short, both Ver Huell's and Zacharias's perspectives constitute dominant voices that appropriate Tiahahu's story for their ideological purposes of, respectively, the justification of colonial rule and of Indonesian nationalism. Both of these dominant appropriations override Tiahahu's own voice in this history. In the final section, as an attempt to untangle her story from the colonial and nationalist voices that came to dominate it, I will analyse Maria Dermoût's (1956) *De juwelen haarkam*.

Ver Huell according to Dermoût

Maria Dermoût (1888–1962) was born in Java. Throughout her life, she lived in different parts of the colony, including in the Moluccan region from 1910–1914. In 1933, at the age of forty-five, Dermoût moved to the Netherlands, at which point she started publishing her short stories about the colony. Although she was born and raised in a colonial family and married a Dutch colonial jurist, her background is ambiguous: she may or may not have been

25 'Wanneer een diep gevoel de ziel ontroert, kunnen woorden weinig troost aanbrengen: een diep stilzwijgen drukte ook bij haar dit gevoel uit.'

26 'hoogstaande levenshouding'; 'strijdvaardigheid tegenover onrecht en overheersing'; 'bezielende invloed op het volk.'

the illegitimate child of her father and his *njai*. Kester Freriks (2001) devotes much of his biography of Dermoût to this unsolved question, which she herself never sought to answer definitively. However, the literary critics Frans-Willem Korsten and Cor de Jong (2004) have criticised this interest in her bloodline for the following reasons:

> Whether or not Dermoût had a mother from the Indies cannot be confirmed. What is more interesting is the way in which her biographer and the literary critics of her time have sometimes measured the *Indisch* quality of Dermoût's work on the basis of her 'blood'. As if her mixed background would make her more authentically a Dutch Indies author. The discussion of this reproduces the colonial distinction between people based on their descent: as full-blooded Dutch, mixed blood, or full-blooded Indies.[27] (10)

My mentioning of this biographical issue here is not meant to further repeat this questionable tendency in literary criticism to classify (post)colonial writers based on their bloodline. Rather, I mention it merely to illustrate how Dermoût's identity is entangled with the previously discussed colonial system of concubinage. Whether or not the story about her background is true, she was aware of its existence throughout her life and chose not to pursue it, instead allowing it to linger as a possibility. This choice, for ambivalence over certainty in her life, can be identified as a common element in her approach to writing as well. In his epilogue to Dermoût's collected works, Freriks (2001) mentions that

> she accepted an invisible reality behind the visible one. Maria Dermoût evokes this way of thinking in the phrase that there are 'many things, but not all things. What rests are the imaginations and shapes'. For her, these were as valuable and meaningful as the tangible things.[28] (675–76)

27 'Of Dermoût inderdaad een Indische moeder heeft gehad, is niet achterhaalbaar. Interessanter is de manier waarop het Indische gehalte van Dermoûts werk door haar biograaf en door de literaire kringen uit haar eigen tijd soms wordt teruggevoerd op haar "bloed." Het is alsof haar gemengde afkomst haar authentieker tot een Indisch-Nederlandse auteur maakt. De discussie hierover reproduceert de koloniale indeling van mensen aan de hand van hun afkomst: als volbloed Nederlanders, mengbloeden, of volbloed Indiërs.'

28 'het aanvaarden van een onzichtbare werkelijkheid achter de zichtbare. Maria Dermoût evoceert deze zienswijze in de zinsnede dat er "vele dingen waren, maar niet alle." Zij vervolgt: "Er bleven nog de verbeeldingen, gestalten." Voor haar zijn die even waardevol en betekenisrijk als de tastbare dingen.'

This tendency to evoke ambivalence is also apparent in Dermoût's literary retelling of the Moluccan revolt of 1817. *De juwelen haarkam* (Dermoût [1956] 2001) is a take on the revolt that focuses not on Tiahahu or any of its other main characters, but instead places the history's most prominent historical source, Ver Huell, at the centre of attention. The story refers to him only by his first name, Quirien, and follows his return to the Netherlands in 1819, after his four-year stay in the colony. The revolt itself is narrated entirely in retrospect, in the form of a conversation between Quirien and his family on the evening of his return. During this conversation, his family is eager to hear about his experience of the Moluccan revolt. However, 'Quirien preferred not to talk and he did not want to tell stories; one story in particular he did not want to tell' (Dermoût 2001, 306).[29] In fact, the first thirteen pages of the story, which comprise more than one third of the full text, feature Quirien's many attempts to talk about anything *but* the revolt, including the shipwreck which he suffered on his way back to the Netherlands: 'that was a safe topic as well' (Dermoût 2001, 310).[30]

This is a first indication that Dermoût approaches telling the history of the revolt through negation. That is, the revolt materialises in her story through its most prominent source's continued *refusal to speak about it*. As such, the setting of Dermoût's story presents a different, more unstable premise for Quirien's account of the revolt than the memoirs of the historical Ver Huell. The latter introduced his account rather confidently, with the following motivation:

> After all, the revolt has nowhere been described accurately. Therefore, I saw it as my duty to present my fellow countrymen with the history of how these delightful, fertile and precious islands were returned to lawful authority, including all the circumstances concerning this campaign.[31] (Ver Huell 1835, xiv–xv)

As this quotation makes clear, Ver Huell presents his account as a matter of national duty, and as a way of bringing structure and clarity to an otherwise fragmented knowledge. Moreover, he unambiguously presents

29 'Quirien wilde liever niet praten en hij wilde geen verhalen vertellen, een verhaal wilde hij niet vertellen.'

30 'dat was ook veilig'.

31 'Men vindt immers nergens dien strijd met naauwkeurigheid beschreven; ik achtte het dus pligtmatig de geschiedenis van het terugbrengen van deze heerlijke, vruchtbare en kostbare eilanden onder het wettig gezag, met al de omstandigheden dezen krijgstocht betreffende, mijnen landgenooten aan te bieden.'

the suppression of the revolt as the return of the territory to lawful – in other words, Dutch – authority.

Unlike Ver Huell's self-representation as an essential voice of history, Dermoût's Quirien is unwilling to share his experiences. As such, he is portrayed as a reluctant and self-doubting, rather than confident, narrator. Halfway through the story, Quirien's father refuses to go along with his son's stalling any longer and starts asking him direct questions about the revolt. In the long interrogation that follows (Dermoût 2001, 312–21), Quirien predominantly remains silent, except for a few short responses in which he denies any authority to speak about the topic, for example: 'I am a mariner, Father, not an administrator, I do not know if there were other causes, other motives' (Dermoût 2001, 317).[32]

In this and similar passages, Dermoût reminds the reader of an important fact that destabilises the purported truth of Ver Huell's writing. As a way to remind him that his views on the political circumstances around the revolt may not be that well-informed, her protagonist gives his father the disclaimer that he is 'a mariner and not an administrator'. The historical Ver Huell was indeed a mariner who arrived in Saparua on 23 October 1817, five months after the revolt had begun. On arrival, he 'was tasked with on-board duties', as a result of which 'he could follow the events only from a distance' (Straver 2018, 164).[33] By emphasising this detail in her representation of Ver Huell, Dermoût destabilises his authority as a reliable witness. As such, Dermoût's story can be read as what literary theorist Greta Olson (2018) calls *decolonising fiction* – that is, as an attempt to dismantle the lasting colonial authority attached to Ver Huell's voice: 'By exploiting and subverting the hierarchically dependent communicative value of reliability, decolonizing fictions revise implicitly authoritarian narrative mores' (Olson 2018, 168). By destabilising Ver Huell's reliability, Dermoût poses a larger question about the reliability of recorded colonial history and 'urges the reader to imagine alternative stories' (Olson 2018, 169).

This aim of imagining alternative stories becomes most clear in Quirien's conversation with his father, in which the former repeatedly refuses to respond to the latter's questions. Throughout this conversation, the father's questions suggest a perspective on the revolt that stands in contrast to that offered by the historical Ver Huell. The latter represents the revolt in his

32 'Ik ben een zeeman Père, geen bestuursman, ik weet niet of er niet nog andere oorzaken, andere motieven waren.'

33 'Zelf moest hij taken aan boord vervullen en kon hij de gebeurtenissen slechts vanaf een afstand volgen.'

memoirs as an unlawful transgression of 'the stray Indians', who had 'not yet been illumined much by the light of Religion' (Ver Huell 1835, 127; 1836, 2). Quirien's father contests this representation by arguing that the revolt's anti-colonial aims are legitimate when understood from the perspective of the rebels. He reminds Quirien that the revolt leader, Matulesia, was 'a devout member of the Calvinist Church, surrounded by religious education leaders, schoolmasters, as they say over there, do they not?' (Dermoût 2001, 316).[34] Because Quirien generally does not respond to his father's suggestions, the anti-colonial perspective that these suggestions invoke is never definitively asserted in Dermoût's text, but instead only hinted at.

Therefore, Dermoût's approach to telling the story of the revolt differs from the ones that were discussed before. Whereas both Ver Huell's colonial and Zacharias's nationalist accounts are appropriations of the history meant to give voice to their respective ideological positions, Dermoût is careful not to take any side, at least not explicitly. Instead, she presents her political standpoint vis-à-vis the subject matter 'indirectly, like so much of her writing works indirectly' (Dirkse-Balhan 2001, 85).[35] Dermoût uses Quirien's sustained refusal to respond to his father's critical questions as a way to take up a position from which she can scrutinise Ver Huell's perspective on the revolt without having to replace it with a definitive perspective of her own. In doing so, Dermoût writes the revolt back into a pre-appropriated condition in which Ver Huell's dominant voice is replaced by Quirien's ambivalent silence.

This ambivalent silence becomes most present in the story's final part (Dermoût 2001, 321–30), which takes place in Quirien's bedroom at the end of the evening, when his mother comes to say goodnight. Here, the story's emphasis on silence is manifested through the communication breakdown that occurs between mother and son, when they both realise that there is a distance between them that can no longer be bridged. As the story thus shifts from a conversation between father and son to one between mother and son, Quirien's silence shifts from one based on the refusal to speak, to one founded on the perceived inability to speak. As his mother mentions a long list of memories from his childhood in an attempt to reconnect him to his past, Quirien does not answer her but instead retreats into silence, reflecting on the sense of detachment that he feels from his family and

34 'de verdwaalde Indianen'; 'nog weinig bestraald door het licht van de Godsdienst'; 'ijverig lidmaat van de Gereformeerde Kerk, omgeven door godsdienstonderwijzers, schoolmeesters zeggen zij daar, nietwaar?'

35 'indirect, zoals zoveel van haar werk indirect was'.

from the Netherlands. This sense of detachment is expressed most clearly near the end of the story, in a lengthy passage that is cited in part below:

> – Was she right? Was it true, did he no longer belong here? Did he belong to a few islands far away? To a volcano? To a bay? Drowned gardens of coral flowers? […] To an Amazon, a ring – a small mosque made of palm wood – lacquered and gilded – from the inside – from the outside – crimson – red – dashing – balsamic – fragrant – an enchanting – blue tree? – […]
> – Or, or was it not so? –
> – Did he belong here after all? Also here – now and here and tomorrow[36] (Dermoût 2001, 330)

Rather than using full sentences, this passage consists mostly of interrupted thoughts that lead up to an ambivalent conclusion, in which much space is left for silences in between that which is spoken, most explicitly through the abundant use of the en dash. By using this writing style, Dermoût presents Quirien's memory of the colony as something that cannot be fully expressed in words. Through Quirien's silence, Dermoût paradoxically represents the revolt as something that must remain unrepresented.

As such, Dermoût reflects on the revolt, albeit without assuming a position of authority over it: she 'does not succumb to the colonial tendencies of appropriation and paternalism' (Pattynama 2009, 143).[37] By having Quirien's father explore the possibility of approaching the history from the point of view of the rebels, Dermoût hints at an interpretation of the revolt as a legitimate protest against the oppressive rule of Dutch colonialism. However, rather than enforcing this perspective at any point, she allows it to linger in the silence of Quirien's refusal to comment on it, as the open-ended possibility of a counterhegemonic reading.

As such, Dermoût's work invites an interpretation of silence as something other than the lack of voice, and the implicated lack of political agency, which it is often made out to be in postcolonial theory (cf. Spivak, 1988). Rather than an absence, Quirien's silence is an active presence: a way to provide expression to events that are too complex to put into words. Where words

36 '– Had zij gelijk? Was het zo, hoorde hij niet meer aan hier? Hoorde hij aan een paar eilanden ver weg? Aan een vulkaan? Aan een baai? Verdronken tuinen vol koralen bloemen? […] Eene Amazone, en een ring – een palmhouten moskeetje – gelakt en verguld – van binnen – van buiten – karmozijn – rode – zwierige – balsamiek – geurende – een betoverde – blauwe boom? – […] – Of, of was het niet zo? – – Hoorde hij toch aan hier? Ook aan hier – nu en hier en morgen –'.

37 'houden zich ver van de koloniale tendens van toe-eigening en paternalisme'.

reach their limit, silence thus emerges as an alternative form of articulation (cf. Engelenhoven, 2022).

Conclusion

The 1817 revolt was an attempt to overthrow Dutch colonial rule in Maluku. Ver Huell (1835, 1836) recorded the events in his memoir, in which he devotes much attention to Martha Christina Tiahahu. Ver Huell's representation of Tiahahu is a classic example of Orientalist discourse – one tainted by sexist and exoticising descriptions that frame her as the savage and feminine Other to his masculine, benevolent, and civilised Self. He explains both her refusal to speak to him and her eventual death on board his ship as unfortunate consequences of her savage nature – something that even his best efforts proved unable to prevent. His version of the revolt has monopolised its historical representation to such an extent that even Indonesian nationalist historiography, which identifies itself emphatically as based on anti-colonial values, is dependent on re-readings of his work, albeit strategic ones. Tiahahu received the official title of national hero in 1969. In the corresponding biography Zacharias (1977) wrote of her, her death is re-interpreted as a heroic suicide, testament to her unfailing nationalist spirit.

Yet both of these appropriations of Tiahahu's story ignore two major details of the practical context of this history: that of convict labour as a post-abolition form of slavery, and that of the *njai*, or concubine, as a particular form of convict labour reserved for colonised women. In my contrapuntal reading of Ver Huell's text, I have used these *external* elements of the story to reinterpret its *internal* elements (Wilson 1994, 265). The result was a reinterpretation of Tiahahu's death as the ultimate attempt to escape her fate as a convict labourer and, possibly, someone's *njai*.

With regard to these colonial and nationalist appropriations of Tiahahu's story and voice, Dermoût's literary retelling of the revolt in *De juwelen haarkam* (1956) is empowering, but *not* because she returns Tiahahu's voice to her. She does no such thing, which is fortunate, because it would in itself be a questionable, colonialist tendency: after all, who could claim the right and ability to grant her a voice? Instead, Dermoût's story is empowering because, rather than speaking or writing for anyone, she seems to *unwrite* or *de-narrate* this history away from fixed representation. In the ambivalent, transformative silence that results, Tiahahu's voice finally appears, not yet as a presence, but as a possibility.

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Intersecting Imaginations

5. The Elephant and Slavery: Thinking about Slavery through the Animal in the Early Modern Dutch Empire

Pichayapat Naisupap

Abstract: This chapter examines the relation between the elephant and the idea of slavery in the Dutch Empire of the early modern period. The Dutch had access to elephants in Ceylon, where trading settlements of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) were located. This chapter shows how the discourse of slavery was expressed, negotiated, and criticised through the Dutch knowledge and management of elephants. Treatises on the elephant published in the Dutch Republic expressed conflicting ideas regarding enslavement when applying the discourse of slavery to the elephant. On the one hand, the elephant was indisposed to bondage and servitude. On the other hand, it was compliant and loyal to its master once tamed. This chapter will show that the elephant was part of a spectrum of thinking about slavery. On the one hand, the slave-elephant was both criticised and empathised with when considered as a rational and freedom-loving being very close to the human. On the other hand, the slave-elephant was cherished due to its strong compliance. It is within this paradox, so this chapter argues, that the early modern idea of slavery hinged upon the ambiguous, contingent line between the human and non-human animals, while also going hand in hand with the abstract qualities of rationality and liberty, which were not monopolised by the human being, but also shared by the elephant.

Keywords: Elephants; the Netherlands; VOC; slavery; rationality; liberty

Introduction

A 1680 portrait of Hillegonda Schellinger painted by her aunt, Gesina ter Borch, shows an imagined representation of a harbour in Curaçao in the

Paijmans, Marrigje, and Karwan Fatah-Black, eds. *Slavery in the Cultural Imagination: Debates, Silences, and Dissent in the Neerlandophone Space*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025. DOI 10.5117/9789463728799_CH05

background (fig. 5.1). Schellinger was born in Curaçao, which had been part of the Dutch Empire since 1634 and functioned as a slave depot for Spanish colonies until 1713, when the British came to dominate the Asiento de Negros.[1] The Dutch slave trade was centred in Curaçao before the preferred destination for slave ships switched to Suriname in the eighteenth century. In 1680, seventy-four percent of the Dutch West India Company's (WIC) slave ships arrived in Curaçao (Postma 1975, 242). Many enslaved people were indeed present in Curaçao and also feature in Schellinger's portrait along with ships, trees, hills, and buildings.

Strangely, behind enslaved men hauling a ship, we see two elephants. It is likely that Ter Borch incorporated the elephants to emphasise the exotic nature of the place, given that there are also several other strange animals in the painting. However, notably, there were no elephants in the West Indies at the time. Treatises on the elephant published in the Dutch Republic since 1650 confirm this fact. For example, in the Dutch edition of John Jonston's natural history work entitled *Beschrijving van de Natuur der Vier-Voetige* ('Description of the Nature of the Four-Footed Animals'), published in 1660, elephants were classified by their natural habitats, which are located only in Asia and Africa (Jonston 1660, 26–27). So, why are the two elephants present in Schellinger's portrait?

According to Benjamin Schmidt (2002, 347–69), the exotic world in the Dutch imagination was composed of a multitude of natural things regardless of their provenance. Whether the elephants and the enslaved were placed in close proximity to one another deliberately by Ter Borch or not, this feature can be figuratively read as a microcosm of the intersecting imagination between the elephant and slavery in the Dutch cultural sphere – a dynamic that is explored in this chapter.

Ter Borch produced the above watercolour in the Dutch Republic, but brought together two elements that existed in different settings of the Dutch Empire: enslaved men in Curaçao and elephants in Asia. In addition to Africa and the West Indies, slavery was also widely practiced across the Indian Ocean and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was actively involved in slavery systems in Asia. Recent estimates suggest that during the early modern period, between 670,000 and 910,000 people from across the Indian Ocean were transported by the Dutch throughout their overseas empire and networks (Schrikker and Ekama 2017, 181). Various Dutch outposts were connected via this network of imperial migration that moved enslaved

1 The Asiento de Negros was a monopoly contract between the Spanish Empire and merchants in supplying African enslaved people only to the Spanish colonies in America.

Figure 5.1 The portrait of Hillegonda Louise Schellinger in an imagined Curaçao by Gesina ter Borch, featuring working enslaved people and two elephants in the background. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

peoples (as well as personnel, princes, convicts, soldiers, and sailors) within the circuits and nodes of the colonial companies, shipping fleets, settlements, and colonies (Ward 2009, 13). It is from the Dutch Empire's network, which facilitated the flow of enslaved peoples and elephants, that such representations are drawn together in Ter Borch's painting.

Although slavery was outlawed, in the Dutch Republic Black Africans remained a common presence accompanying Portuguese and Jewish

merchants who resided in and around Amsterdam. These Black Africans were most likely enslaved people in the guise of servants. Dienke Hondius (2008) suggests that Rembrandt van Rijn might have encountered or been in contact with them when he lived in Amsterdam in Jodenbreestraat, where Portuguese Jewish merchants owned houses. Hence, Rembrandt's painting *Two African Men* may have originated from his experiences at home, rather than from his time in Antwerp (Hondius 2008, 90–92). As argued by Peter Erickson (2009), the representation of the two Black men in this painting by Rembrandt was still far from recognition of the individuality of enslaved humans, as the two 'remain generic figures, caught in a vague border area between particularized individual and abstract exercise' (40–41).

In the case of the elephant, the Dutch established their settlements around the coast of Ceylon, where they had access to wild elephants. The Dutch captured elephants, both for trade and gift-giving diplomacy. Other than gifting elephants to Asian rulers, there were also several cases in the early modern period in which the VOC shipped Ceylonese elephants to the Dutch Republic as gifts for Dutch stadtholders (*de facto* heads of state). One such gift-elephant became well-known throughout Europe and was also portrayed by Rembrandt in his sketches and etchings. This elephant later became known as Hansken (Abbing 2021). Yet, like Rembrandt's painting of the two African men, Hansken was also portrayed by Rembrandt as a generic figure deprived of any significant context. There was, however, one exception, in which Hansken was placed in a Christian mythological scene, as seen in Rembrand's 1638 etching *Adam and Eve*. This can show that the elephant Hansken was an ambivalent figure standing between one notion that recognised the elephant's symbolic significance in the European context and another that deprived the animal of such significance.

This chapter examines how the discourse of slavery was expressed, negotiated, and criticised when thinking about, or imagining, the elephant. The idea of slavery has been historically studied for the most part by considering enslaved humans as a specific category. For example, all of the articles in the first part of Schrikker and Wickramasinghe's (2020, 43–146) multi-author volume *Being a Slave* explore the human aspects of slavery and subjugation as experienced by enslaved peoples from across the Indian Ocean. However, we could question if the enslaved, especially during the early modern period, were even deemed to be full human beings.

Indeed, at that time, the boundary between the human and the animal was both ambiguous and contingent. Even though from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, Cartesian philosophy had tried to establish a clear line between the human and the animal (Harrison 1998, 481–82), naturalists in

the eighteenth century saw the human as part of the animal world (Pasteur 1793, 24; Raff 1781, 3–5). However, by blurring the dividing line between the human and non-human animals, the discriminating distinction between the enslaved and their white (and hence more human) masters remained. As shown in *Becoming Human* by Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020), Black people have been seen as beings with abject animality, whereas white people have been deemed as rational, civilised beings – that is to say, as complete human beings. As we will see in the pages that follow, the elephant complicated this matter because, whilst the elephant was seen as fundamentally subject to human control, it was also believed to possess 'civilised' qualities, which elevated it above other animals and brought it closer to the human in the great chain of beings (Harrison 1998, 472–75).

Attitudes that saw enslaved human and non-human animals as close to one another existed in the context of the Dutch Empire. These views can be seen both in the Dutch Republic and elsewhere in its empire and networks. For example, in an antislavery book entitled *Swart Register van Duysent Sonden* ('Black Register of a Thousand Sins') by Jacobus Hondius, which was first published in 1679 (Kennedy 2017, 212), sin number 810 is: 'sinful people […] buy slaves to sell them again and trade with wretched people as with other sellable goods and as if they were only animals' (Hondius 1724, 363–64).[2] Even though Hondius's book opposed such treatment, by reading this book differently we can deduce that enslaved people and non-human animals were not treated that differently. Hondius (1724) also pointed out that such treatment was not practiced only by 'Jews, Turks, […] but also by Christians such as Spanish, Portuguese, and others, yes also by the Dutch' (364).[3] In Asia, such attitudes were visible in the *Thesawalamai* or customary law of Jaffna in the northern part of Ceylon. This law was drawn up in 1707 by Isaac Isaaksz, a Dutch administrative head of a province – known as *dessave* – of Dutch Ceylon, in consultation with twelve local elites. Enslaved people and the slave trade were present throughout the code. On an aspect of usufruct, enslaved persons were to be handled in the same way as cows and sheep, because the enslaved 'formed transferable property and could be bought and sold, inherited and manumitted at the will of the owner' (Schrikker and Ekama 2017, 189). Thus, enslaved people and non-human

2 'Sondigen sodanige menschen … nochtans slaven koopen om die weder te verkoopen, ende met die ellendighe menschen haten koophandel te drijven, gelyk met andere waren en goederen ende als of het maer beesten waren.'

3 '… soosanige slaven-handel al gedreven wordt niet alleen van Joden, Turcken, en Heydenen, maar oock van genaemde Christenen als van Spanjaerden, Portugijsen, en andere; jae oock van de Hollanders.'

animals were not so different from each other, either in legal categories or cultural imaginations.

The following sections will be threefold. The first part discusses the tripartite division into the non-human animal, human, and enslaved, and how they were historically related to, and overlapped with, one another. It also briefly demonstrates how the case of the elephant can be used to nuance this division. The second part will show how elephants were brought into submission by the VOC and how the discourse of slavery was articulated when elephants were chained in bondage. Further, the second section will also discuss how the act of enslaving elephants, seen as rational and freedom-loving beings, was criticised whilst empathy was also expressed towards them. In the final part I will discuss how elephants, as intractable animals, in effect negotiated and resisted their servitude and how they taught humans a lesson on slavery. By structuring my analysis in this way, the latter two parts echo the work of the French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc (also known as Comte de Buffon), who wrote about the elephant in his *Natural History*. Buffon's work on the elephant was translated into Dutch and published in the Dutch Republic in 1779. Buffon understood the elephant from two perspectives: first, as 'independent and free' (*onafhankelijk en vrij*); and second, as being in a 'state of slavery or domestic submission in which the elephant master's will is partly the motive of the elephant'[4] (Buffon 1779, 14).[5]

The Non-Human Animal, Human, and Slavery

Non-human animals have been studied by several scholars as symbols of slavery. Jason Hribal (2003) proposes that throughout history, non-human animals have played significant roles in the development of both the agricultural and industrial revolutions, to the extent that 'animals are part of the working class' (435–53). Although Hribal mainly emphasises aspects of the labour and commodification of non-human animals, his writing frequently states that non-human animals were 'treated as chattel slaves to be bought and sold at will' (436), thus sharing similar circumstances as

4 'in zen staat van slaverny of huisselyke onderwerping waar in zyns meesters wil gedeeltelyk het beweegrad van den zynen is.'

5 This chapter occasionally consults the Dutch edition of Buffon's work with an English version when translating texts from Dutch into English (see the English edition of Buffon's natural history in Buffon 1775).

enslaved humans. In America, the commercial livestock industry thrived along with the plantation system that depended for its existence on slave labour. Also, during the eighteenth century, with the invention of the animal-powered cotton gin that separated cotton fibres from the seeds, horses and oxen were employed by humans to produce an enormous amount of cotton. The mass production powered by these non-human animals laid the foundation for cotton plantations and the cotton economy, which would go on to serve and strengthen the slavery system in America for years to come (Hribal 2003).

Non-human animals were also kept by humans, especially men, to exercise their mastery and at the same time to strengthen their positions in the master-enslaved relationship. For example, Sarah Hand Meacham (2011) has studied the culture of pet keeping in the town of Chesapeake, Virginia, during the late eighteenth century. Her work reveals that Chesapeake elites, who were usually plantation owners, kept pets 'in part because doing so gave them validation of their right to have slaves' (524). These pets included dogs, birds, cats, and squirrels that were restrained and confined by collars and cages, thus enforcing their submission. Other than being symbols of wealth and refinement, devices such as collars and birdcages indicated men's mastery over the animals they subjugated. Meacham also shows that the keeping of pets served the additional purpose of training the children of the plantation owners to become more accustomed to the role and practice of planter they would one day undertake (Meacham 2011).

Yet, by only drawing attention to the symbolic relation between slavery and non-human animals, research of this kind does not touch upon the aspect of the blurred line that exists between human and non-human animals – something that is important, if we are to understand the historical process of enslaving humans and non-human animals alike. Works on the orangutan, however, come somewhat closer.

The orangutan has been a creature that disrupted the exceptionalism of the human. The great ape has been portrayed in travel writing, literature, paintings, exhibitions, and performances as capable of doing what humans can do (Cribb, Gilbert, and Tiffin 2014). Silvia Sebastiani (2021) argues that 'the animalization of the African [enslaved] was construed through the humanization of the primate' (68). In other words, whilst the orangutan was considered to possess an anatomy and feelings comparable to that of humans and was thus used to reflect human nature, Black Africans were depicted as bestial, ape-like beings (Sebastiani 2021). Sebastiani's work is a relevant study of how early modern dehumanisation was closely related to the unclear boundary between the human and non-human animals.

However, instead of see-sawing between humanisation and dehumanisation with the dichotomy between the non-human animal and the human (the former humanised and the latter animalised, or vice versa), this chapter will show that the humanisation/emancipation and dehumanisation/enslavement of the elephant occurred simultaneously. As the human represents the highest form of all animals at one end of the spectrum, the elephant could move backwards or forwards on the spectrum towards or away from the human. Humanisation then does not mean separating humanised non-humans or objects from animals, but rather, moving them closer to the human. Moreover, unlike the orangutan, delegitimisation of enslavement of the elephant did not concern anatomy and physical acts resembling those of the human, but rather rationality and indisposition to bondage and servitude – that is to say, freedom.

Rationality was thought to reside in the elephant's mind. One of the earliest Dutch treatises about the elephant was written by the Flemish scholar Justus Lipsius. In his work *Historie vanden Elephant* ('History of the Elephant'), published in Dutch in 1621, the elephant is portrayed as capable of understanding human languages, having an excellent memory, feeling love, being compassionate, having dignity, and being prudent and pious. Lipsius (1621) concludes his elephant treatise by stating: 'I have made the elephants into human beings gifted with speech, rationality, affection, and virtue. Farewell'[6] (12). At the same time as humanising the elephant, Lipsius (1621, 2–4) also stresses the remarkable loyalty of the elephant when tamed, which confined the elephant to the realm of non-humans. In the eighteenth century, Buffon also considered the elephant as physically competent and mentally rational as the human. Citing the French missionary Philip of the Blessed Trinity, who had travelled to Persia and Goa in the seventeenth century, Buffon (1779) wrote that elephants 'come close to humans in judgement and rationality'[7] (49). In another excerpt, Buffon quotes the English traveller Edward Terry, who had travelled to the Indies during the early seventeenth century and had written that elephants did many things that resembled human reasoning beyond pure natural intuition (Buffon 1779, 50–51).

The elephant can be used as a comparison for issues involving Black people, who were seen through the concept of the polygenic origin of humans as beings closer to the ape (Robertson 2015, 62–63). The elephant's

6 'ick hebbe de elephantine tot menschen ghemaeckt, begaeft sijnde met sprake, met redelickheyt, gheneghentheyde ende deuchden. Vaertwel.'

7 'De olyfanten, zegt de Vader Philippe, Koomen in oordeel en redeneering naby de menschen.'

rationality was deemed to be higher than that of the ape because the ape's reasoning was based more on mimicry, whilst the elephant was considered to possess intrinsic reason (Hesse 1694, 214). This resembles Enlightenment comparisons of the speech capability of Black people to the way in which parrots speak by mimicking (Jackson 2020, 24). The elephant was, moreover, portrayed through Christian eyes as a virtuous animal with a sexual modesty employed to teach 'married folk not to be given too much to carnal and sensual pleasures' (Lifschitz 2019, 749; Schultz 2019, 178–80). Conversely, Black men were stigmatised as 'a bestial sexual threat […] unrestricted by morality or prohibition' (Jackson 2020, 13).

The elephant's fondness for liberty can also be seen as emblematic of the Germanic ideal of freedom, which had detested slavery long before it was introduced under the Roman custom by a Frankish king. The Germanic freedom had been promoted since the beginning of the establishment of the Dutch Republic. Dutch legal scholars in the seventeenth century also attempted to ally the idea of Germanic freedom with the idea of slavery (see van Nifterik 2021, 164, 184–86). More evident than looking at the human who claims to be above nature, the elephant from *nature*, with its strong fondness for freedom, can be deemed as a creature with '*natural*' rights, of which liberty is part. Dutch political debates on slavery during the early modern period also primarily addressed a secularised version of the idea of natural rights. Although freedom is inborn and inalienable, one had to prove oneself capable and worthy of freedom (Sierhuis 2022, 69). As we will see, the elephant, with its significant level of rationality, shows a disposition towards liberty in many instances, ranging from the moment of capture to the process of taming. Thus, the elephant as a rational, freedom-loving being was surely capable and worthy of liberty. By examining the case of the elephant, this chapter suggests that the (de)legitimisation of slavery, which was connected with processes of (de)humanisation, concerned less the outward characteristics of the beings than their abstract, inner qualities, such as virtuous rationality and a fondness for liberty – qualities that were thus far considered uniquely human, but that were now shared by the elephant.

Chaining Elephants

Procuring elephants from the wild demanded substantial human effort. Whilst the VOC and private traders obtained enslaved people from the west coast of Africa for the Atlantic slave trade and from various polities

throughout the Indian Ocean, ranging from Mozambique to South India and from Bengal and Arakan to the Indonesian archipelago for the intra-Asian slave trade (Emmer 1972; van Rossum 2020; Vink 2003), the VOC obtained elephants via elephant hunts in Ceylon; elephants given as tribute from the Vanniyars who lived in Jaffna under Dutch rule; and diplomatic gifts from Asian rulers, such as the kings of Kandy and Siam. Once in the hands of the VOC, the elephants were used by the Dutch for the intra-Asian elephant trade and for diplomatic gift-giving to rulers across Eurasia. In the same way humans did not naturally become enslaved to other humans, elephants likewise did not naturally become VOC property. The VOC's enslavement of elephants instead called for processes of hunting and taming and, similarly, the discourse of slavery was articulated and negotiated during and after those same processes.

There were several ways of capturing wild elephants in Ceylon. In his 1713 account, the Dutch commander of Galle, Cornelis Taay van Wezel, mentions two methods in the area ruled by the Kandyan king of Ceylon. The first way was to use a noose. Elephant hunters went into the forest and hid behind large trees. When a wild elephant appeared, hunters put a noose round one of its hind legs. The elephant was then tied to a tree until exhausted. Once calm, the elephant was taken to a stall by two tamed elephants and thus began the taming process. The other way was to dig pits that were covered with thin branches, leaves, and soil for camouflage. Unaware of the pit, the elephant walked on and hence fell into the trap. The elephant would be left in the pit for several days until showing signs of submission through hunger and thirst. Then the elephant was pulled out of the pit and again brought to a stall (van Wezel 1713, 188–89). As the pit method often proved fatal, it was forbidden by the VOC during the early eighteenth century (van der Baan 2017, 36). However, the VOC used neither method since these yielded only a small number of elephants per hunt, which did not meet the demand of the large trading company. A more systematic, albeit labour-intensive, way utilised by the Dutch to capture wild elephants in a great number was the kraal.

The kraal method as used in Ceylon was described meticulously by many Dutch literates in both published and unpublished works. The VOC probably started using kraals for capturing wild elephants in the south of Ceylon during the 1640s and in the west after the capture of Colombo in 1656 (Raben 2004, 267). In his children's book of natural history, the Dutch politician Jan D. Pasteur visualises the kraal method employed by the VOC by using three Roman letters. The letter *V* in a horizontal form was thought by Pasteur to be a good representation of the overall palisades of the kraal. Inside the kraal there was a section into which hunters drove elephants with fine

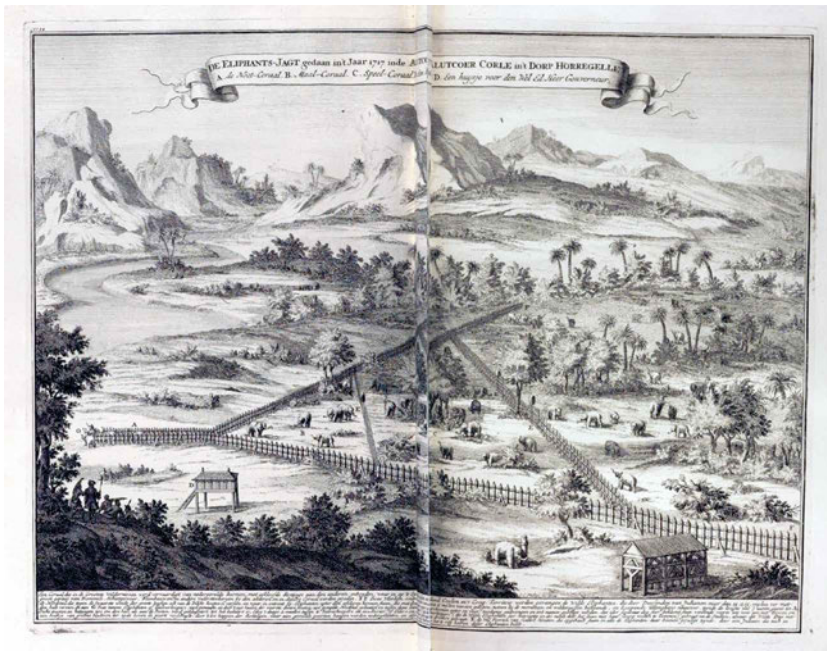

Figure 5.2 The etching of the elephant kraal in the Alutkur *korle* in 1717 from François Valentijn's work on Asia. Source: François Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, Vyfde Deel.

physical characteristics. This inner section combined with the kraal more or less resembles a horizontal *A*. At the end of the kraal, there was a narrow space or a funnel for captured elephants to exit the enclosure. This funnel attached to the kraal was similar to a horizontal *Y* (Pasteur 1793, 182–83). Pasteur's visualisation of the elephant kraal is an imaginative way to see the structural form of the overall enclosure in one's mind's eye. François Valentijn – who lived in Asia for more than a decade in the service of the VOC and who wrote extensively about Asia in eight volumes published between 1724 and 1726 (Gaastra 2003, 106) – in his fifth volume includes an illustrative etching of an elephant kraal in the Alutkur *korle* (subdivision of a province) near Negombo in 1717 (Valentijn 1726). The kraal in Valentijn's work fits perfectly with Pasteur's Roman-lettered kraal (see fig. 5.2). The German traveller Elias Hesse, who was also in the service of the VOC, wrote about the kraal method in the section 'how the elephants in Ceylon were tamed and caught by *Hollanders*'[8] (Hesse 1694, 212). He wrote that this method called for a great number of people, who had to be equipped with snares, axes, shovels, spades, and other tools. Once the kraal had been set

8 'Hoe d'elephanten in Ceylon van de Hollanders gevangen en tam gemaeckt warden.'

up, hunters went into the forest and screamed out loud whilst hitting drums and cymbals to frighten a herd of wild elephants, driving them into the kraal.

Another description of the kraal method comes from the Dutch minister Jan Brandes, who travelled to Asia during the late eighteenth century. In Brandes's unpublished sketchbooks, the kraal method as used in Ceylon was diligently illustrated. Brandes attended an elephant hunt in December 1785 – an account that is also set in the Alutkur *korle* (Raben 2004, 270). According to Brandes, the kraal was compartmentalised into four sections: the *losse kraal* (loose kraal); the *speelkraal* (playing kraal); the *maalkraal* (chewing kraal); and the *noodkraal* (forced kraal). These four sections were also portrayed in the kraal shown in Valentijn's etching. More importantly, Brandes's drawings show vivid pictures of the process in each section of the kraal. The hunt officially started when a Dutch *dessave* had given the order. People formed a large circle a few dozen kilometres in diameter around a herd of wild elephants. The circle slowly contracted, pushing the elephants towards the open end of the kraal. During this contraction, hunters were shouting, beating drums, firing guns, and lighting torches. As soon as the wild elephants passed the first line into the *losse kraal*, a row of posts was set upright immediately to shut the open enclosure and horizontal beams were attached to them. Once in the enclosed kraal, elephants were driven into the other compartments: the *speelkraal* and the *maalkraal*, respectively. In the *maalkraal*, elephants were provided with banana trees. After these two kraals, elephants entered one by one into the *noodkraal* (or *hira gala* in the Sinhalese language, which means a prison kraal). The *noodkraal* was the narrowest section of the overall kraal, to the extent that the elephants could not move, neither to the left nor to the right. Nor could they move forwards or backwards, because in this section they were separated by four transverse beams (Raben 2004, 269–81).

Immediately after an elephant emerged from the *noodkraal*, the process of taming began. The elephant was tied by nooses at the legs and bound by strong ropes at the neck. These ropes were in turn attached to rope harnesses of two tame elephants that stood waiting at the gate. Several procedures had to be done once a wild elephant was out of the kraal. An elephant was measured, 'baptised' with water, and given a personal name whilst being flanked on both sides by two tame elephants. Tame elephants could discipline a wild elephant by beating it with their trunks or offering it food. In Dutch these tame elephants were known as *zielverkopers*,[9] or soul

9 The term *zielverkoper* arguably originated from the situation when *volkhouders* (dealers in personnel) supplied the VOC with sailors in return for a *ceel* (a written authority signed by

sellers (Raben 2004, 281–91). This word had been used previously to denote a recruiter of sailors for the VOC and WIC. These sailors were usually men who had come to Holland and Zeeland in search of financial opportunity, but ended up being indebted to men and women who offered them provisions and lodging. Often these debtors were 'sold' to the VOC and WIC by the creditors who were now called *zielverkopers*, and the first wages of these new VOC and WIC employees were transferred to the creditors in reimbursement (Ekama 2018, 144). For the elephant, according to this nomenclature, this initial process of taming can be interpreted as its soul being 'sold' into a new state of submission. This interpretation was also articulated by Pasteur (1793) in his children's edition of a book on natural history. He wrote: 'there stand two tame elephants, one on each side, that were called *zielverkoopers* in Ceylon because they give away and sell their own kind into slavery'[10] (Pasteur 1793, 184). Before this process, when an elephant was still in the kraal and slowly moved towards the other end of the kraal, the elephant might already have felt that it was about to lose its liberty. However, in the kraal, especially in the *noodkraal*, an elephant's soul might have been already moulded to fit the objective of the VOC, its body steadily cramped into the narrow passage of the *noodkraal* (for a similar analysis, see Saha 2018, 159–77).

The post-kraal taming process involved the animal being locked up and adhering to a fixed schedule. *Zielverkopers* took a wild elephant to its stable, where it would spend several weeks. The still-wild elephant was again tied between two trees, this time to a scaffold of four vertical and several horizontal beams (fig. 5.3). One horizontal beam was placed under the chin to discipline the elephant to keep its head upright. A wild elephant was fed at the stable and taken by *zielverkopers* to a watering place to alleviate its thirst and the heat, and for bathing (Raben 2004, 291–92). Once tractable, an elephant became a fully enslaved commodity under the authority of the VOC.

In Batavia, elephants and enslaved humans had a close connection. Although there were no wild elephants on the island of Java, tame elephants were occasionally shipped as diplomatic gifts from Southeast Asian polities and Kandy for VOC governor-generals. These elephants were probably kept at a stable near Batavia Castle. We know from VOC records that these

sailors to transfer part of their salaries received from the VOC to a holder), which *volkhouders* would sell on to entrepreneurs. For this reason, *volkhouders* were also called *ceelverkopers* (*ceel* sellers), a later corruption of which became *zielverkopers* (Nadri 2015, 339).

10 'daar staan twee tamme olifanten, een aan wederzijde, die op Ceylon Zielverkoopers genoemd worden, omdat zij die van hunne eigen soort verraden en verkoopen om hen in slavernij te brengen.'

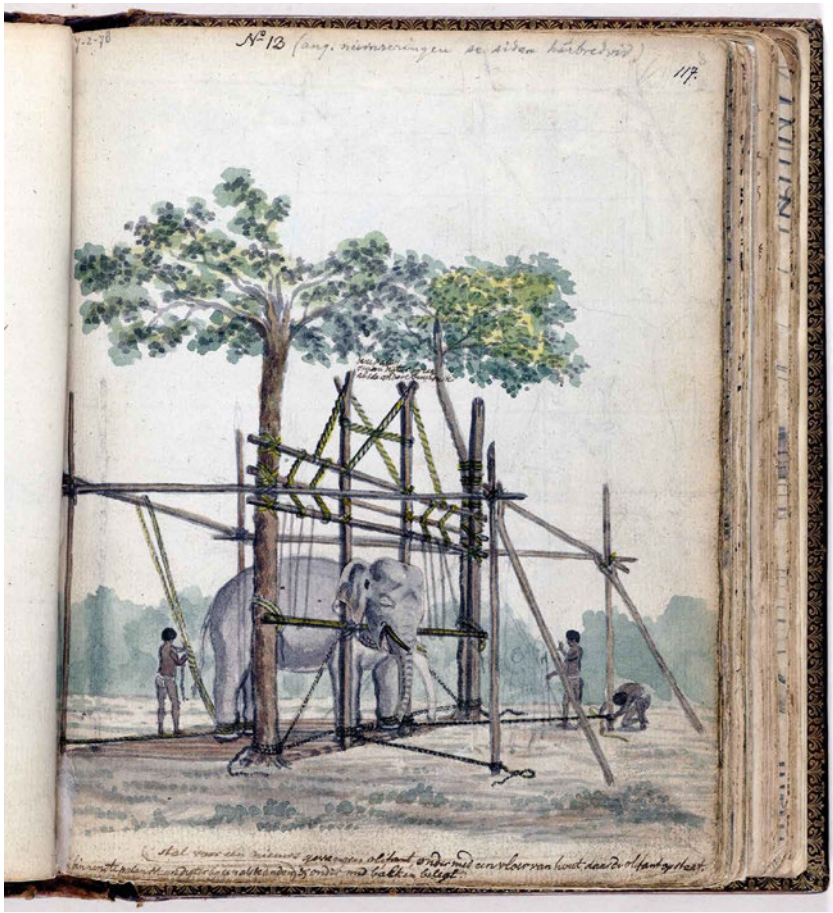

Figure 5.3 Jan Brandes's drawing, showing how a wild elephant was locked up in a stable after emerging from a kraal. Source: Album van Jan Brandes, Deel 2. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

animals were cared for by enslaved humans. They had the duty to clean the elephants and provide food for them. Besides, enslaved people in Batavia were responsible for repairing the stables if damaged (*Generale Missiven* 1610–1638, 43).

François Valentijn and Jan Brandes, who depicted the process of enslaving elephants we have seen so far, also had direct experience with enslaved humans. A minister in Amboina in the late seventeenth century, Valentijn was also a slave owner by his marriage to a wealthy widow, owning thirty enslaved humans. He complained about 'evil slaves' who were drunk, smoked, and stole. The corporal punishment for such enslaved persons was not administered by Valentijn himself, and he ordered employees under the VOC public prosecutor called *kaffirs* to do this instead (Knaap 2022, 510). Brandes,

who was also a minister stationed in Batavia, similarly owned enslaved humans. He used to punish his 'evil slaves' by beating, but came to realise that such harsh treatment did not stop them from running away, nor did it make them work any harder. Instead, Brandes rewarded his well-behaved enslaved persons by giving them a small amount of money and allowing them to go into the city to use the money and have fun (Djajasoebrata, Veenendaal, and de Bruijn 2004, 159–62). Brandes also made several portraits of enslaved people in silhouette, although the enslaved in his portraits remain anonymous, like the Black Africans in Rembrandt's painting from the previous century (Djajasoebrata and de Bruijn 2004, 163). Perhaps for Valentijn and Brandes, a very tractable enslaved elephant might be seen as a perfect example of a 'virtuous slave.' However, the harsh treatments such as starving and beating by *zielverkoper*-elephants and *mahouts* or elephant keepers during the processes of kraaling and taming might be deemed by some as an efficient means of transforming a chained elephant into a good enslaved non-human.

However, the servitude of the elephant also caused controversy. It was criticised in the Dutch edition of Buffon's natural history, which stated that subdued elephants had several disadvantages compared to free counterparts. First, domesticity reduced the elephants' size. Those taken into the state of slavery when still young would never grow to full size. Servitude reduced not only their height, but also every other proportion (Buffon 1779, 43). Captive elephants displayed stunted growth in comparison to their wild counterparts, especially African elephants, whose young that were brought to Europe always stayed below the growth standard (Buffon 1779, 29, 43). Second, their longevity was reduced when living in captivity. Buffon wrongly believed that the lifespan of captured elephants was only one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirty years, whereas free elephants could at least live up to two hundred years.[11] Elephants that were shipped to the Dutch Republic by the VOC did not live long either. Hansken, the gift-elephant for the Dutch Stadtholder Frederik Hendrik, lived no more than twenty-five years and died in 1655 in Florence after a tour of Europe (Abbing 2021). Another young elephant arriving in William V's menagerie at Het Kleine Loo near The Hague in 1773 died only a year later. This young elephant was dissected by the Dutch physician Petrus Camper (Pieters 2001, 61). Third, as it was believed that elephants were virtuous animals, elephants did not copulate in the state of domesticity because in such conditions, elephants

11 This early estimation of the elephant's lifespan is wrong compared to modern zoological knowledge, which places the average lifespan of an elephant at approximately sixty-five years.

were rarely left alone and they would not mate before the eyes of others (Buffon 1779, 40). Regarding the third reason, Buffon (1779) stated that 'the source of subsequent generations [of elephants] uselessly dries up'[12] (28). These various strands of criticism of the enslaved elephant reflected comments on human slavery in the Dutch Republic during the late eighteenth century. Driven by a discourse of the decline of the Dutch Republic and its colonial possessions in terms of economics and society, Dutch defenders of slavery were concerned with the high mortality and low fertility rates of enslaved people. To be able to supply enslaved humans to fuel the overseas and home economies at times when the acquisition of new enslaved people was limited, the defenders of slavery supported a humanitarian argument that the cruel treatment of enslaved humans should be stopped in order to make them healthy, long-lived, and hence more likely to procreate (Sens 1995, 95).

The criticism regarding the slavery of elephant also conjured sympathy and empathy. Once elephants were domesticated into a submissive state, they were taken away from their home in the wilderness. Under the VOC, such tamed elephants were mostly deported, either for trading or gift-giving, to other places across Eurasia: some to Europe; some to Persia; some to India; some to Batavia; and some even to Japan. These animals had to endure hardships at sea, new environments in destination countries, and different treatments according to new natural and cultural conditions. All such sufferings considered, exported elephants might have felt a profound longing for home. Buffon hinted at this feeling of distress when he discussed the matter of climate for elephants. He stated that the climate is one of the factors that explained why elephants are in Asia and Africa, but not in Europe. Elephants prefer to live their lives in these two regions because they 'are loyal to their fatherland and steadfastly attached to their climate'[13] (Buffon 1779, 24). Whilst Buffon's language when describing the homesickness of the elephants is fairly empirical, the feeling of yearning for home in those beasts was beautifully recounted earlier in the previous century by the Dutch VOC official Pieter Nuyts, who wrote a treatise on the elephant.

Nuyts's *Lof des Elephants* ('Praise of the Elephants') (1670) is a work about the elephant and its associated emblematic meanings. The work is less an empirical study of the elephant and its physical features than a book of emblems showing with whom and with what the elephant was associated under a system of correspondences in which all things in nature were related

12 'de oorsprong van volgende geslagten nutteloos verdroogt.'

13 'zijn getrouw aan hun vaderland en standvastig aan hun klimaat verknogt.'

to one another and bore symbolic meanings (see Ashworth 1990). Nuyts travelled to Batavia from the Dutch Republic in 1627, whereupon he was appointed governor of the VOC settlement on Formosa Island (Taiwan). During his tenure as governor, he clashed with the Japanese authorities, who also claimed power over the island. He was later ordered for the second time to sail to Japan as an emissary, but upon arrival in Japan, he was placed under house arrest in Hirado. He spent his time under house arrest drafting his work on the elephant. He was released in 1636 and sailed to Batavia, and from there he returned to his fatherland. His work on the emblematic elephant was published posthumously by his son in Delft in 1670 (Blussé 2003, 95–110). In one of the chapters, Nuyts wrote about the good memory of the elephant. When caught and taken far away from its home, a migrant elephant still 'has continual memory of [its] fatherland and birthplace,' in which 'the deprivation often and for a long time is shown not only with sorrow but also with shedding of too many tears' (Nuyts 1670, 80–81).[14] Nuyts empathised with the captured elephant from his overseas experiences in Asia. He wrote this treatise when he had been away from home for six years, was under house arrest in Japan, and was aware of the death of his other son in Batavia (Blussé 2003, 110). Although these experiences were very upsetting for Nuyts, he did manage to travel back home eventually, whereas the enslaved and deported elephants never had the chance to do so.

Elephants Break Free

As stated in the Dutch edition of Pliny the Elder's natural history published in 1703, 'captured elephants bewail all night at their bondage or servitude not only with their usual voice but with plaintive sigh and groan'[15] (Pliny 1703, 108). During the early modern period, Pliny's text served as a source for various Dutch authors when writing about nature. At the beginning of his account on the elephant, Taay van Wezel referred to *Plinius* as his point of departure, albeit stating that Pliny 'had made some mistakes' (Wezel 1713, 176). Despite his mistakes, many European intellectuals agreed with Pliny that the elephant was not fond of being chained.

14 'Den eliphant … heeft gestadigh sulcken geheugenisse tot sijn vader-lant ende geboort-plaats, dat de ontberinge des selfs, menigmaal ende langen tijd, niet alleen met droefheyt, maar met stortinge van overvloedige tranen te kennen geeft.'

15 'De gevangen olyphanten beweenen des nachts hare knechtschap, ofte dienstbaerheyt, niet alleen met hare gewoonlijcke stemme, maar met een seer klagelijk gezucht ende gekerm.'

Imperial narratives of subjugation, domestication, and colonisation were frequently disrupted by non-human animals (Burton and Mawani 2020, 1–16). In the case of elephants, these animals, as charismatic megafauna, clearly possess agential power (Saha 2017, 169–89). In Dutch Ceylon, where the Dutch exerted colonial control over various groups of people, lands, and natural environments, elephants also played a role in disrupting imperial power. As recorded by the Dutch commander of Jaffna, Hendrick Zwaardecroon, elephants rampaged through agricultural lands and harmed people's lives. Some places in Ceylon had to be garrisoned by *toepasses* (Christian natives) under the command of Dutch sergeants in order to protect both land and people from the incursions of wild elephants (Zwaardecroon 1911, 85). Indeed, some wild elephants were called 'thief elephants' by local people because they roamed around and devoured crops. This habit caused them to come into conflict with humans, and this human-elephant conflict made these animals accustomed to attacks from people and thus fearless of fire or guns (D'Oyly 1938, 248). In his travel writing, published in Amsterdam in 1672, the Dutch minister Philippus Baldaeus advised people not to travel on the island unless they were accompanied by soldiers (*lascorijn*) 'with their Drums and Kettles [kettledrums], the noise whereof frightens these Creatures' (Baldaeus 1703, 825). He further cautioned against travelling during the evening because elephants were 'most dangerous towards evening when they are hungry' (Baldaeus 1703, 825). Palanquin bearers, who carried *sedans* or litters for local elites and Europeans, 'often run away at the sight of an Elephant, leaving those they carry to shift for themselves' (Baldaeus 1703, 825). The same narrative was also found in François Valentijn's work (van der Baan 2017, 34). During the hunt, a 'thief elephant,' usually a loner, was the most difficult to control and capture, and was liable to break the line of a kraal (D'Oyly 1938, 247–48). After the hunt, Baldaeus also stated that elephants were 'very hard to be tam'd, and require sometimes four whole months before they can be brought to lie down' (Baldaeus 1703, 825). On the one hand, the Dutch tried to enslave wild elephants through their hunting and taming processes. On the other hand, elephants showed their agency to counter their enslavement. Control always comes with negotiation and resistance, whether from humans or non-human animals.

The intelligence and dexterity of the elephants were often praised by naturalists as a way not only to resist and negotiate their captivity and exploitation, but also to demonstrate their yearning for liberty. The story of an elephant at a menagerie in Versailles breaking free from its chains was recounted in Pasteur's children's version of natural history (1793). This elephant untied a double leather leash that chained its leg. By using its

trunk, the elephant lifted the tongue of the buckle and took the leash out of it. When the elephant was tied tighter by the leash, which had a rope twisted around with many knots, it 'untied all of these knots without breaking anything' (Pasteur 1793, 194).[16] Also at Versailles, a painter wanted to create a drawing by observing a live elephant. When the painter wanted to capture the elephant in an extraordinary posture, the painter's servant threw some fruits at the elephant so that the elephant would raise its trunk and mouth to receive the fruits. In many instances, the servant just pretended to throw without any fruit in his hand. When the elephant realised that it was being deceived, it splashed water at the paper to spoil the drawing. The elephant 'did not take revenge on the servant but the master,' because the elephant knew that 'the drawing of the painter was the reason for this scourge' (Pasteur 1793, 193–94).[17] In this incident, we see that the elephant understood the submissive condition of the painter's servant – a condition that the elephant also shared with the servant, as they shared the same circumstance that made both obliged to follow the master's commands. Similar narratives are also found in Buffon's natural history (1779, 48). Indeed, it is quite possible that Pasteur borrowed these two incidents from Buffon's work, which had been published in Dutch two decades earlier.

Elephants as a species were never entirely subject to the state of slavery. This refusal to submit absolutely was well-acknowledged by Buffon and Pasteur. As elephants were not born into slavery, the fact that some of them became subjugated was not applicable to all members in the elephant family. An 'individual alone is a slave, the species remains independent and refuses steadfastly not to procreate for the advantage of their tyrant' (Buffon 1779, 17).[18] The tyrant here can be taken to mean an elephant master, a ruler, a king, or even a trading company exploiting elephants to their own benefit. Because of this insistence on freedom, elephants were 'above all the common nature of the beasts' (Buffon 1779, 17).[19] Pasteur (1793) summarised the elephant's inclination towards liberty by comparing it to other beasts:

> See a circumstance there again where the elephant differs from the other animals. The camel, the horse, the donkey, the cow, the sheep, the goat, the cat, [and] the dog propagate their species in slavery and are then

16 'ontknoopte hij alle die knoopen zonder iets te breken.'

17 '… hadden hij gemerkt dat het tekenen van den schilder de oorzaak van dit plaagen was, wreekte hij zig niet op den knegt, maar op den meester.'

18 'Hier is de individu alleen slaaf, de soort blyft onafhangelyk, en weigert standvastig ten voordeele van haaren tyran voort te teelen.'

19 '… boven de gemeene natuur der beesten te kennen.'

> entirely submissive to man. On the contrary, while the elephant can be brought into slavery, no offspring [of the elephant] bear the state of slavery. This is also the reason why the species of the elephants does not degenerate or alter.[20] (185)

This notion can be read against the tradition of hereditary slavery, in which one was automatically born into slavery. This practice can be found across the globe from America to Africa and Asia. Hereditary slavery followed a principle called *vrucht volgt buik* in Dutch, literally translated as 'fruit follows womb,' according to the Dutch version of Roman law (Vink 2003, 154). A loophole in which a child born to a free woman and an enslaved man was born free caused the VOC in 1732 to reissue a 1704 ordinance against that type of concubinage, declaring that a child from this kind of relationship maintained slave status (Ekama 2020, 110).

Pasteur (1793) might have intended to pass this statement on to his readers, whom he addressed in his preface as 'young readers' (*jonge lezers*). The purpose of this natural history was to encourage Dutch children not only to 'learn more accurately about familiar animals,' but also 'to gain knowledge on animals that [they] do not know yet exist in the world' (Pasteur 1793, 4–5).[21] However, the elephant was surely known more or less to his young readers through elephant motifs in the arts and the presence of actual elephants in Europe. But its strong discontent with slavery and yearning for liberty might have been rather novel for them, considering that the period between 1787 and 1794 in which Pasteur's natural history was published was the time when antislavery arguments progressed internationally and to some extent influenced Dutch debates on slavery as well (Brandon 2016, 3–26).

Conclusion

Buffon and Pasteur praised the elephant's resistance to slavery whilst at the same time lauding the elephant's faithfulness and compliance when it

20 'Zie daar wederom een omstandigheid, waarin de Oliphant zig van de andere dieren onderscheidt. De Kamels, de Paerden, de Ezels, de Koeijen, de Schaapen, de Geiten, de Katten, de Honden planten hun geslagt voort in slavernij en zijn daarom den mensch geheel onderworpen, terwijl de Oliphant integendeel wel zelf tot slavernij gebragt kan worden, doch geene kinderen in den staat van slavernij voortbrengt; dit is dan ook de reden dat het geslagt van de Oliphanten niet verbasterd, of veranderd is.'

21 'Zijn zal van meest alle bekende viervoetige dieren na lekanderen … Gij zult ook kennis krijgen aan dieren, die Gij nog niet weet dat in de waereld zijn.'

was eventually forced into a state of submission. As stated by Buffon (1779), the elephant's

> devotion became sometimes very intense and lasting, and its affection was absolute to the extent that it refuses to serve under anyone else except its master, and the elephant was seen dying of repentance when it had killed the master in an attack from wrath.[22] (23)

Pasteur (1793) followed suit by stating that 'once the elephant is domesticated, it is the tamest and most obedient of all animals' (185).[23]

Due to this paradox, the discourse of antislavery thought through the elephant in early modern natural history should not be regarded as part of early abolitionist ideas. Instead, Louise E. Robbins (2002, 195–98) has proposed that we should see this contradiction as part of 'happy servant' discourse. The elephant, Buffon (1779) stated, 'accustoms itself slightly and submits to man and serves with zeal, fidelity, keen intelligence, etc., not so much by violence but by kind treatment' (11).[24] Jumping on Buffon's bandwagon, Pasteur (1793) also stated that 'if the elephant was exhorted to gratitude by good treatment,' it would serve a master 'with fidelity and zeal' (156).[25] In this way, the elephant's state of servitude could be accepted, as long as it was treated with kindness by a master. This benevolent bondage can to some extent be compared with Dutch religious arguments that reconciled the Christian faith with the idea of slavery by promoting Christian kindness and gentleness in treating enslaved people (van Nifterik 2021, 184).

To be fully human, one must therefore strongly desire for freedom and absolutely despise subjugation. These qualities were often associated only with white Europeans, who were thought to possess a high level of rationality, while Black Africans were considered devoid of such intellect and full of abject animality. Following this line of reasoning, the autonomy and domination of the former, and the impediment to civility and state of slavery of the latter were legitimised.

22 'Zyne verknogtheid wordt zomtyds zo sterk, zo duurzaam; en zyne genegenheid zo volkomen, dat hy weigert onder iemand anders te dienen, en dat men 'er een heeft zien sterven van spyt, dat hy in een aanval van toorn zyn bestierder gedood had.'

23 'Wanneer de oliphant eens getemd is, is hij het makst en gehoorzaamst van alle dieren.'

24 'hy gewent zig ligtelyk aan den mensch, onderwerpt zig minder aan hem door geweld, dan door vriedelyke behandelingen, dient hem met yver, met getrouwheid, met vernuft, enz.'

25 'als hij door eene goede behandeling tot dankbaarheid wordt aangespoord, wanneer hij zijnen meester met getrouwheid in ijver zal dienen.'

The elephant was a liminal non-human animal with regard to these two characteristics. On the one hand, the enslaved elephant was criticised and the subject of empathy when seen as a rational, freedom-loving being. On the other hand, the enslaved elephant was cherished due to its strong compliance. To put it another way, as the boundary between humans and non-human animals was blurred and contingent, the elephant came close to the human any time it showed signs of rationality, resistance to bondage, and longing for freedom, proving that the elephant was capable and worthy of 'natural' rights. However, when the elephant was compliant to its master as a 'happy servant,' it moved towards non-human animality, albeit never too far from the human because such compliance by the elephant was still based on its marvellous intellect. All in all, the case of the elephant illustrates that the early modern idea of slavery was very much interspecies, questioning the sharp line between humans and non-human animals as well as human exceptionalism in terms of possessing rationality and disposition towards liberty.

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6. Law as a Sociocultural Imaginary: Legal Arguments, Social Hierarchy and Pro-Slavery in the Dutch Republic, *c.* 1760–1780

Gertjan Schutte

Abstract: This chapter explores the legal arguments that Dutch contemporaries used to legitimise both slavery and the slave trade in the 1760s and 1770s. By using the concept of sociocultural imaginary, which refers to the broad way in which contemporaries perceived their social existence, it demonstrates how legal arguments pertaining to slavery and the slave trade were used to create and reproduce social hierarchies, in which the enslaved population was marked as both moveable property and as the recipient of benevolence. The writings of three Calvinist authors – David Gallandat, Thomas Pistorius, and Jan Jacob Hartsinck – demonstrate that contemporaries reacted to seventeenth-century Calvinist denunciations of the slave trade, resistance of enslaved Africans, and antislavery ideas by articulating legal arguments that legitimised slavery. These pro-slavery arguments gave particular emphasis to the importance of social hierarchies in overseas territories. The sociocultural imagination of Gallandat, Pistorius, and Hartsinck sheds light on their own motivations, which legitimised a violent institution instrumental to the Dutch Empire. This chapter points to the lack of imagination and the absence of non-white voices – i.e., the 'white innocence' at the heart of these visions on enslaved populations and slavery.

Keywords: Pro-slavery; legal arguments; Dutch Empire; Calvinism; social imaginaries

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Introduction

In 1792, the antislavery book *Commerce in the Human Species: And the Enslaving of Innocent Persons, Inimical to the Laws of Moses and the Gospel of Christ* by the British abolitionist Baptist Abraham Booth was translated and published in Dutch by Marinus van Werkhoven, a writer of religious poetry (Booth 1792a, 1792c). The publication of the Dutch translation of Booth's sermon marked an important moment, because the writings of other British abolitionists had not been translated into Dutch during the previous decades. As a result, antislavery ideas had been discussed less frequently in the United Provinces compared to other countries. The printers involved in the Dutch translation of Booth's sermon, van Werkhoven and de Bruyn, explicitly addressed this development in an advertisement included in the translation of one of Booth's other books. They stated that slavery had come under attack in Denmark and Britain. Since Denmark had started to abolish the slave trade and abolitionists in Britain had attempted to achieve the same in the British West Indies, there had been many books and pamphlets discussing 'the inhumane trade in human beings' (Booth 1792b, 125).[1] Writers such as Newton and Falconbridge had taken an historical approach, focusing on the 'cruelty and inhumanity' of the slave trade (Booth 1792b, 125).[2] Booth (1792b) had taken a further step by arguing that, from a moral point of view, the slave trade should be considered as 'godless and criminal' (125).[3] By summarising these developments and publishing Booth's sermon, van Werkhoven and de Bruyn aimed to inform their Dutch audience of developments in the antislavery movement.

The publication of a Dutch translation of a British antislavery sermon thus sheds light on the debate on slavery in the Dutch Republic in comparison to the abolitionist debates elsewhere. In North America slavery was an unavoidable domestic issue. In all states south of and including Maryland, at least one-third of the population was enslaved, with peaks of forty-six percent in Georgia and sixty-one percent in South Carolina. Britain was 'secure and prosperous at home', which partly explains why contemporaries discussed an overseas issue like abolition (Drescher 2009, 266). The relative absence of pressing domestic problems stimulated the debate on slavery in Britain. Together with Quakers based in London, Anthony Benezet (1713–1784), who was born in France and lived in the American colonies, sent antislavery

1 'dat onmenschlijk handeldrijven in Menschen.'
2 'wreedheden en onmenschlijkheden.'
3 'ten hoogste godloos en misdaadig.'

treatises to British parliamentarians in 1766 to address the situation of the enslaved population. He also corresponded with Granville Sharp, who acted as a lawyer in the Somerset case – a court case that discussed the legal basis of slavery in Britain (Jackson 2009; Plank 2012, 209).

However, the initiatives of Quakers and other antislavery thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic were not widely discussed in the Dutch Republic before the 1790s. For example, there were no Dutch translations of the essays and books written by abolitionists such as Benezet, John Woolman, and David Cooper (Schutte 2022, 252). Nevertheless, several of their Dutch contemporaries were becoming increasingly concerned, especially with the legal aspects of slavery – an institution that both Booth and earlier writers had described as 'criminal'. By the 1760s, abolitionists and resistance of enslaved Africans had contested slavery in different ways. Writers such as Gallandat reacted to these developments by articulating legal arguments to legitimise slavery or the slave trade. This approach not only legitimatised coercive practices, but also served to augment and reproduce existing hierarchies between white colonists and enslaved Africans (Gallandat 1769a, 1769b). By focusing on the writings of three Calvinist authors, namely Gallandat, Pistorius, and Hartsinck, this chapter analyses how this tendency to focus on the legality of slavery contributed to the circulation of pro-slavery ideas. This chapter therefore aims to point to two interrelated aspects of the relation between slavery and law, namely contemporary denunciations of slavery as illegal and pro-slavery arguments about the lawfulness of slavery.

On the one hand, slavery had been contested by theologians and commentators as unlawful from the seventeenth century onwards. Some of these theologians had a strong impact on the contemporary debate on slavery because their writings were widely read, like the Dutch Calvinist theologian Festus Hommius (1576–1642). In 1602, he published *Het Schatboeck* ('Treasurebook'), a translation of *Explicationes Catecheticae* (1591), written by the German theologian Zacharias Ursinus. Hommius added various sections to a new edition published in 1617, including remarks about 'grave forms of theft' (Ursinus and Hommius 1617, f. 192).[4] One of these 'grave' forms of theft concerned the slave trade. Hommius mentioned God's ban on this form of trade, as expressed in Exodus 21: 'And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death' (Ursinus and Hommius 1617, f. 190). This new edition of *Het Schat-boeck* was reprinted numerous times during the seventeenth century (Schutte 2000, 30–33).

4 'grove Dieverije.'

On the other hand, their adversaries challenged this claim about the link between the slave trade and God's punishment, instead articulating legal arguments to develop a legal justification of slavery. Although writers such as Gallandat, Pistorius and Hartsinck were hardly systematic thinkers, they contributed to the development of a pro-slavery ideology, in which social hierarchy played an important role.

During the eighteenth century, as Dutch Calvinists developed increasingly explicit pro-slavery ideas, including arguments that referred to law, wider theological critiques of slavery fell increasingly silent. The development and circulation of legal arguments constituted a reaction to various phenomena in the West Indies and Europe. The attacks of the Maroons on plantations undermined the self-confidence of planters and colonists alike.[5] At the same time, Montesquieu, Benezet, and others increasingly articulated antislavery ideas (Montesquieu 1989). These developments stimulated various authors, including Gallandat, to explicitly defend slavery and the slave trade in terms of law.

Given the relationship between legal arguments and social circumstances on both sides of the Atlantic, it is helpful to perceive these legal arguments as an aspect of the cultural impact of colonisation and slavery on the Dutch Republic. During the last decade, historians have increasingly focused on the impact of overseas expansion on Europe in terms of available land, labour, and natural resources (Grafe 2015, 273–74). The same applies to the link between slavery and the Dutch Republic during the eighteenth century. Recent research shows that slavery was connected to profits and wages earned in the Dutch Republic, most notably in Holland (Brandon and Bosma 2019). At the same time, slavery overseas led to the de facto reintroduction of slavery on Dutch soil (van Rossum and Fatah-Black 2015). As slavery also had an intellectual impact on Europe, historians have mainly focused on the adversaries of slavery and paid relatively little attention to the intellectual coherence and force of pro-slavery discourses.

In a seminal article, Seymour Drescher (1995) argued that '[n]either a dynamic seventeenth-century metropolitan economy, nor a distressed late eighteenth-century economy on both sides of the Atlantic stimulated Dutch antislavery' (52). In other words, Drescher connected the relative absence of antislavery ideas in the Dutch Republic to economic interests. However, it can be argued that the pro-slavery cause had considerable intellectual cogency that contributed to the limited impact of antislavery ideas in

5 In the West Indies, enslaved Africans fled from the plantations into the forests, from where they attacked plantations and attempted to free the enslaved.

the Dutch Republic. This chapter investigates the pro-slavery arguments articulated by Gallandat and two other Calvinist authors, Thomas Pistorius and Jan Jacob Hartsinck, who were preoccupied with defending the slave trade and slavery in the Dutch West Indies.

Their ideas were part and parcel of the Dutch Empire and its violent oppression of enslaved Africans in the West Indies. In this chapter, I aim to shed light on the historical role of these ideas, namely their contribution to the legitimation and reproduction of the abhorrent institution of slavery in the eighteenth century. At the same time, there is a discrepancy between the historical role of these pro-slavery ideas and their imaginative quality. The writings of Gallandat, Pistorius, and Hartsinck exhibit what Gloria Wekker (2016) has labelled as 'white innocence': they portray themselves as innocent people who treat others with dignity and respect (Wekker 2016). Their lack of self-awareness, especially with regard to their own whiteness, and the contradiction between their discourse about 'humanity' and the gruesome practices of slavery and the slave trade, form the starting point of this chapter. In other words, this chapter discusses the limitations of the white imagination of Gallandat and two other eighteenth-century thinkers.

These contemporaries often used legal arguments to defend and legitimise slavery in terms of social hierarchies. Therefore, these arguments went beyond the strictly legal plane, and were also part of a wider social imaginary. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (2004) defined social imaginary as the way in which 'people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others [...] and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations' (23). Rather than amounting to an explicit social theory, a social imaginary conceptualises implicit understandings of one's social existence, developed by 'ordinary people' in the form of representations (Taylor 2004, 23; see also Roberts 2014). In the case of the second half of the eighteenth century, Dutch contemporaries perceived their social world predominantly in terms of hierarchy. Some groups received preferential treatment, such as the impoverished 'first-class citizens' who suffered from the financial crises of the 1760s and 1770s and were offered a lucrative position in the VOC hierarchy to restore the balance between their wealth and social status. At the other end of the spectrum, contemporaries not only assumed that enslaved people had no privileges, but perceived the enslaved both as 'property' and as human beings. As hierarchies played a crucial role in contemporary culture, it is appropriate to use the notion of sociocultural imaginary.

Legitimising Slavery and the Slave Trade

Sugar production in the Dutch West Indies decreased from 24 million pounds in 1750 to 16 million pounds in 1780. However, during the same period the production of coffee increased rapidly from 3 million pounds to 20 million pounds (Fatah-Black 2020, 130). As the production of these commodities was achieved by the use of enslaved labour, the size of enslaved populations in the West Indies grew rapidly during the eighteenth century. The growth of the Dutch plantation economy in the West Indies led to the publication of various books on Suriname. J. D. Herlein's (1718) *Beschryvinge van de volk-plantinge Zuriname* ('An account of the plantations in Surinam') was published in 1718. After this book, there were decades without any book-length publication on Surinam (Fatah-Black 2019, 145). Thomas Pistorius's *Korte en zakelyke beschryving van de Colonie van Zuriname* ('A concise account of the Surinam Colony'), which was published in Amsterdam in 1763, changed this situation. This book provided reliable information on the plantations and the conflicts with the Maroons, but lacked accuracy when it came to the inland areas outside of the plantations (Fatah-Black 2019, 145). Jan Jacob Hartsinck (1716–1779) published an elaborate book on Dutch Guyana in 1770 (Hartsinck 1770). His father had been one of the directors of the Suriname Company, whilst he himself held an important position in the ranks of the Dutch West-India Company (WIC). One year earlier, David Henri Gallandat published the *Noodige onderrichtingen voor de slaafhandelaren* ('Necessary Instructions for the Slave Traders'), which was a manual instructing merchants involved in the slave trade on how to treat the enslaved on the voyage from Africa to the Americas. It was published both in a periodical of Zeeland's most prominent learned society and as a separate book (Gallandat 1769a, 1769b).[6]

Although critiques of slavery had been circulating in the Dutch Republic from the early seventeenth century onwards, Gallandat, Pistorius, and Hartsinck – all pious Calvinists – presented slavery as an unproblematic legal institution. Various Reformed theologians, like Smytegelt and Hommius, had condemned slavery, whilst others argued that this institution had always existed, most notably in the Bible (Schutte 2000). In addition, enslaved populations fighting for their freedom, most notably in Berbice in 1763, threatened the stability in the plantation economies in the West Indies (Kars 2020). Although they were not always explicitly mentioned as such, enslaved Africans fighting against the plantation system and antislavery

6 The Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen, located in Vlissingen.

ideas were influential in the pro-slavery writings of Gallandat, Pistorius, and Hartsinck.

David Henri Gallandat (*c.* 1732–1782) was born in Switzerland and moved to Vlissingen in the province of Zeeland in 1744 to study medicine with his maternal uncle J. H. Bruas. Upon passing his exam in 1751, he became the physician on a slave ship. Between 1751 and 1757, he embarked on at least four voyages from West Africa to Guyana and St. Eustatius. He inspected the health of the enslaved in West Africa and supervised their health on board the ship (Harderwijk and Schotel 1862, 24; Molhuysen and Blok 1918, 626–27). Gallandat's 1769 manual not only offered medical advice, but also defended the slave trade with several religious, commercial, and legal arguments. Although Gallandat was strongly convinced that the slave trade was unproblematic, his arguments carried an apologetic tone. In other words, he felt the need to justify and defend the slave trade against the criticism expressed by his contemporaries.

Gallandat's comments on the slave trade make clear that he thought that slavery was a normal and unproblematic institution. To support the argument that slavery was compatible with 'the freedom of the gospel', Gallandat referred to a dissertation written by Jacobus Capitein (1717–1747). A former enslaved person, Capitein was brought to The Hague by a WIC merchant in 1728. After studying theology in Leiden, he became a missionary in Ghana in the 1740s (where he also died). Prior to his departure, he wrote the dissertation *De servitude, libertati christianae non contraria* (completed in 1742) to which Gallandat would later refer. Besides the link between the Bible and slavery, Gallandat was concerned with the question what persons were eligible for enslavement. This legal interest explains why he referred to the Bible to make the argument that slavery was not incompatible with the law of nations, which was probably an allusion to the ideas of Hugo Grotius. He quoted from the Second Epistle of Peter to argue that it was normal for prisoners of war to be enslaved (Gallandat 1769a, 6). Disregarding the context in which it was written, Gallandat included only the second part of chapter 2, verse 19: 'While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage' (Gallandat 1769a, 6). Gallandat omitted the first part of this verse, which shows that it refers to sin rather than slavery. This quotation from the Bible played a significant role in Gallandat's broader aims, forming both a reaction to criticism levelled against the slave trade and an attempt to provide arguments in favour of this branch of commerce:

> I will argue that many activities occur which would seem unacceptable if they do not yield a particular advantage. The slave trade provides us with

> an example. Only the merchant's advantage can acquit this [activity] of illegality. This thought, however, does not support the accusations levelled against the [slave] trade. These accusations are mostly based on prejudice.[7] (Gallandat 1769a, 3–4)

These 'prejudices' refer to rumours that, according to Gallandat, were already circulating in society. Gallandat stated that some of his contemporaries believed that 'among the negroes' it was common practice for parents to sell their children, or for husbands to trade their wives. It is not clear which rumours Gallandat had in mind, but he possibly referred to the sermons of Bernardus Smytegelt (1665–1739), a Reformed pastor who had lived in Middelburg for the last forty years of his life. Gallandat possibly alluded to Smytegelt's condemnation of the slave trade in order to make the opposite case.

Although Smytegelt owned WIC shares, he was strongly opposed to slavery (Schutte 2000, 45). In one of his sermons, Smytegelt condemned the slave trade on the basis of Exodus 21:16, probably inspired by the writings of Festius Hommius. Smytegelt thought that the slave trade was a form of 'theft', and therefore subject to God's punishment (Schutte 2000, 28–29). It is important to note that by comparing slavery to theft, Smytegelt implicitly argued that slavery was unlawful:

> It is very sad that Christians have transformed this [theft] into a trade. Alas, may it be so that the humans that are now being sold, transported, and often murdered once express their despair. Perhaps they would speak like Joseph once did: I am stolen away out of my land, Gen XL:15.[8] (Smytegelt 1747, 636)

This sermon became part of a collection of sermons published in 1743, a few years after Smytegelt's death. Indeed, it proved so popular that two

7 'Alleenlyk zal ik hier aanmerken, dat er vele bedryven plaats hebben, welke ongeoorloofd zouden schynen, indien 'er geen byzonder voordeel in te vinden was. Getuige zy hier van de *Slavenhandel,* dien men alleen door het voordeel, 't welke dezelve aan de kooplieden toebrengt, van onwettigheid kan vryspreken. Deze opmerking moet echter geenzins trekken om tegenwerpingen te staven, welke sommigen tegen dezen handel inbrengen; tegenwerpingen, die meest alle op vooroordelen gegrond zyn.'

8 'Is dat niet droevig / daar hebben de Christenen eene negotie van gemaakt. Ach! mogten die menschen / die soo verkogt, vervoert, en dikwils daarom vermoort worden / eens smeken; zouden ze niet zeggen / als eertyds Joseph; Ik ben dieffelyk ontstoolen uit myn land, Gen. XL: 15.'

printer-booksellers, van Thol and Callenfells, proceeded to publish three reprints of the same book in 1747, 1756, and 1766 (Schutte 2000, 215–18). As the 1766 reprint of Smytegelt's sermons was partly initiated by Callenfells, Gallandat's legal justification of the slave trade was possibly inspired by Smytegelt's condemnation of this practice or a similar argument circulating in Dutch society. Gallandat must have worked on his treatise in the period before 1769 and may have read Smytegelt's (1766) condemnation of slavery as 'theft', after which he aimed to contest this idea.

Another possible motive for Gallandat's justification of the slave trade are two essays published in *De Denker* in July 1764, a periodical that was edited at the time by Nicolaas Bondt, an Amsterdam lawyer and man of letters. These two essays contained three voices expressing an opinion about the slave trade: the writer of the essay; the opinion of the prominent French judge, historian, and political philosopher Charles de Montesquieu on slavery; and a fictious letter written by 'Kakera Akotie', an enslaved African, addressing 'Atta', a 'brother' living in West Africa. As editor of *De Denker,* Nicolaas Bondt used aspects of historical events to add his own voice to contestation of the slave trade (Fatah-Black 2021, 118–20).[9] He described Kakera as a free man illegally enslaved by merchants from Holland. He described how several of the enslaved had died during the voyage and concentrated especially on the cruelty and *onmenselyke* ('inhumane') behaviour of the crew, including the rape of women. On one occasion, one of the crew had thrown a baby overboard. He also described the branding of enslaved Africans and the hardship on the coffee plantations. Kakera concluded that the Europeans acted like *barbaaren* ('barbarians'; Bondt 1764, 233–37).

Nicolaas Bondt communicated an antislavery message in *De Denker* by various subtle means, not only by printing Kakera's fictitious letter, but also through his own ironic remarks. He stated that Kakera's account would not convince countrymen with an interest in the West Indian colonies. He himself thought that the 'usefulness of the colonies for the state' and the 'usefulness of slavery' were abundantly clear (Bondt 1764, 245).[10] Rather than rebutting Kakera's narrative, he quoted from Montesquieu's (1748) *De l'esprit des lois,* in which Montesquieu had expressed criticism of slavery by means of irony – quoted in *De Denker* in 1764: 'It is impossible for us to

9 As Karwan Fatah-Black (2021) has argued, this letter was based on events that took place between 1746 and 1749. Inhabitants living close to Elmina, located in modern Ghana, had forced the WIC to return several oarsmen, who had been kidnapped and enslaved. Kakera Acotie was manumitted and helped to find the others, including Atta. As both men died before they were able to return to West Africa, their families received compensation (Fatah Black 2021, 118–20).

10 'het nut dat die Kolonien doen aan den Staat'; 'de Nuttigheid der Slaaverny.'

assume that these people are men because if we assumed they were men one would begin to believe that we ourselves were not Christians' (Montesquieu 1989, 250, cited in Bondt 1764, 248).[11]

Whilst Gallandat's implicit suggestion of prevalent criticism of the slave trade cannot be linked to any source with certainty, Smytegelt's condemnation of the slave trade and the letters in *De Denker* form the possible inspiration behind his defence of the slave trade. Moreover, the reprints of Smytegelt's sermons and the essays in the *Denker* depict the wider intellectual climate in which Gallandat wrote his book. During the late 1760s, the slave trade had been criticised by Calvinist theologians and writers, who had argued that it was morally and legally unacceptable, whilst the fictious letter published by *De Denker* presented the slave trade (albeit implicitly) as a form of theft. The circulation of the antislavery ideas of Hommius, Smytegelt, and Bondt points to the existence of dissent against slavery in Dutch society and beyond. In the social imaginary of these thinkers, slavery was unlawful. As Gallandat and others tended to present their pro-slavery ideas as self-evident and obvious, the capacity of dissent of Smytegelt, Bondt, and others shows their ideas were contested and not taken for granted by their contemporaries.

The existence of opposition to slavery can account for the fact that Gallandat used legal expressions, such as *vryspreken* ('acquit'), to vindicate the slave trade. This word suggests that he felt the need to justify the slave trade. More importantly, his arguments explicitly focused on the legal context of slavery and enslavement. He argued that prevalent misconceptions about slavery – for example, husbands selling their wives – were incompatible with the functioning of any society. In fact, Gallandat (1769a, 4–5) wrote how impressed he had been by criminal law as practised by the *onbeschaafde volkeren* ('uncivilised people') in Africa. He stated that the institution of African slavery was part of this system. If one could not pay a fine, one would be enslaved. However, Gallandat (1769a, 5) argued that most of the *negeren, welke aan de schepen worden verkocht* ('negroes sold to the ships') were not enslaved as a result of debt, but were either born enslaved or were enslaved as prisoners of war. This latter category was especially important for Gallandat. He argued that the enslavement of prisoners of war was better than the alternative – execution.

11 'Het is onmooglyk, dat wy deese luiden zouden onderstellen menschen te zyn; om dat, indien wy hen onderstelden menschen te weezen, men zou beginnen te gelooven, dat wy zelfs geen Kristenen zyn.'

Gallandat (1769a, 5–6) consequently thought that the slave trade was a practice that also served the interests of Black Africans. In this way, Gallandat articulated two arguments simultaneously. By suggesting that the process of enslavement was beneficial for Black Africans, he used a moral and paternalistic argument; should this argument fail to convince his readers, he could still point to the circumstances in which a person could be legally enslaved. The social status of the enslaved was part and parcel of the fabric of the African societies in which they lived.

Gallandat's views on the legality of the slave trade were part of a broader sociocultural imaginary. His legal views on enslavement permeated his perspective on social hierarchies. He imagined the Middle Passage, the shipment of enslaved Africans from West Africa to the Americas, as a practice that was useful for all persons involved. On one occasion, Gallandat (1769a, 4) argued that it was because of the *advantage* for merchants, the slave trade could be acquitted of illegality. Slavery was a commercial opportunity that could not be ignored. A few pages later he expressed a different argument by extending this *voordeel* ('advantage') to all parties involved in the slave trade. The enslaved were better off in the West Indies compared to their situation in their 'fatherland'. African societies were rid of their *misdadigers* ('criminals') and the colonial settlements in the Americas gained from the slave trade, because Africans were better suited for agricultural work than native Americans or white Europeans. Given all these advantages, a slave trader could ply his trade free from a nagging conscience as long as he cared for the enslaved to the best of his abilities, combining *menschlievendheid en eigen belang* ('humanity and self-interest') (Gallandat 1769a, 6-7, 22-23).

Starting from contemporary legal views on enslavement, Gallandat created a white sociocultural imaginary in which slavery was a legal practice that was beneficial for all. He assigned interests to the enslaved without considering either their own evaluation of their enslaved situation and violent treatment, or the role of the slave trade in stimulating the enslavement of Africans. In other words, Gallandat's legal views were part of a highly paternalistic view of the enslaved. Gallandat did acknowledge the humanity of enslaved Africans and was preoccupied with their suffering during the Middle Passage, but his *menschlievendheid* ('humanity') was a sentiment imposed on the enslaved. As it imposed an obligation on the white crew of slave ships, it reduced the enslaved to mere recipients of such benevolence (Gallandat 1769a, 6, 22-23, 26). Both Gallandat's legal views and his idea of *menschlievendheid* thus created and reproduced the hierarchy between white men like himself and the enslaved.

Pistorius and Hartinck

Whilst Gallandat was involved in the slave trade itself, Thomas Pistorius had first-hand knowledge of the practice of slavery, since he had been a plantation owner, slave holder, and a member of the colonial government in Suriname. Pistorius wrote his account of Suriname in later life, supposedly dictating it to a scribe (van der Meiden 1987, 65). Luzac's (1781) *Hollands Rijkdom* ('Dutch wealth') reported that Pistorius had led an expedition against Maroons in 1733. His expeditionary force had pursued a group of Maroons through the jungle, destroying a village, killing some of them, and returning with twelve captives (Luzac 1781, 181–82). Indeed, in his own account Pistorius (1763) wrote that the Dutch colonists in Suriname had been attacked by 'Indians', whilst the enslaved population had also fought for its freedom on different occasions. He mentioned, for example, that his uncle had been killed during an attack on the Acribo plantation by *Karïbische Indianen* ('Caribbean Indians') (Pistorius 1763, 24).

Although Pistorius raised no fundamental questions about the acceptability or sustainability of either the slave trade or slavery, enslaved Africans resisting the plantation system had a strong impact on his views on slavery. As a result of the resistance of the enslaved, Pistorius seemingly put much emphasis on the importance of social hierarchy. He was mainly concerned with the question of how unequal social relations in the West Indies should be organised. In order to legitimise slavery, Pistorius focused on two moral sources: a divine principle and legal arguments. First, he believed that owners of enslaved Africans had obligations towards the enslaved, because as human beings both groups had the same God as their creator:

> Even if God has not yet enlightened the slaves with the light of the gospel, slaves are our fellow humans, equally created by God. If we aim to act like good Christians and want to redeem our conscience of gnawing inner accusations, our Christian duty of charity will demand of us to treat them as humans and not burden them with more [duties] than their time and powers allow.[12] (Pistorius 1763, 98)

12 'Wil men nu handelen gelyk Christenen betaamt, en onze Conscientie en gemoed van kloppinge en beschuldiginge bevryden; dan zal het de Christelyke Liefdepligt vorderen, dat wy de Slaven, die ook Menschen zyn, en met ons het zelve Opperweezen tot hunnen Schepper hebben, ofschoon 't Hem nog niet behaagt heeft, gelyk ons, met het zalige Euangelie-Ligt te beschynen, te behandelen als Menschen, en niet meer opleggen als zy dragen kunnen, nog hunne kragten en tydsgelegenheid toelaaten.'

Pistorius thus expressed ideas similar to Gallandat's view on the enslaved as 'humans'. Despite unequal social relations, both the enslaved and their owners had been created by God, although only the latter were Christians. Pistorius, himself a member of the Reformed Church and a delegate at the Synod of Suriname, implied with the words 'not yet' that enslaved Africans could become Christians (*Maandelyke uittreksels* 1756, 89). Much like Gallandat, Pistorius's recognition of the humanity of the enslaved was fundamentally one-sided. It described the moral obligations of white colonists without taking into account the voices of the enslaved themselves. Consequently, the enslaved were again reduced to mere recipients of benevolence.

Yet this idea of a shared Christian humanity coexisted with a second moral source: The treatment of the enslaved was not only guided by Christian charity, but also by civil law (Pistorius 1763, 89–98). Pistorius maintained that both Christian charity and civil law demanded that proper care should be given to enemies. If that was the case, one should take even better care of enslaved Africans, who increase *onze inkomsten en vermogens* ('our income and wealth') by their work (Pistorius 1763, 89–98). Both his religious and legal arguments served to reproduce a rigid distinction between the enslaved and the colonists.

Rising social tensions formed the basis for Pistorius's preoccupation with social hierarchy. In his narrative, the enslaved were not only a means contributing to 'our income and wealth', but they also posed a threat to the colonial status quo. His book was thus intended as a warning to prospective colonists (Pistorius 1763, 89). The ninth chapter of his book offered practical advice regarding the organisation of colonial life in Suriname. He stressed the importance of the wellbeing of enslaved persons living in the West Indies, and slaveholders were advised to provide them with sufficient food and rest, and to offer care when they were sick. Pistorius also advised that slaveholders should provide the enslaved with *hoeden en tabak* ('hats and tobacco') twice a year and that they allow them some holidays (Pistorius 1763, 89–98). However, paternalistic advice of this nature was inspired primarily by self-interest, to prevent disturbances of the colonial status quo. As an effect of this policy, a plantation owner would be in a better place to demand *vlytige arbeid* ('diligent labour') from the enslaved. One could expect all sorts of problems and misery if one failed to provide food and other forms of care to the enslaved population (Pistorius 1763, 89). These remarks seem to echo Pistorius's own experience of the attacks by Maroons. The practical advice about the treatment of enslaved Africans as described in the ninth chapter of Pistorius's *Korte en zakelyke beschryving* was intended

to regulate and ultimately preserve unequal colonial relations in Suriname. He believed that the implementation of his advice would make the colonies in the West Indies more profitable (Pistorius 1763).

The views of Gallandat and Pistorius show both similarities and differences. Both emphasised the importance of the correct treatment of the enslaved population, inspired by self-interest and their belief that the enslaved were also *menschen* ('humans') created by God. Both pointed to the commercial importance of slavery and the slave trade, by referring to 'advantage' and 'income' respectively. Their comments also demonstrated that economic concerns, *menschlievendheid*, law, religion, and colonial tensions were inseparably connected. Each of these themes played a role in defining Pistorius's vision of the West Indies. Pistorius articulated a sociocultural imaginary in which there was rigid distinction between the enslaved and the colonists. This distinction was not only a product of law, but also of religious sentiments, commercial interests, and fear for the enslaved.

A similar yet more explicit mixture of arguments based on commerce and social status can be found in the work of Jan Jacob Hartsinck (1716–1779). In 1770, he published an elaborate book on Dutch Guyana. In the dedication of his book to Stadtholder William V, Hartsinck stressed the commercial importance of the colonies in the West Indies by arguing that colonisation was a commercial activity of the utmost importance. He connected the *bloei en welvaart* ('flourishing and prosperity') of the colonies in the West Indies with *onze Scheepvaart en Koophandel* ('our navigation and commerce'), the *welzyn van ons Gemeenebest* ('wellbeing of our commonwealth'), and the *Rykdom der Ingezetenen* ('wealth of our inhabitants') (Hartsinck 1770, iv). This was not mere rhetoric, since in the first chapter Hartsinck (1770) stated that, from a historical perspective, the *voordeel* ('advantage') of colonies for states and empires was abundantly clear (vi). Colonisation was therefore a commercial opportunity which served to enrich the fatherland.

Besides this commercial aspect, legal arguments also played an important role in Hartsinck's (1770) view on slavery. Hartsinck quoted (without comment) the charters provided by the States General to the WIC in 1682 and to the directors of the colony in Berbice in 1732. Both texts allowed planters to sell and move the enslaved population as they pleased (347, 631). From a legal perspective, enslaved Africans were mere chattels owned by colonists or investors based in the Dutch Republic. This legal perspective was closely intertwined with the legal basis of slavery itself. Like Gallandat, Hartsinck was preoccupied with the legal procedure of enslavement. This is demonstrated by the last chapter of his book, in which he discusses the lives of the enslaved as they were transported, first from the interior of West

Africa to Elmina, thence to the West Indies (898–922). He described not only the fear and uncertainty of enslaved Africans as they were transported away from West Africa, but also the cruelty and diseases that they were forced to endure (898–902). These hardships especially applied to the way in which enslaved persons were sold to European slave traders. Hartsinck admitted that enslaved persons sometimes experienced a traumatic transition from a *bloeijenden staat* ('flourishing life') to the *hardste Slaaverny* ('toughest slavery') (Hartsinck 1770, 900).

Hartsinck's (1770) explanation of this transition focused entirely on the legal structures in African societies. He referred to the most common ways in which individuals were enslaved: free persons were enslaved as the consequence of war, debt, or criminal behaviour. Prisoners of war could be enslaved, criminals were punished with slavery, whilst indebted people could use their wife or children as collateral. He also admitted that Black slave traders – the *Caboceërs* – used to raid rival kingdoms to capture and enslave other Africans to sell them to European merchants, to fulfil the 'contract' between the African kings and the Europeans (Hartsinck 1770, 900).

This focus on legal procedures in Africa is almost identical to Gallandat's description from 1769, albeit with one significant difference: Gallandat had attempted to refute the rumour that African slavery meant that husbands were often selling their wives, whereas Hartsinck presented the same practice as a possible legal outcome of indebtedness. Since Hartsinck published his book in 1770, one year after Gallandat's volume on the slave trade, it seems improbable that Hartsinck provided Gallandat with an incentive to refute this rumour.

Hartsinck's (1770) legal views were a foundational part of his views on social hierarchy. More specifically, Hartsinck was concerned with the question of how to maintain differences in social status. From the closing pages of Hartsinck's *Beschryving van Guiana*, it is apparent that slavery presented a dilemma for the slave owners in the West Indies. Hartsinck admitted that most of Suriname's inhabitants were enslaved persons – a source of significant trouble for the colonists. He mentioned the many rules and prohibitions that enslaved Africans had to respect: 'it could cause much evil, if one were to give [the enslaved] too much [freedom]' (917).[13] Other prohibitions concerned the issue of curfew: The enslaved were not allowed to congregate after nine o'clock at night. Street patrols were allowed to shoot enslaved if they did not obey their orders. In addition, there was harsh punishment if enslaved persons ran away or misbehaved (Hartsinck 1770, 916–18).

13 'en het veel kwaad kan uitwerken, dat men hen al te veel toelaat.'

These rules stressed the subordinate status of the enslaved, whilst they also showed anxiety in relation to the prospect of disorder and revolt. There was a difference between the strict rules for the enslaved and the advice that Hartsinck offered to slave owners. He urged the latter to subordinate the enslaved population severely, albeit with moderate harshness. Slave owners were advised to provide enslaved Africans with necessities, not to 'seduce' women, or to condemn the enslaved without evidence (Hartsinck 1770, 918). Slave owners were allowed to punish enslaved persons, but not to kill them. Hartsinck stressed only a court was allowed to execute enslaved persons (Hartsinck 1770, 917). Similar to Gallandat and Pistorius, Hartsinck developed a social imaginary in which social hierarchy was a crucial factor, perceiving the enslaved as human beings, but with neither voice nor will of their own. He reduced enslaved Africans to the status of persons that deserved the benevolence of their masters, but whose dignity depended wholly on the will of white colonists.

Although Hartsinck denied the existence of problems in the unequal social relations between the enslaved and slave owners, events on the ground arguably had a profound effect on his white social imaginary. He discussed the revolt of enslaved Africans in 1763 extensively, but explicitly denied any connection between colonial violence and the fight for freedom by enslaved Africans in 1763 (Hartsinck 1770, 368). Instead, he maintained that the enslaved population in Suriname had been treated better than in other colonies (Hartsinck 1770, 271). However, as the historian Gert Oostindie (2011, 333) remarked, Hartsinck himself hinted at the treatment of the enslaved population as a cause of the revolt (see also Hartsinck 1770, 381, 399). It is telling that Hartsinck's book included both an elaborate discussion of the history of resistance by the enslaved population and detailed instructions on how colonial life ought to be organised.

The importance that Hartsinck attached to social hierarchy concerned both the enslaved, and the position of other social groups. Hartsinck briefly mentioned the place of manumitted persons in the social hierarchy of colonial Suriname. Although the same law applied to both manumitted and freeborn persons, Hartsinck implied there was a clear social difference between the two categories. In 1733, a law had described the social relations between manumitted persons and *blanken* ('whites'). The former group was forbidden to show any sign of *stoutheid* or *moedwil* ('boldness' or 'malevolence') towards white persons. They had to show *ontzag* ('respect') because they owed their *Pand van Vryheid* ('freedom') to the white settlers. The *blanken*, for their part, were forbidden from exploiting their superior social status vis-à-vis the formerly enslaved (Hartsinck 1770, 917–18). Hartsinck

attached much weight to the conservation of social hierarchies in Suriname. In his sociocultural imaginary, the enslaved and other groups needed to respect the superior status of white colonists.

Conclusion

Gallandat, Pistorius, and Hartsinck reacted to antislavery ideas and the resistance of enslaved Africans by developing pro-slavery arguments. These arguments included three elements that were closely intertwined. First, Gallandat and Pistorius explicitly recognised the commercial aspect of the slave trade and slavery respectively. Second, like Hartsinck, they also used legal arguments to legitimise these institutions. Gallandat and Hartsinck put much emphasis on the process of enslavement that took place in Africa. By presenting this process as a legitimate legal process, they argued that slavery was unremarkable, natural, and normal. This emphasis on law was arguably inseparable from their insistence on the importance of social hierarchy. Third, Gallandat's medical advice and the ideas of Pistorius and Hartsinck about social relations in the West Indies were meant to create and reproduce the boundaries between the enslaved and white colonists. Even their explicit recognition of the humanity of the enslaved played an important role in this process.

The relation between the resistance of the enslaved and abolitionism on the one hand, and the pro-slavery arguments of Gallandat, Pistorius, and Hartsinck on the other, seems to show that slavery was firmly embedded in the imagination of contemporary Dutch commentators. For these Calvinist authors, slavery was not only a commercial opportunity, but also part and parcel of their sociocultural imaginaries – the way in which they imagined their social world. The fact that they used legal arguments to legitimise slavery should be seen, at least partly, in the context of resistance of enslaved Africans, antislavery ideas, and also seventeenth-century condemnations of the slave trade by Calvinist authors. Their legal counterarguments, in turn, contribute to our understanding of the tenacity and cultural force of the pro-slavery movement in the face of resistance and antislavery ideas. The sociocultural imagination of Gallandat, Pistorius, and Hartsinck sheds light on their own motivations, which legitimised a violent institution instrumental to the Dutch Empire. This chapter has aimed to point to the narrow-minded imagination and the absence of non-white voices – i.e., 'white innocence' – that stood at the heart of these visions on enslaved populations and slavery.

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7. Januari's Ghost[1]: A Tale of Slavery, Sexuality, and Boyhood on Board a VOC Vessel

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Abstract: Can we imagine what historical records omit? If so, why should we? This chapter takes us back to the summer of 1769 and discusses an encounter between two boys, Steven and Januari, during a crossing from Batavia (Jakarta) to Ambon. Januari and Steven were young: one was eleven, the other fourteen; one was Black, the other white; one was enslaved, whilst the other was free. The boys will not have forgotten their encounter lightly, even though Januari later described it as playful. Steven and Januari were apprehended and charged with sodomy when they arrived in Ambon. Using historical records, this chapter (re-)constructs the moment of contact between Steven and Januari. The case illustrates why it is important to raise imaginative questions – in this case about love, sexuality, hierarchy, and abuse – even if the records do not provide clear-cut answers. Furthermore, it will show how present-day knowledge of sexual development in children, racial discourse, and criminal law practice can guide us in answering such questions. It is only through such a layered engagement with the past that we can construct a story that does justice to the historical experience of an enslaved boy like Januari.

Keywords: Ambon; Indonesia; slavery; sexuality; social hierarchy; race; eighteenth century

1 This is a reworked and translated version of chapter four in my book *De vlinders van Boven-Digoel. Verborgen verhalen over kolonialisme* ('Butterflies from Boven-Digoel: Hidden Histories of Colonialism'; Schrikker 2021).

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Jan Stelling: 'What were they doing there?'
Januari van Souratte: 'We were playing.'
Aboard the *Amerongen*, off the coast of Ambon, 1769[2]

Introduction

Can we imagine what historical records omit? If so, why should we? This chapter takes us back to the summer of 1769 and discusses an encounter between two boys, Januari and Steven, during a crossing from Batavia (Jakarta) to Ambon. Januari and Steven were young: one was eleven, the other fourteen; one was Black, the other white; one was enslaved, whilst the other was free. The boys will not have forgotten their encounter lightly, even though Januari later described it as playful. Using historical records, this chapter (re-)constructs the moment of contact between Steven and Januari. Januari's story offers a valuable insight into the power relations at play, on the one hand revealing that such relationships were not always set in stone, whilst on the other showing that boys like Januari always found themselves on the losing side of the equation.

The history of the two boys reveals the profound disparity of information available in the historical record of those who travelled on board the ships of the VOC 250 years ago. The difficulty or ease with which we can identify historical figures is intimately connected to the colonial relations that existed at the time. The case of Steven and Januari illustrates why it is important to raise imaginative questions – in this case about love, sexuality, hierarchy, and abuse – even if the records do not provide us with clear-cut answers. Furthermore, it will show that present-day knowledge of criminal law practice, sexual development in children, and racial discourse can guide us in answering such questions. It is only through an imaginative and layered engagement with the past that we can construct a story that does justice to the historical experience of an enslaved boy like Januari.

2 ANRI (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia), Residentiearchief Ambon, inventory number 963: 'Steven Harderwijk en Januari van Souratte, verdachten van sodomie aan boord van de Amerongen, 1769' ('Steven Hardewijk and Januari van Souratte, suspected of sodomy on board the Amerongen, 1769'). The original Dutch reads: 'Wat zij daar deden', and 'Dat zij daar maar wat speelden'.

On Board

Today, historical research can be done from the kitchen table. Thanks not least to the widespread digitisation of archives such as on the website of the Nationaal Archief, you can now dive straight into the world of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC, United East India Company). The VOC archives also contain a number of extremely useful databases, amongst the most important of which are the Dutch Asiatic shipping database, which lists all VOC ships that sailed between the Dutch Republic and Asia; the VOC *opvarenden* ('persons on board') database, which lists all the people in the Dutch Republic who were employed by the VOC and who signed up for the return voyage; and the *Boekhouder-generaal Batavia* database (Batavia Accountant General's database), which records the cargoes transported by VOC ships, both within Asia, and between Asia and Europe. Using these resources, it is possible to follow the ships, persons, and goods that moved between the Dutch Republic and Asia. The database of seafarers also offers direct access to digitised personnel records (ships' pay registers), which provide details on the birthplace, debts, marital state, and careers of the men employed by the VOC.[3]

The databases are a veritable gold mine for anyone interested in the life stories and living environments of those who undertook the journey to Asia. As an example, let me pick out one of them: Steven Harderwijk from Amersfoort. He turns up in the database of *opvarenden*, because in 1767, as a cabin boy, he signed on in Amsterdam to sail on the return ship *Bovenkerker Polder*, which was built in 1765. It was the first trip for Steven, who was thirteen years old at the time. He left with a debt of twenty-five guilders to one Jan Govers, probably the *zielverkoper* ('soul seller') or intermediary recruiter who had advanced him the money for his accommodation and equipment. During this voyage, *Bovenkerker Polder* had 280 men on board, of whom sixty died – about one in five. Steven survived the journey, but on arrival in Batavia on 15 July 1767, he spent more than a month in hospital. Eighteen months later, he embarked on the ship *Amerongen*, which sailed

3 The databases mentioned above and the information about ships, cargo, and about passengers can be found on the websites of the Huygens ING and the Dutch National Archives: Boekhouder-generaal Batavia: https://bgb.huygens.knaw.nl; Dutch Asiatic Shipping: http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/das. This database was originally published as a book and can also be consulted as an e-book: http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/das. The ship's paybooks (Scheepssoldijboeken) were the source for the passenger database, 'VOC: Opvarenden' from the National Archives: https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/zoekhulpen/voc-opvarenden.

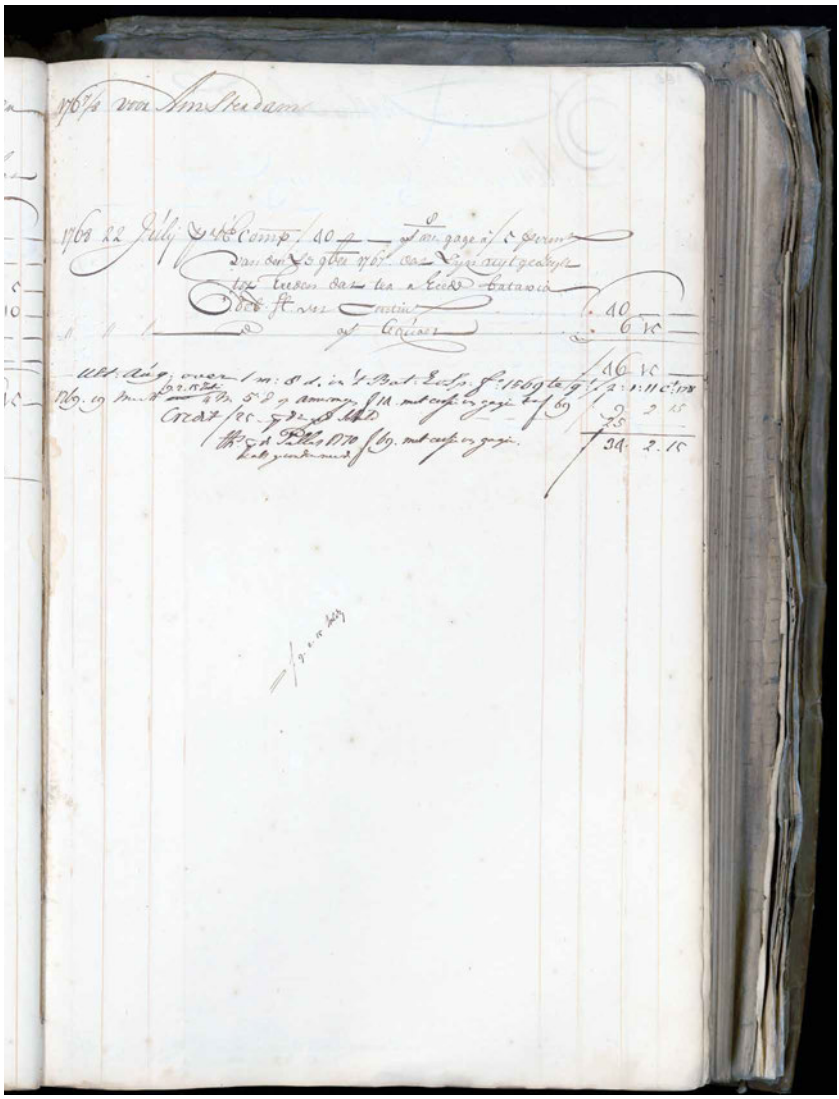

Figure 7.1 Fragment from Steven's payroll, registering his return without payment and 'als gecondemneerd' (last words on the page). NA 1.04.02, 6502, Scheepssoldijboek *Bovenkerker Polder*.

to Ambon. Finally, in 1770, he returned to the Republic on the *Pallas*. Upon his return his debt was paid off, but the word *gecondemneerd* (convicted) is scribbled into his personnel record (fig. 7.1). The file does not state what he was convicted of.[4]

4 For the data about Steven, see: VOC: Opvarenden van het Nationaal Archief: https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/zoekhulpen/voc-opvarenden. The data are linked to the scans of the original archive.

The hospital where Steven ended up in Batavia was an extremely unhealthy place, and many of the sailors died there. Typhoid fever was one of the main causes of death. The average death rate of sailors was between eleven and fifteen percent, and hence the situation on the *Bovenkerker Polder*, where the mortality rate was at least twenty per cent, was above average. Notwithstanding the conditions on the *Bovenkerker Polder*, it could be a lot worse. Take, for example, the *Amerongen*, on which Steven later served. The records show that, on its fifth voyage between Amsterdam and Batavia in 1764, the ship had a total of 219 sailors on board, of whom sixty-nine died on the way – almost a third. This voyage was the *Amerongen*'s last from the Republic. The ship did not return to Europe, but sailed another five years on the intra-Asian trading voyages, first between Batavia and Surat (North-West India), and later mainly between port cities on Java. The last long route was between Batavia and Ambon in 1769. Steven also sailed on that journey. A year later, the ship was decommissioned.[5]

The above information on the routes sailed by the *Amerongen* is taken from the *Boekhouder-generaal Batavia* database. Fortunately, this database allows one to dive into the hold and see what the ships were carrying. For example, during the years that the *Amerongen* moved between Batavia and Surat, it transported various types of textiles from Surat, from handkerchiefs to colourfully dyed silk chintz and everyday blue-and-white-striped cotton cloths. It also carried 5,000 kg of *putjuk* – a gum from the *Costus indicus* popular in China for the production of incense, but also used medicinally. The commercial value of the *putjuk* shipment was more than 15,000 guilders.[6] All these products were destined for the Asian market. In the Netherlands, we sometimes forget that the world of the VOC revolved around so much more than just the pepper and cloves for which the company was established in the first place. Sometimes, if you scroll through these cargo lists, you will come across people described as, for example: '10 *pees* [pieces] slave, male Papuan, large and small' in a crossing from Ternate to Batavia (Schrikker and Wickramasinghe 2020). So, slaves were also listed as if they were goods. People to be used either as gifts and/or commodities are often found on board the ships of the VOC. Yet Januari van Souratte, who also sailed on the *Amerongen* as an enslaved boy, is nowhere to be found in those databases.

5 For these data about routes and cargo within Asia, see: Boekhouder-generaal Batavia: https://bgb.huygens.knaw.nl; and for the return journeys: Dutch Asiatic Shipping: http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/das.

6 Boekhouder-generaal Batavia: https://bgb.huygens.knaw.nl.

Trade and Shipping in Asia

Whilst the databases present a fantastic resource, they do not tell us everything. Why was Steven punished? Who was Januari? To know what happened on board the *Amerongen*, we have to dive deeper into the web of the VOC archives, in this case a court file from Ambon, which is kept in the archives in Jakarta. Steven misbehaved so badly on board the *Amerongen* in the eyes of his colleagues that they reported him to the Ambon Court of Justice. Januari van Souratte also appears to have been involved in the incident.[7]

Presumably, Januari had come aboard the *Amerongen* in 1766 after the vessel had entered the port of Surat.[8] Januari must have been about eight years old when he was bought in Surat by the boatman. We do not know much about his origins. Slave trade networks from the Middle East, India, and East Africa came together in Surat. The people traded there came mainly, but not exclusively, from East Africa. An important party in this centuries-old trade along the West Indian coast were the Sidis. These slave-soldiers, originally from Africa, claimed their own power base by building fortifications along the coast. Later, in the seventeenth century, it was mainly the Gujarati and Arab traders who dominated the trade in humans in this corner of the Indian Ocean (Barendse 2002; Basa 2001; Machado 2014; Nadri 2015). From the beginning of its presence in Surat, the VOC was able to adapt to this situation. For example, it brought human cargo to Mocha when the opportunity arose. Sergeant Jürgen Anders wrote of one such transaction in April 1646 after a voyage from Surat to Mocha: 'after our arrival in Mocha we brought our 120 slaves ashore to sell as cattle to the Muslims' (Roeper and van Gelder 2002, 172).[9]

In the trade in humans, children were sought after from about seven years of age. They were then physically strong enough to survive childhood diseases and young enough to mould them into ideal workers and teach them new languages and customs. Surat 'soul sellers' (*serangs*) had the habit of buying young boys in order to, for example, hire them out later as sailors to Gujarati or European skippers (Nadri 2015, 136–64). Since Januari is explicitly described several times in the documents as a 'black slave boy,'

7 All information about the court in Ambon and the events that took place on board is based on the same court record: ANRI, Residentiearchief Ambon, inventory number 963: 'Steven Harderwijk en Januari van Souratte, verdachten van sodomie aan boord van de Amerongen, 1769.'

8 Reconstruction based on Boekhouder-generaal Batavia: https://bgb.huygens.knaw.nl.

9 '[…] na onze komst in Mokka hebben wij onze 120 slaven aan land gebracht om als vee aan de moslims te verkopen.'

he may have originated in East Africa and been brought to Surat by Gujarati traders. We can be more certain that the boatswain of the *Amerongen* must have bought him on the slave market in Surat when the ship was anchored there in January 1766. That was probably also the moment that he was given the name 'Januari' – his birth name remains unknown. The boy is invariably referred to as 'Januari of Souratte' in the records (Carter and Wickramasinghe 2018). Just as for the Gujarati traders, buying a young child was an investment for a VOC officer, as he could be moulded and prepared for a life in a household or as a sailor (van Rossum 2015, 29–57).

For more than three years, the *Amerongen* served as Januari's home. However, he would not have been the only non-European on board. It was common in the eighteenth century for the VOC to employ Asian sailors on the Asian trade routes. These Moorish sailors, as they were called, were supplied by Suratse *serangs* – just as the Amsterdam-based *zielverkopers* had done for Steven. For the *Amerongen*, we can be certain that there was someone else from Surat on board, a sailor called Miessing, and in all probability there were more. The historian Matthias van Rossum (2014), in his study of the living conditions of European and Asian sailors on board, clearly shows that these men were dependent on each other, worked together, and partly lived alongside each other. For example, there was a separate cooking and eating area for the Moorish sailors – known as the Moorish galley – and the rations for the Moorish sailors were different from those for the Europeans (van Rossum 2014).

Children of the Company

When the *Amerongen* left Batavia in 1769 for Ambon, at least Januari, Steven, and Miessing were on board. The ship's cargo was diverse: from hats and handkerchiefs to writing implements and building materials picked up on Java's north-east coast along the way. At that time Januari was still only a boy of eleven, maybe twelve years of age. In the three years since his departure from Surat, he had at least learned to speak Dutch, but it is not clear exactly what kind of work he had to do for his owner. We do know that he could move about somewhat freely on board and that he met Steven Harderwijk several times near the Moorish galley.

Steven Harderwijk had left Amsterdam two years earlier with the *Bovenkerker Polder*. He had come aboard the *Amerongen* in March, when he was almost fifteen years old. We know a little more about Steven than we do about Januari. He was born in April 1754 in Amersfoort, his father and

mother were called Anthonij and Hendrika, and he had an elder brother and two sisters. The family were members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Shortly after his youngest sister was born, he signed on with the VOC in Amsterdam. An uncle had also enlisted in 1760, but died in 1762.[10] Hence, the family were no strangers to the VOC. It was not unusual for Steven to have enlisted at such a young age: on the *Bovenkerker Polder*, he was in the company of eight other ship's boys. There were also eighteen *hooplopers* on board – young sailors, who on average must have been slightly older than the ship's boys. It has been estimated that in the seventeenth century, some twelve and a half percent of seamen were in fact children, whilst the eighteenth-century database shows that the proportion of children on board was slightly higher at around fourteen per cent. An average crew of 250 would therefore have comprised approximately thirty-five children (Ketting 2002). These boys spent their adolescence on board VOC ships surrounded by grown-up men. Life on board was harsh, not only because illness and death were always near, but also because there was a lot of brawling and bullying. You can imagine that the children were drawn to each other under these circumstances, but of course this might not always have been the case, nor should we assume that contact between children was always positive (Ketting 2002).[11]

We do not know why Steven enlisted – was his family poor and did he therefore have no choice? We do know that orphanages sometimes enlisted their children as punishment for bad behaviour, and sometimes simply because the orphanages were too full.[12] Two of the children who signed up for the *Bovenkerker Polder* together with Steven, Cornelis Willemse Knip and

10 The data about Steven's family background were found through the website wiewaswie.nl, in which digitised archives from a range of Dutch municipal archives have been integrated and which are searchable at the level of personal names.

11 Not much is known about the age demographics of VOC personnel, except for the estimate Ketting made for the seventeenth century. The percentages I mention are based on a rough estimate based on the VOC database *Opvarenden*. Because the year of birth or age was not recorded in the personnel records, it is difficult to give an exact figure. Instead, I looked at two types of jobs, those of ship's boys and *hooplopers*, who were usually aged twelve to seventeen. They made up about fourteen per cent of the total population, although this estimate is only an approximation. There are other categories of young workers, such as young sailors and young soldiers, but they are more likely to have been around eighteen to twenty years old. More research is needed for a more accurate estimate. It is also interesting to ask whether in the course of the eighteenth century the VOC started to hire increasingly younger boys due to a lack of personnel.

12 For orphans who were enrolled in the VOC, sometimes as punishment, see Geuzebroek (2020, 114). The municipal archives of Leiden have a number of letters from orphaned boys who were enrolled in the VOC or WIC as punishment. They write about their experiences in very different ways. The letters were published in Van Wieren-Maan (2018). On child labour in the

Jan Pieterse de Haan, came from an orphanage in Uitgeest. Also, a shortage of personnel meant that the VOC took on anyone who came forward. In the second half of the eighteenth century, administrators complained bitterly about the quality of the personnel. Perhaps Steven was simply better off on board than at home, or perhaps his parents had sent him away because he was rebellious. Whatever the reason, in one way at least Steven could be considered lucky: two of the nine ship's boys died within a year. Some of the boys returned soon, like Steven, but three others remained in service for years. One of them, Hendrik Frank, even survived the VOC and stayed in Asia after 1799.[13]

Januari certainly had no choice; his fate lay solely in the hands of the adults who sold and owned him. Furthermore, although he does not figure in the percentage of children on board, there were undoubtably more boys like him, as it was quite common for officers and officials to take enslaved boys with them. These boys served them on the voyage and could later be sold elsewhere for profit. We can therefore assume that there were always children like Januari on board whenever a ship sailed within Asia, even though we do not always see them in the archives (van Rossum 2014). For historians, children like Januari are like ghosts: because they do not appear in the official records, it seems as if they did not exist. Indeed, children like Januari only become visible when something extraordinary happened.

Steven and Januari's Game

We know for sure that Steven and Januari encountered each other along the way, because their meetings eventually led to a conviction by the criminal court in Ambon, records of which appear in the archives in Jakarta. Trials like these are a fascinating source for historians because they reveal so much about what people thought and did. So, what happened? Whilst the ship was at anchor in the harbour of Ambon, the two boys were caught lying, semi-naked, on top of each other. When the cableman, Jan Stelling caught them, Januari jumped up in fright and, lifting up his trousers, said that they were only playing. Startled, he also said that he had only bent down to pick up his handkerchief. It turned out, however, that during the crossing there had been other times when the two boys were seen in each

Dutch Republic in general and on the employment of orphaned boys with the VOC specifically, see van Nederveen Meerkerk and Schmidt (2008).

13 Scheepssoldijboek *Bovenkerker Polder*: NA 1.04.02, 6502.

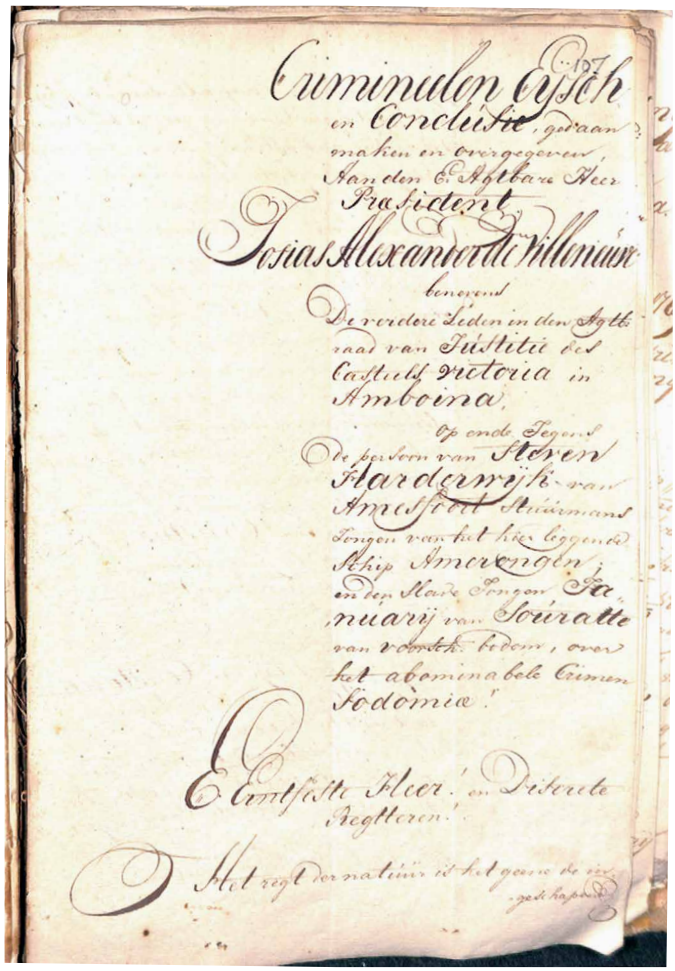

Figure 7.2 First page of the sodomy trial against Steven and Januari, Ambon 1769. ANRI (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia), Residentie archief Ambon, inventory number 963.

other's presence. Because they had now been caught in a sexual act, they became suspects in a sodomy trial (fig. 7.2).[14]

Sodomy fortunately no longer exists as a legal term. The act of sodomy, prohibited in the Netherlands until 1971, was applied to any type of sex other than between a man and a woman, ranging from sex with animals to sex between two men or two women. During the time of the Republic, it was

14 The following sections are all based on the documentation in the court case against Steven and Januari ANRI, Residentiearchief Ambon, inventory number 963.

punishable by death. The fact that homosexual acts were forbidden did not mean that they did not occur. In practice, people turned a blind eye to sex between men, although, particularly in the 1730s, there was a sharp rise in the persecution of homosexuality and many sodomy trials took place in the Dutch Republic. We do not know exactly how many such trials took place within the VOC, but we know from the work of van Rossum and Ketting that they were held with some regularity (Ketting 2002; van Rossum 2014). There seems to have been an increase in the number of trials in the VOC, as at home in the Dutch Republic, in the eighteenth century.

During the trial, Januari explained that Steven had pursued him during the entire voyage and that they had ended up behind the galley in this way before. When they were caught, however, Januari was found on top because Steven had told him that it was his turn, saying: 'I'll teach you to screw.'[15] There does not seem to have been any violence during the act. Yet the situation is not clear-cut. Was this primarily a matter of play and experiment, or a case of budding sexuality between two young adolescents? In the eyes of the eighteenth-century VOC official, the behaviour of the two boys was punishable regardless of age or consent. This is also clear from the very first sentence of the trial. The case does not begin with an explanation of the case and the testimonies, as would be considered usual, but rather with an introduction or *exordium*. The president of the law court in Ambon introduced the case by stating that sodomy was unnatural, not only for humans, but for 'all animals born in the sky, on earth and in the sea,'[16] continuing: 'With how much more abhorrence and detestation should we not look down upon a sin that flouts the law of nature, despises it, thwarts the continuance of mankind. Yea, erases the name of Christ.'[17] The president concluded with the observation that the 'Roman emperors Constantinus and Constans wanted and desired that such villains […] should be punished with this sword'[18] – in other words, the death penalty. The exordium sounds like a voice from a distant past, reminding us how law and faith were intertwined and how standards in the past can deviate from those of the present.

15 'ik zal je wel even leren naijen'. (The quotations in footnotes 15-19 are from ANRI, Residentiearchief Ambon, inventory number 963.)

16 'alle dieren die in de lugt, op aarde en in de zee geboren worden'.

17 'Met hoeveel te meerder afschuwing en verfoeiing moeten wij dan niet nederzien op een zonde die de wetten der natuur in de wind slaat, deszelve veragt, de voortseeting van het mensdom dwarsboomt. Ja de naam van Christus uijtwist.'

18 'Roomse Keyzers Constantinus en Constans wilden en begeerden dat sulke booswichten […] met de swaarde zouden gestraft worden.'

The exordium showed that the two boys had in fact already been judged as offenders before the trial started. However, the case was also about establishing exactly what had happened, since the Court of Justice had to determine whether the death penalty was justified in this case. Therefore, in addition to the boys themselves, the witnesses who brought the case to light were also interviewed. They were four Dutch sailors, two older and two younger, who were perhaps little older than Steven himself, and the Moor Miessing from Surat. Immediately after the boys had been arrested, Steven had said that Januari had taken the initiative and had kept chasing him. However, the council did not find this credible, in view of the statements of the witnesses and the testimony of Januari himself.

It gradually becomes clear that the court felt a certain compassion for Januari, who was repeatedly referred to as 'the little black slave boy.' The judges appreciated the fact that he had repented. It must have been an intimidating situation for the young Januari, there in the courtroom surrounded by high-ranking European men. The way Steven treated Januari must also have been intimidating. Remember that Steven was three years older – at their age this is a big difference. Furthermore, Steven was white. Steven and Januari's sexual escapades do not reflect affection or love. Rather, a picture emerges of experimenting boys, with Steven clearly dominating. This emerges from Januari's own testimony, but also from Steven's other behaviour as recounted by witnesses: Steven was cheeky and scolded his fellow sailors, and we would currently perhaps describe his behaviour as oversexed. The cableman Stelling and the young sailor Philippus had caught him twice before with a chicken between his legs. Philippus had therefore called him a 'chicken fucker,'[19] a comment which had been overheard by others.

Sexuality on board is an important subject, because it was part of everyday reality, but it is difficult to investigate unless in cases that went to court like this one. Matthias van Rossum (2014) gives a handful of examples of court cases in which men on board not only committed sexual acts on chickens, but also, for example, in mast holes. We simply do not know to what extent and with what regularity frustration during the long voyages led to such behaviour. Ketting (2002) suspects that acts of paedophilia were also common and he gives a number of examples of young boys who ran away screaming whilst older sailors tried to sexually violate them, usually resulting in a court case (see also van Meer 1995, 272–73). Tender or loving sex is never mentioned in these cases, which is not to say that it never

19 'hoenderneuker'.

happened. In the case of Steven and Januari, it is clear in any case that the colleagues on board the *Amerongen* disapproved of Steven's behaviour and reported it, and as such they must have known that severe punishment awaited them.[20] Would they have considered that the report could also have far-reaching consequences for the enslaved Januari? At the same time, one can also wonder how reliable they were as witnesses, if indeed their intention was to be rid of Steven. The court, however, did not consider this possibility and hence took the testimonies completely seriously.

The trial that opened so unequivocally gradually took an interesting turn. After it had been established that Steven in particular was the culprit in this case, the court decided to have him examined by a doctor. The doctor concluded that Steven was still barely sexually mature: he suspected that he was not yet capable of full ejaculation, because his '*partes genitales* were not fully grown, nor had his *pupes* in any way become visible.'[21] In short, his genitals were not yet fully grown and he hardly had any pubic hair. In modern medical terms: Steven was at Tanner stage 2, or perhaps just at stage 3, in terms of the development of his sexual organs.[22]

A Contemporary View

How should a historian interpret the case today? Could not the relationship between Steven and Januari have been burgeoning love and the sexual acts the accompanying innocent play and experimentation? Steven's actions with the chicken, however, seem to point in a different direction. In my attempt to fully grasp the significance of this case, I will allow myself an ahistorical thought experiment: how would professionals look at this case today?[23]

20 Ketting (2002) suspects that this might have been the case in several of the seventeenth-century sodomy cases he studied. Van Rossum (2014) and Ketting (2002) both pay extensive attention to the sodomy cases and both emphasise that everyone knew that the death penalty would be the likely outcome of a trial. Their work does not mention cases involving sex between children or teenagers.

21 Zijn 'partes genitales nog geensinds gezet, nog de pupes sig op eenige hande manieren quam te vertoonen.'

22 The Tanner scale is broadly used in the field of medicine to describe the stage of development of sexual organs during adolescence.

23 This section is based on conversations with three professionals who deal often with questions concerning juvenile law, sexuality, and vice cases, and with whom I discussed the historical case of Steven and Januari: Sophie Broersen (journalist at Medisch Contact and a medical doctor at GGD Hollands Midden); Reinier Feiner (a criminal and juvenile law specialist at FeinerIwema Advocaten and the chair of the Vereniging Sociale Advocatuur Nederland); and Carin Strop

Sexual relations between boys in themselves would be a non-issue in the Netherlands today and would of course not be considered an offence. However, the sexual behaviour of a child such as Steven could be labelled as transgressive by doctors, and that would immediately be seen as a red flag: what did this child experience in his young life? Research shows that this type of behaviour is more common amongst mentally impaired children at a young age and that such children are also more likely to have been abused themselves. Sadly, the eighteenth-century judges concerned with the case did not waste words on such issues. Therefore, we do not know whether Steven had a history of abuse, but it helps us now to think about this case further. I have already suggested that acts of paedophilia on board was probably common enough; so had Steven himself been abused on his earlier voyages?

And how do we place Januari's experience? His testimony and that of the others does not indicate that it was violent. Was it, then, perhaps playful or experimental behaviour on his part? Playing is also the word that young Januari himself used when they were caught. However, it also becomes clear that he did not like it very much. He literally said that Steven had pushed him all the time during the journey to sleep together and had made him do these things. He also said that he regretted it. A recent Dutch guideline for social workers on adolescent sexuality emphasises that when boys and girls perform sexual acts with older children or adults before the age of fourteen, this almost always occurs under (social) coercion (de Graaf et al. 2017). Is there reason to believe that this was any different in the early modern period – specifically in the case of Januari? It is often said that we should not measure such matters against the standards of the present, but in my opinion, this actually helps us to draw past events into clearer focus. Knowledge from the present can help us to understand the colonial world. It is important to allow ourselves to raise imaginative questions about the people of the past, their desires and whims, and think through the possible answers, even if we will never know for certain. This is essential if we want to reach beyond what the archives can tell us.

From the perspective of contemporary juvenile law, other things come to the fore if we continue this ahistorical thought experiment and imagine that we present the case of Januari and Steven to the court as a contemporary sexual abuse case. We assume that the judge in this hypothetical case would consider the testimonies of bystanders and Januari to be reliable, as

(judge at Rechtbank Den Haag). They helped me shape a present-day perspective of the case, although the interpretation is entirely my own.

the Ambon court did at the time. Of course, such a case today would not be about sodomy, but rather about the power relationship between the two children. A judge would then ask whether there had been coercion. Aspects that might influence the power relationship between the two would be considered, such as age, mental development, and their status amongst their peers. Januari was clearly the victim in the case, primarily because he was younger and smaller than Steven, but there was another, specifically historical aspect to the relationship that allowed Steven to exercise power over Januari, who was a slave and therefore socially subordinate to Steven. Thus, a contemporary court would only punish Steven, because he would be seen as the perpetrator.

Januari was a victim, but even if he were not, he would not be punished because he was under twelve. If the case proved that Steven had indeed forced Januari to engage in sexual acts against his will, the judge would request a personality test, observing Steven's behaviour. He or she would then set an appropriate punishment that would focus on treatment to prevent repetition. Today, therefore, Steven would not be tried. If it did come to trial, Steven's lawyer would mainly try to prove his client's innocence, for example by denying Steven's position of power and stating that, whilst there may have been a biological difference of three years between the two boys, no such mental difference existed. The lawyer might also paint a gloomy picture of life on board among adults who created a very unsafe environment for the boys, and who would have had a bad influence on their morale. The question whether Steven may have been abused himself is less relevant to establishing guilt, but would be important to the judge in determining the punishment. Punishment for minors is what they now call educational punishment, consisting of psychiatric care and, possibly, juvenile detention.

Eighteenth-century criminal law practice did not focus on treatment or care, although preventing repetition remained an important goal. We can only imagine how anxious Januari must have felt when he heard the judge's thundering exordium in the courtroom. When Steven dared him and touched him, and ordered him to try it too, Januari probably did not even know that such acts were punishable by death in Christian Europe. In eighteenth-century legal practice, the situation on board was not taken into account in any way, and the interests of the children were considered irrelevant; of course, such children lacked legal representation in court. The only thing the judges in Ambon seemed to take into account was the age difference and the character of Steven, and this provides an unexpected parallel between past and present (*cf.* van Egmond 1995, 81–84).

Steven and Januari's Fate

Januari instinctively has my sympathy, as indeed he seems to have had the sympathy of the judges in Ambon who handled the case. They seem to have had compassion for him. Januari was seen as a human being in the courtroom in Ambon, at least for a moment. It is clear that the judges saw two children standing before them and, ultimately, they also had some consideration for their ages. The account of the facts and testimonies is followed by pages of quotations from the Bible (how serious the offence is and why it should be punished) and from Roman Catholic legal scholars (to reinforce these points and especially with regard to the question of whether children may receive the death penalty).

The court finally decided to send the two boys to Batavia, with the advice that Steven 'should be banished for ever to as far away as possible.'[24] What place they had in mind is not clear. They initially wanted to send Januari to Banda for 'a few years,' but this was later crossed out and increased to ten years. Interestingly, the court's compassion went out to Januari, despite his status as a slave. Apparently, colour and status mattered a little less in this particular case.

However, this is only a snapshot. When the boys arrived in Batavia, Steven somehow managed to curry favour with the governor general. As a result, Steven's punishment ended up being remarkably light. The governor general decided that Steven should return to the Netherlands.[25] He was put on board the *Pallas*, admittedly as a person 'condemned,' but in the Netherlands he could disembark as a free man. As a result, his 'exile' entailed little hardship. Perhaps someone put in a good word for him, or maybe the governor general, knowing the situation on board the ships, turned a blind eye to this type of offence? Steven got off well, because corporal punishment was common in addition to banishment in other sodomy cases between children. We also know examples from Amsterdam of boys who ended up being condemned to strangulation for sodomy.[26] After his return to the Republic, Steven could go wherever he wanted as if nothing had happened.

24 'voor altijd naar zo ver weg mogelijk verbannen diende te worden,' and 'eenige jaren'. ANRI, Residentiearchief Ambon, inventory number 963.

25 See: *realia* (index) on the resolutions of the governor general and his council for the month of July 1769 at: https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/generalresolutions/.

26 For similar cases I refer to Muhammad Asyrafi's exceptionally rich Master's thesis, 'A Distant Mirror: Violent Public Punishment in the VOC Batavia, 1729–1739,' which can be consulted via the online thesis repository of Leiden University at www.studenttheses.universiteitleiden.nl. Asyrafi (Rafi) shows that fifteen men were convicted of sodomy between 1729 and 1739. All cases of sodomy that came before the Court of Justice in Batavia in these years took place on board a

And Januari? In Ambon, the councillors had, at least to some extent, seen him as a human being. They seemed to feel sorry for him, perhaps due to the intercession of the other sailors. However, his owner – the boatman – immediately dropped him and distanced himself from him as if he were contagious. Once ashore in Batavia, he was a slave boy like many others and the governor general carried out his punishment without mercy: ten years of banishment to Banda, 10,000 kilometres from the coast of Africa where he was born.

I have not been able to ascertain Januari's ultimate fate. The chances are that he did not survive those ten years of forced labour. If he did, the VOC probably sold him on to a *perkenier*, a planter, for whom he would have worked as a slave on the nutmeg plantations for the rest of his life. Yet maybe, as happened regularly, he was able to flee.

Conclusion: Januari's Ghost

Databases concerning the VOC are a valuable tool. They work almost like time machines, bringing the long-forgotten people, goods, ships, and shipping routes of the VOC into clear focus. At the same time, they reflect only a fraction of that historical reality. It is a paradox that, precisely because of the enormous wealth of information and detail in the databases, historians run the risk of missing which lurks in the shadows on board ships. They fail to cast light on the lives of those who did not end up in the registers, but for whom life on board could be extremely difficult. Court records can help to bring to life the people who otherwise remain unseen, whose histories remain untold – even if the legal case that produced these records will more often than not have been unfortunate, as was the case with Januari. The story of Steven and Januari is therefore not merely about whether their sexual encounter was play, love, or coercion. It portrays social relations in a colonial world and a contemporary view helps to see those historical

ship. The background of the defendants was diverse: they were about equally Dutch and Asian. Nine of the fifteen men were sentenced to death by drowning. In two cases, fourteen-year-old boys were involved. They did not receive the death penalty, but severe corporal punishment that was carried out in public (Asyrafi 2020). This underlines the conclusion that Steven was very lucky. This is also true in comparison with criminal cases from Amsterdam in the same period: the data on the death penalty for boys from the orphanage in Amsterdam come from Geuzebroek (2020, 118–19). She also gives an example of a case against a fourteen-year-old boy who abused an eleven-year-old boy, a situation similar to that of Steven and Januari. Here, the fourteen-year-old boy received fifty years of solitary confinement as punishment (Geuzebroek 2020).

relations more clearly. Sometimes, as this case show, you can only place a historical experience in the right context by analysing it with present-day knowledge.

Januari was briefly seen by the councillors in the courtroom in Ambon, but otherwise he remains a shadow. The people who brought the case did not think about what would happen to him; they were targeting Steven instead. To the governor general in Batavia, Januari was nothing more than an anonymous, Black child slave. He felt no compassion for a boy like Januari, but he did for the white child Steven, who was given a second chance. Januari's ghost forces us to think about colonial relations, norms, and values. Once you have seen him, he will continue to haunt you. And rightly so.

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8. Transformative Work: An Antislavery Petition at the National Exhibition of Women's Labour, 1898

Sophie van den Elzen

Abstract: This chapter investigates the meaning of an obscure exhibit at the Dutch National Exhibition of Women's Labour (The Hague, 1898): an illuminated copy of a women's antislavery petition from 1855. The chapter asks what frames of reference this exhibit mobilised, reconstructing its significance for visitors by examining references to the antislavery movement in a range of women's reform periodicals and in a feminist bestseller: *Hilda van Suylenburg* (1897), which had been published by the president of the exhibition, Cécile Goekoop-de Jong van Beek en Donk, the year before. The chapter shows that the appropriation of the history of antislavery by organised feminism, a dynamic well known in the English and American contexts, was part of Dutch feminist culture as well. Not the straightforward celebration of Dutch women's activism it appears, the exhibit rather draws on a transnational culture of imperial feminism. The chapter ends with a reflection on the collective blindness to the realities of colonial slavery and the struggle for abolition that folk stories about antislavery fostered.

Keywords: Abolitionism; antislavery; *Hilda van Suylenburg*; first-wave feminism; National Exhibition of Women's Labour

Introduction

> Sire! The undersigned take the liberty of addressing themselves to the throne, Your Majesty, with a most urgent appeal. May it not surprise you that that sex does so which is ordinarily less likely to involve itself in public affairs. But when it comes to the interests of its fellow humans, it

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> would harm its conscience, if it too did not raise its voice, did not let its pleas reach Your ears. Everything that has recently come to light about the condition of Slaves in our Colonies, particularly in the West Indies – and in which Christian household has the fate of these unhappy ones not been discussed? – has so shocked the sensibility of the Undersigned, that they can no longer withstand their desire to address Your Majesty directly, with the urgent plea to soon end this state of affairs.
> Sire! As wives, mothers, and marriageable girls, in doing so, more than ever we feel our privilege of being free; but also that the name or condition of slave might injure, but can never extinguish, the natural feeling of she who is not free.[1]

The summer of 1898 was a watershed in the history of Dutch feminism. Discussions of women's work, domestic happiness, legal rights, and political power animated lecture halls and made the pages of major journals. The catalyst for all this activity was a massive fair held in The Hague: the National Exhibition of Women's Labour. This event, which had been brought into existence by the collaborative effort of hundreds of women, drew 90,000 visitors over the course of three months, and treated them to a panoply of objects, demonstrations, speeches, displays, and décor related to different aspects of *vrouwenarbeid* ('women's work') in the broadest sense the organisers could conceive (Dudink 2000; van Eijl 1994; Stam 1998). The event included the display of people, such as typists and women workers manning looms in the Hall of Industry, and Javanese gamelan musicians and batik textile workers in the colonial section.[2]

The exhibition built on a tradition which had, with the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, become an international and often internationally competitive genre. Dutch organisers, who were overwhelmingly from a white, Protestant, educated background, were well-informed of this tradition, and particularly of the hard-fought Women's Building that had graced the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893. As Maria Grever (2000, 17) explains, the 'encyclopaedic striving' of these events meant that organisers faced a

1 Text of an Amsterdam women's antislavery petition. Preserved in the National Archive, https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/en/research/archive/2.10.02/invnr/450/file/NL-HaNA_2.10.02_450_0259 and reprinted in *De Vereeniging: Christelijke Stemmen* (1856) and the monthly journal of the Dutch Society for the Promotion of Abolition ('Berigt', 1856, 54–56).

2 The centenary of this event in 1998 saw a wave of public commemoration and new scholarship (notably, Grever and Dieteren 2000; Stam 1998). The most expansive treatment is Grever and Waaldijk (1998), translated into English as *Transforming the Public Sphere* (Grever and Waaldijk 2004). I am grateful to Dineke Stam for her valuable feedback on an earlier version of this essay.

monumental and usually contentious task of harmonising the scores of objects they amassed into some form of coherent whole. In the case of the Exhibition of Women's Labour, spelling out the connections between aspects of women's labour and, particularly, harmonising them into a unified plea for the expansion of the domain of women, was a key concern for the politically minded feminist president of the exhibition, Cécile Goekoop-de Jong van Beek en Donk, who saw the exhibition as an opportunity to stake feminist claims. De Jong had personally overseen the construction of the key site to forge this synthesised vision: the Hall of Social Work, which showcased both the social wrongs suffered by working-class women and the charitable and philanthropic efforts of their wealthier counterparts.

This chapter explores how the narrative of women's involvement in the campaign to end slavery contributed to this aspiration. The connection between women's activity in the antislavery movement and their feminist awakening has often been considered for the British and American contexts, where there were significant personal connections between the campaigns (Hersch 1978; Kellow 2013; Midgley 2004). Abolitionism served as a training ground for women to master techniques of social action, including public speaking, organising petitions, and fundraising (Dubois 1998; Gibson Cima 2014; Yellin 1989; Zaeske 2003). The imagery and arguments developed in the antislavery campaign also fed into the formulation of new vocabularies to critique gender relations (Ferguson 1992; Quanquin 2012; Sánchez-Eppler 1993). In the Netherlands, too, the antislavery campaign served as a rare site for the mobilisation of women and for the formation of a feminised, emotive political discourse (Janse 2007, 100ff.; 2020).

A richly decorated artefact brought the story of abolition in the Dutch territories and the role women played in it to the exhibition. In the Hall of Social Work, a placard familiarised visitors with the work of the Ladies' Committee for the Emancipation and Evangelisation of the Slaves in the West Indies, and with the text of the women's antislavery petition from 1855 which opens this chapter (van den Elzen 2021; IJtsma, Joosten and Stam 2021). The document, measuring 80 cm x 50 cm, was printed on sturdy marbled paper, written in illuminated longhand, and adorned with a red wax seal.[3] Presented with faux historical flair, the placard proudly noted that 733 women had signed the petition, and loudly, but wrongfully, attributed what had been a working-class project to the moneyed Amsterdam abolitionist Anna Bergendahl (Janse 2020; Stibbe 2023).

3 The document survived, heavily damaged, and is part of the collection of the Atria Institute, https://hdl.handle.net/11653/obj1919.

The exhibit's garbled recollection indicates the organisers' class bias, but also how obscure the event it referenced really was. The appeal had indeed been one of the first public actions by Dutch women, as one contemporary reviewer noted (IJtsma, Joosten, and Stam 2021, 36; Janse 2003), and the collection of hundreds of signatures had taken real effort. Yet, although the festive illumination of the number '733' on the placard drew positive attention to the number of signatories, ultimately the petition had had little effect. Its scale paled in comparison to the mass women's petitions in the United Kingdom, which gathered many thousands of signatures across many cities and all social classes. When slavery in Suriname and the Antilles was finally abolished in 1863, this happened after protracted parliamentary debate, rather than mass civic pressure. Overall, the Dutch response to the transnational popular movement to end slavery was notoriously tepid (Drescher 1994; Emmer 1980; van Stipriaan 2005; for a critique of this dominant reading of Dutch abolitionism, see Janse 2007, 31–33; 2015). What then did this placard *mean* to visitors to the exhibition? What memories, personal or cultural, did curators call upon, or even hope to mobilise with it?

This chapter explores these questions. It begins by examining some of the intimate stories told about women's antislavery work in the circles of prominent reformist families, the van Hogendorps and the Moquettes. These familial memories were a valuable resource for the occasion. It then examines references to antislavery made in the public sphere, in women's periodicals, including the journal *Vrouwenarbeid*, which was devoted specifically to the exhibition, and in de Jong's novel *Hilda van Suylenburg* (1897), a key text of the women's rights movement. The dominance of a limited number of key stories about antislavery – particularly that of Harriet Beecher Stowe's significance in the antislavery movement, and the story of the World's Antislavery Convention in London, 1840, being the foundation of American feminism – quickly becomes apparent. The frames of reference the exhibit called upon were fundamentally transnational, and the mobilisation of these triumphalist international stories ultimately hid the realities of the Dutch colonial regime from view.

'Close Tie of Mutual Passion': Personal Connections

The archives of the subcommittee responsible for the Hall of Social Work do not reveal who made the placard of the antislavery petition, and visitors

made scant mention of it in the records.[4] This is little wonder. Other eye-catching displays drew people's attention in this section of the exhibition, including a 'table of horrors' displaying products of sweated labour alongside the starvation wages workers received for them, and a model of the sod hut peat cutters called home (Grever and Waaldijk 1998, 110; Waaldijk 2000). As the most overtly political section of the exhibition, the hall also included propaganda for women's suffrage.

It is likely that the sisters Anna and Marianne van Hogendorp had a hand in the conception and design of the placard. Only one known review of the exhibition references it, demurely explaining that it commemorated 'the first time that women here acted independently to aid the work of men' (W. 1898, 62), for readers of the monthly journal of the *Nederlandsche Vrouwenbond ter Verhooging van het Zedelijk Bewustzijn* [*Dutch Women's League for the Elevation of Moral Hygiene*]. This anti-prostitution organisation had been founded by the van Hogendorp sisters, at the personal urging of one of the international leaders of the movement to abolish prostitution, Josephine Butler. Butler's bust could also be admired in the Hall for Social Work (van Drenth and de Haan 1999, 149ff.; van Hogendorp 1898a, 296).

The Protestant van Hogendorp family had been haphazardly involved in antislavery across several generations. Most notably, the sisters' great uncle Dirk van Hogendorp premiered an abolitionist play set in the Dutch Indies in 1800 (Adams and van der Haven 2016). Anna van Hogendorp reminisced about these philanthropic connections in her family in *Vrouwenarbeid*, the journal specially founded to accompany the exhibition. She explained that her mother had been part of a women's circle that extended a helping hand both at home and abroad, including to Suriname, where the traces of 'dehumanising slavery had not yet been eradicated after more than thirty years' (van Hogendorp 1898b, 250). With regard to the theme of the exhibition, van Hogendorp described how a 'close tie of mutual love and passion (*geestdrift*) connect[ed] all of the women labourers (*arbeidsters*)' and explained that her mother was able to combine family duties and 'diligent outward work' by involving her children in her 'social and philanthropic work. They were interested in it, they collaborated in it, they grew up in it' (van Hogendorp 1898b, 250; on domestic antislavery culture, see also Legêne 2000). Fifteen years later, on the occasion of the exhibition *De Vrouw 1813–1913*, which happened to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary

4 The archives of the exhibition are held by Atria and have been made available online: https://hdl.handle.net/11653/arch110.

of abolition, Anna van Hogendorp again shared warm reminiscences of the reformist women in her family. This time, she also mentioned the Amsterdam petition, which, like the placard, she once again erroneously linked to Anna Bergendahl (1913, 27). The Amsterdam petition was also recalled by Hermine Moquette, in her review of *De Vrouw 1813–1913*. Her sensitivity to this mostly forgotten history may be explained by her father's involvement in organised antislavery.

Van Hogendorp's comments suggest her deep personal attachment to her family history of philanthropic work. At the same time, however, in politicising this history for the context of a demand for women's rights, she chimed in with a transnational feminist master narrative. Josephine Butler, most famously, had also insisted on the comparison between the campaigns against slavery and legalised prostitution, and celebrated her own family's involvement in the antislavery campaign. Like van Hogendorp, Moquette also put her reference to the Amsterdam petition in a transnational light: she mentioned it in connection to the famous American antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although the recollections that made the exhibition possible were intimately familial and its purpose was to highlight Dutch women's 'work', the broader frames that gave meaning to it were fundamentally transnational, and drew their mobilising power from that dimension.

'Potent Work, a Blessing': Popular Memory of Antislavery

It was not her presidency of the exhibition, but the publication of her novel *Hilda van Suylenburg* in 1897 that made Cécile Goekoop-de Jong van Beek en Donk a household name. In many ways, the novel offered a complementary 'exhibition on paper' to the pavilion in The Hague (Leijnse 2015, 202). A footnoted social novel, *Hilda* used the story of its eponymous heroine to catalogue the various woes of women across different classes: from loveless marriages, spinsterhood, and sweated labour, to unwanted pregnancy. A key device to connect these plots are the work shifts of Hilda's mentor, Corona van Oven. As a reform-oriented medical doctor, Corona takes Hilda all over town to visit wealthy as well as impoverished patients. *Hilda* was a major popular success, with a fourth re-print appearing within ten months of its initial publication.

In both endeavours, de Jong sought to showcase that women's work had transformative potential. It could bring a new community into being, tap into new human energies, and serve the nation in unique ways (see also

Dudink 2000, 84ff.). When opening the exhibition on 9 July 1898, de Jong suggested that the work that had gone into it, although imperfect, had not only been in service to the *gemeenschap* ('community'), but had also been transformative for the organisers: 'this preparatory work in itself has already for so many been a powerful awakening, a revelation of solidarity, potent work (*arbeidskracht*), a blessing' (cited in Pierson 1898, 1). She stressed the expansive, collaborative nature of the effort:

> we who brought this work to term are simple Dutch women from all ranks and classes, from all religious backgrounds, political persuasions, and philosophies. It is wonderful to be able to say that women from all circles worked together! And now the hour has come that we will lay down the fruits of our labour at the feet of the Dutch nation! (de Jong cited in Pierson 1898, 2)

Similarly, throughout *Hilda*, de Jong (1984) emphasised that 'emancipating women' entailed 'mould[ing] her into a serious labourer in the family of humankind' (291). This labour could be social, artistic, learned, or in crafts. Women's labour was not just a way to ensure economic independence, but could also transform the social sphere.

De Jong ([1897] 1984) buttressed her case by way of three returning themes, and supported each of them by reference to the history of antislavery. First, she emphasised that philanthropic work was not the same as charity. Charity was non-committal and ultimately useless (101, 128, 314) – it neither transformed society nor women's lives themselves. Philanthropic work, conversely, described the contribution women could make to world history. Second, she emphasised the mutual ties between women's emotional life and their work. Key expressions she used to characterise this relationship were 'loving enthusiasm' (*liefdeënthousiasme*, 362) and 'loving service' (*dienende liefde*, 371), representing the gendered familial emotions that women could turn outwards for the benefit of society. Moreover, de Jong suggested, if women did not experience these emotions, they would unhappily wither away (142, 362). Third, despite its utopian ring, there was a place where women's work had already wrought its social transformation: America. Throughout the novel, de Jong cited America as proof of a nation where civil progress and women's public advancement went hand in hand (233, 241, 501). De Jong used the story of women's involvement in antislavery to illustrate each of these themes (de Jong 1984).

'All Great Movements of Her Time': Imaginative Connections

Hilda van Suylenburg invokes the history of abolition at several points. Following a popular custom, de Jong (1984) framed it as the most recent example in world history of the powerful 'loving enthusiasm' of women:

> Women have always passionately participated in all great movements that animated their time: Christianity, the French Revolution, the American emancipation of the slaves, etc., etc., and nowadays, too, there really isn't a serious movement that does not sport its female champions. (141)

This narrative of abolition had wide currency. Praising the 'fiery enthusiasm' of 'brave women who, against all threats, suspicion, and ridicule fought in the vanguard of each spiritual quest for freedom' (de Jong 1984, 362), including the movement to abolish slavery, was a very different framing than that of the charity *Hilda* criticised. It was a way of inserting women into history, and more specifically, into the powerful narrative of liberal progress that characterised the age (Butterfield [1931] 1965).

This preoccupation chimed in with a prominent late nineteenth-century intellectual debate about whether women's historical existence could be understood in terms of cultural evolution. Influential works such as J. J. Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), which speculated about the existence of prehistoric 'gynecocracies', and Jules Michelet's *La femme* (1860), which sacralised women's place in the home, described women's historical agency as running counter to modernity. Conversely, works such as Léon Giraud's *Essai sur la condition des femmes en Europe et en Amérique* (1883) and Louis Frank's *Essai sur la condition politique de la femme* (1892) emphasised the role of women in the progressivism of the time (van den Elzen 2024, ch. 5). In the Dutch context, works such as Johanna Naber's *Wegbereidsters* (1909) made a similar case. Like many Dutch feminists, de Jong was informed of these debates, and works by Michelet and Frank feature in the footnotes in *Hilda*. The narrative of women's historical importance to abolition was a major support for this side of the debate. It relied on two main motifs: the participation of British and American leaders of the women's movement in antislavery, and the popular success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853).

The first motif was a narrative crafted by American suffragists that had been launched very successfully in Europe. As Lisa Tetrault (2014) has argued, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony invested heavily in the mythmaking around their movement's history. They collected, wrote, and

actively circulated the six-volume *History of Woman Suffrage*, intended as an 'arsenal of facts' for future historians (Stanton et al. 1887, 7). The first volume appeared in 1881. It paid elaborate tribute to women's work in the antislavery movement and claimed that the birth of the suffrage movement in Britain and America could be dated to the 1840 World Antislavery Convention in London, to which female American delegates including Stanton herself were denied equal access (Tetrault 2014). The *History of Woman Suffrage* was well received in European women's rights circles and its echoes reverberated in the Dutch feminist press, including the passages in *Hilda* cited above.

The motif of Harriet Beecher Stowe's significance to the abolition of slavery in the United States had become established folk wisdom within the women's movement and beyond. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* found great success in the Netherlands after its publication in 1853, even briefly reinvigorating the languishing abolition movement (Ham 2018; Huisman 2015, 60ff.; Janse 2007, 91ff.). The significance Stowe held for feminists, even if she did not count herself among their number, has led Margaret McFadden (1999, 67–68) to call her an 'unwitting ally'. Stowe made her appearance in a variety of Dutch women's reform journals, including the anti-prostitution journal *Orgaan van de Nederlandsche Vrouwenbond* mentioned above ('Het spreken', 1887, 90–91; 'Reglementeering', 1898, 103), the bourgeois feminist *Onze Roeping* ('Hoe Mevr.', 1872, 137) and *Evolutie* ('De Vrouwenbeweging', 1893, 3), and the Flemish-Dutch socialist *De Vrouw* ('Nog Iets', 1896, 39-40). The publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was presented as a pivotal moment in the history of abolition. *Orgaan van de Nederlandsche Vrouwenbond*, for instance, wrote: 'Was it not Mrs. Beecher Stowe whom the slaves have to thank for their freedom, besides God?' ('Het spreken', 1891, 90–91). *Hilda* also makes references to Stowe, praising her as 'the untiring labourer for the freedom of the American slaves, who in addition to her great social work also found the time to be an excellent mother to her six children' (de Jong 1984, 77).

'Loving Enthusiasm'

In the transnational feminist press, Stowe was also used as an example to show that to act on a passionate drive for social change was, in fact, perfectly feminine. In this context, novel writing was presented as equivalent to, and potentially more effective than, more traditional modes of campaign work, such as collecting petitions. The drive to work could, then, be considered as an expression of the feminine ideal. In one of *Hilda*'s reflections on great women like 'Cleopatra and Harriet Beecher Stowe', the narrator muses that

'thousands and thousands [of women] must, consciously or unconsciously, feel something within themselves of that which these historical women possessed in its perfection' (de Jong 1984, 79). It must have pleased de Jong that her novel was compared to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on multiple occasions, even if one reviewer who launched this comparison did so to make the point that the author was 'a bad *artist*, but a good *person*' (cited in Leijnse 2015, 213, emphasis in original).

Stowe's inspiration was frequently presented in gendered, feminine language. *De Vrouw*, for instance, reprinted fellow woman novelist George Sand's characterisation of her:

> Thrice holy is the soul that *loves* martyrs thus, that blesses and *comforts* them! [...] Great, noble, and elevated is the *heart*, that with its love, compassion, and reverence, *embraces* a whole race that has been cast down in blood and dust. ('Nog iets', 1896, 39–40, emphasis added)

Orgaan, too, emphasised this connection between feminine feeling and political mobilisation in a lengthy article comparing sex trafficking to the slave trade:

> When we read of the terrible spectacle of slavery in Africa and America [in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*], tears rose to our eyes, hearing about so much cruelty. Similarly, accounts of the current slave trade not only bring tears, but a feeling of rebellion to our hearts, at all this deceit and all this injustice. We'd want to call out to everyone: 'Do you not hear the sighs, the cries of so many unhappy deceived souls, rising to the Heavens?' (van Hogendorp 1902, 100)

This article characterised not just passionate writing, but even passionate *reading* as a politically significant domestic pursuit.

It has often been observed that women's antislavery rhetoric took a different form than men's. It made greater use of emotional appeal, and developed characteristic argumentation based on sentimental identification, specifically with the female enslaved. As Maartje Janse (2007, 112ff.) has shown, such characteristics are also present in the 1855 petition reproduced at the exhibition. Stowe played a major role in this understanding of women's engagement in antislavery as a form of female politicised work. The placard at the exhibition pointed beyond itself, to this broader understanding. It reinforced both the sense that women's philanthropic work was a benefit to society, and that it was a benefit to their character.

America

In the nineteenth-century Dutch imagination, abolitionism and the role of women in it were primarily associated with the anglophone world, and from the 1850s onwards, primarily with America (see also Huisman 2015). The article in *Orgaan* refers to slavery in America, but makes no mention of Suriname. Similarly, in *Hilda*, the enumeration of 'great movements' in world history speaks only of the '*American* emancipation of the slaves' (de Jong 1984, 141, emphasis added).

This suggests a third frame of reference that gave meaning to the placard. For many women's rights advocates, America was a shining example of progress. The exhibition itself had been significantly inspired by a similar event at the World's Columbia Exposition held in Chicago (Grever and Waaldijk 1998, 28ff.). De Jong (1984, 248) visited this exhibition in 1893 and makes reference to it in her novel. America offered more employment and educational opportunities to women than any European nation and had been the first to develop a sustainable organised women's rights movement. Throughout, *Hilda* references the success and social value of these American experiments (de Jong 1984, 233, 243, 501).

The American antislavery campaign was closely intertwined with this story at many points. Not only did individual pioneers such as the first female physician Elizabeth Blackwell and orator Lucy Stone often refer to their formative experiences with antislavery (Blackwell 1895; Stone [1930] 2001), the antislavery campaign had also been enshrined as a founding myth of the feminist awakening in works such as the *History of Woman Suffrage*. The discussion of the placard in *Orgaan* bears witness to this understanding of the women's antislavery movement, and transposes it to the Dutch context: it specifies that the petition was the first time *here* that women aided men's work this way (W. 1898, 62).

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the frames of reference that a lavishly illustrated, but obscure historical exhibit at the National Exhibition of Women's Labour mobilised. Even though on the surface the placard seems a case of specifically Dutch imperial feminism, the history it referred to had been all but forgotten, and the object was in fact only made legible by a transnationally shared feminist master narrative of antislavery. Maria Grever and Berteke Waaldijk have shown that the exhibition told a fundamentally

*trans*national story: imperial pride was at the heart of the exhibition, and of Dutch feminism more generally (esp. Grever and Waaldijk 1998, ch. 5; see also Boisseau 2018; Bosch 1999; Burton 2004; Grever 2000). The displaying of the 1855 petition further complicates this story: it drew its power not just from Dutch imperial pride, but also from a powerful transnational founding myth of women's activism which travelled from the English-speaking world. This story, its origins, and resonance had little to do with the realities of the Dutch colonial regime, and even less with the plights of 'she who is not free'.

If anything, the eagerness to tell transnational success stories encouraged a selective blindness towards Dutch colonial history. The Dutch women's rights press hardly made any reference to the history of Dutch slavery, only ever framing the practice as either an American or a global plight (van den Elzen 2024), without implicating the Dutch in any special way. Rare exceptions are celebratory remarks about Dutch *abolition*, not about slavery itself ('Eenige Oogenblikken', 1898, 212), or the odd palliative and condescending recollection of the regime after the fact (Conradi 1913).

The Hall of the West Indies hardly made any reference to the history of Dutch slavery either. Grever and Waaldijk (1998, 192ff.) have documented the lack of interest in this part of the exhibition, which proved a source of frustration to the members of the subcommittee responsible for it. Only the presence of Louise Yda, a Black Surinamese woman who welcomed visitors dressed in colourful traditional *koto*, drew significant attention. However, despite the fact that she spoke Dutch fluently, visitors responded to her as a striking foreigner, or even a curiosity, rather than a fellow Dutch subject. It is also telling that one of the few surviving portraits of her was taken in front of the cotton processing machines in the Hall of Industry. Even though Suriname was not a major producer of cotton, this American context made her readable for Dutch audiences (Grever and Waaldijk 1998, 279). The way in which she was framed – no doubt influenced by stereotypical stories about the history of slavery – irritated Yda: she asked one interviewer to 'please put it in the papers that I am not to be pitied, I know exactly why I'm here' (cited in Stam 1998, 20).

When considering how stories about the role of women in the campaign against slavery were used to assert the social importance of women's work, as well as the feminist mission of the exhibition that Cécile de Jong and her colleagues animatedly pursued, another striking omission comes to light. Women of different backgrounds in Europe and America could, and did, get involved in all kinds of work to support social causes such as abolition. They

crafted contributions for bazaars, collected signatures, hosted meetings, and wrote fiction. In recollecting these stories within the movement for women's rights, visions of overarching lofty aims were frequently used to imbue efforts both ambitious and small, learned or unskilled, with societal significance. Yet even though the curators of the exhibition were eager to showcase skilful and exotic crafts of women in the colonies, this same synthetic vision was not applied to the work of non-white 'sisters'. The product of their work was framed as simply the artefacts displayed – another way in which invisible yet powerful barriers were erected between the West 'and the rest'. Recently, Tracey Jean Boisseau (2018) has insightfully suggested that a distinct feature of women's exhibitions was their 'fantasy' of 'a world of work that women everywhere excelled in and participated in with equal pride and power, with mutual respect and remuneration' (248). Paying close attention to the frames of meaning that exhibitions mobilise, however, opens up a window into powerful transnational grammars that the fantasy was not meant to dispel.

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Visual and Spatial Imaginations

9. Not Absent, But Not Seen: Narrating the History of Slavery at the Cape

Carine Zaayman

Abstract: This chapter offers a response to the curious muteness that surrounds the history of slavery at the Cape. I trace the reasons offered by Nigel Worden, Pumla Dineo Gqola, and Gabeba Baderoon respectively for the scarcity of commemorations of the enslaved in Cape Town and South Africa. By narrating the story of Susanna van Bengal, I outline the conceptual categories underpinning archival entries on enslaved people. On the basis of this analysis, I propose that the commemoration of slavery by itself does not speak to the restitution called for in postapartheid South Africa, but that the conceptual frameworks that enabled the enactment of colonial violence need to be acknowledged. Narrations of the history of slavery are likely to remain parochial until the world produced by colonialism, including its archives, is critically addressed. Such critiques might allow us to prise open the racialised demarcation of this history, make palpable its resonances for South Africans as we forge postapartheid identities, and recognise the ways in which it shapes the intimate repertoires of our lives.

Keywords: Cape of Good Hope; Susanna van Bengal; colonialism; slavery; commemoration, South Africa

Introduction

Seven years ago, a friend of mine was walking through the Company's Garden, a public park situated at the heart of Cape Town's urban centre. The park is what survives of the garden established by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the second half of the seventeenth century. The garden was intended to serve as a 'refreshment station', providing fresh water and

Paijmans, Marrigje, and Karwan Fatah-Black, eds. *Slavery in the Cultural Imagination: Debates, Silences, and Dissent in the Neerlandophone Space*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025. DOI 10.5117/9789463728799_CH09

provisions to ships sailing between the Netherlands and the VOC's colonies in the East.[1] Notwithstanding the fact that Cape Town has not been part of a Dutch colony since 1806 (when the British took possession of the Cape),[2] that South Africa gained independence in 1931, and formally abolished apartheid in the 1990s, the garden continues to exist and even keeps the VOC reference in its name. Today it is a pleasant, leafy space, where tourists walk and workers relax on the lawns during their lunch hour. The geometrical paths that cut through the garden are flanked by institutions of national importance, including the Iziko South African Museum, the Iziko South African National Gallery, the National Library of South Africa, and the South African parliament. At the north-eastern end of the garden stands St. George's Cathedral, the seat of the archbishop of Cape Town, a position held for many years by Desmond Tutu. Diagonally across St. George's one can find the Iziko Slave Lodge (see fig. 9.1), the second oldest surviving building from the Dutch colonial era in South Africa. Now a museum, the building once housed enslaved people who laboured for the VOC; it was converted to government offices in 1811. Forming part of the collection of buildings in the Company's Garden that constitute a nexus of political and institutional power, the Slave Lodge's position attests to the deep entanglement of slavery in the shaping of South Africa.[3]

Entering the Slave Lodge, my friend chanced upon a book by Anna J. Böeseken titled *Slaves and Free Blacks at the Cape 1658–1700*, published in 1977. On the dust jacket she read the story of Susanna van Bengal, an enslaved woman who endured unimaginable suffering whilst living at the Cape from 1658 until 1669, when she was executed.[4] Susanna's story

1 For a succinct overview of activity at, and the beginning of, European occupation of the Cape in the seventeenth century, see 'The General South African History Timeline: 1600s' on the *South African History Online* website (https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/general-south-african-history-timeline-1600s). It should further be noted that whilst 'South African history' is often articulated as beginning in 1652 with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, the Cape had by that time been inhabited for centuries by Khoekhoe (and, further inland, |xam) people, as had the interior of South Africa by various other groups. More information and background to the long history of what is today South Africa can be found on the Five Hundred Year Archive website: https://fhya.org.

2 In strict terms, the Cape was a colony of the Batavian Republic from 1803 to 1806.

3 For a comprehensive overview of the complex history of slavery at the Cape from 1658 to 1807, see Heese (2020).

4 The dust jacket reads: 'There was the slave who returned exhausted, from her labours in the Garden to find her infant crying all night, to the annoyance of the other women who hated her, presumably because the father of the child was a white man. She tried to silence the baby, the other women tore it from her arms, and it died a few days later. She was convicted of murder and sentenced to having her breasts cut off with hot irons, and then burned to ashes outside the

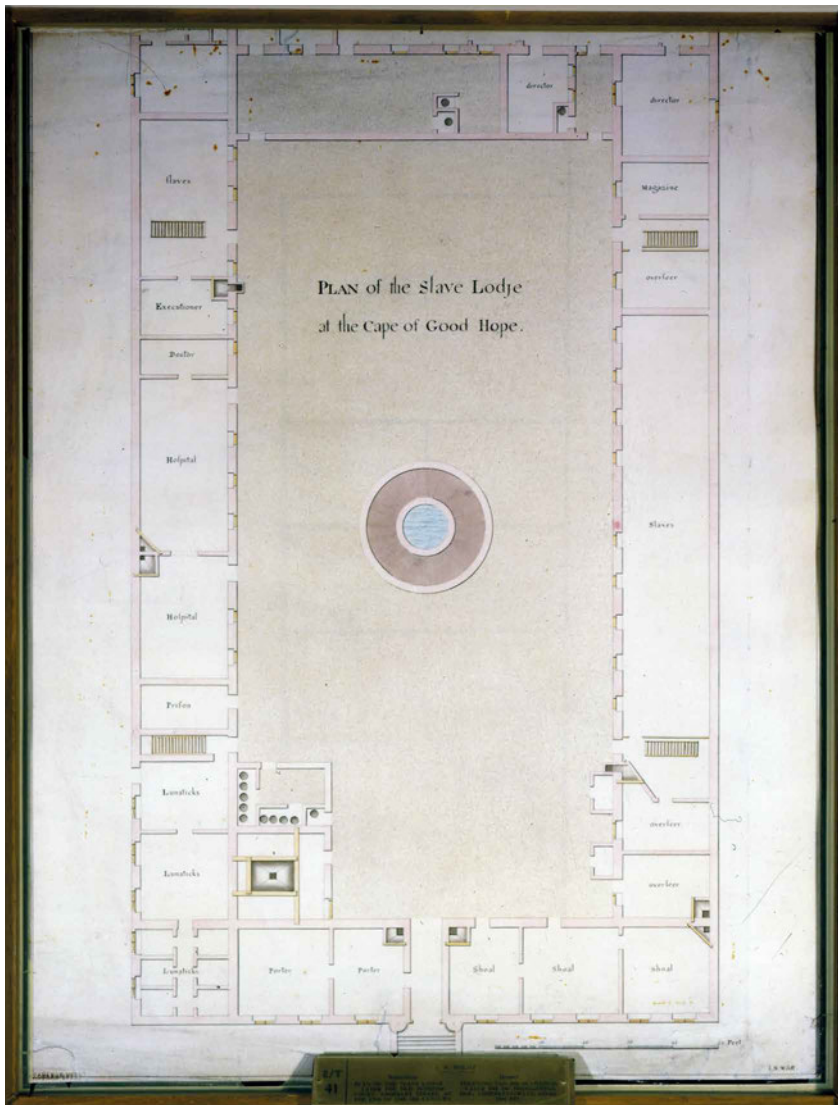

Figure 9.1 I. N. Wildt, Plan of the Slave Lodge at the end of the eighteenth century. Pen and water colour, *c.* 1798. Iziko Museums of South Africa, Iziko Social History collection, William Fehr collection.

gripped my friend, who was shocked, not only by the events related in the story, but also by the fact that she had not heard of Susanna prior to that moment. Eventually her encounter with Susanna van Bengal would lead

settlement. But this sentence was commuted, and she was sewn alive into a sack and dropped into Table Bay' (Böeseken 1977, dust jacket).

to our collaboration on the project *Under Cover of Darkness*, which began with an exhibition tracing the stories of twelve women in servitude in the early Cape Colony.[5] Core to the impetus of *Under Cover of Darkness* was our intent that Susanna's story should be circulated in the public sphere so that it may become better known, so that we may contribute to an imaginary where the stories of enslaved people at the Cape may find articulation and spaces for representation.

Our project's germination from the encounter with Susanna moulded how it developed. Since the archival documents upon which we drew to narrate the stories of enslaved women were authored from the perspective of the colonisers, they excluded the voices of the oppressed. In a similar vein, all the objects in the Iziko collection are the preserved possessions of those who 'owned' enslaved people, rather than the material culture of enslaved people themselves. With the colonial bias of the physical sources firmly in view, our curatorial question became one of how these documents and objects could help us tell the stories of enslaved people like Susanna van Bengal in a critical manner that did not simply reinscribe the colonial narrative. We understood that the narrative that would emerge if we were to rely exclusively on these objects would engender a form of cultural imagination framed primarily by a colonial perspective. Thus, to focus the attention of our audience on the lives and worlds of the enslaved, we sought to bring what little information survives about the twelve women whose lives we narrated into prominence. In the exhibition, we employed texts written by Suzie Joubert and photographic images I had taken of the Cape landscapes where the women lived, as well as contemporary artworks by Azazole Ndamase and Gabrielle Goliath to provide prompts for imagining the past against the dominant colonial account.

As the *Under Cover of Darkness* project expanded,[6] we became increasingly aware of – and concerned with – how silence permeates not only the slavery past, but also its memory in the present. In Cape Town, there are relatively few commemorations of enslaved people.[7] Moreover, the city is habitually

5 See www.undercoverofdarkness.co.za for more on the project and, for a full description of the exhibition, see Zaayman (2021).

6 After our first exhibition, *Under Cover of Darkness* also staged a symposium (2021), a web-based exhibition (2021), and a collaborative exhibition-workshop (2022).

7 As Carohn Cornell (1998, 259) indicates, the history of slavery in South Africa is commemorated at the Slave Lodge and the Bo-Kaap Museum, as well as at the museums at the Groot Constantia and Vergelegen wine farms. Subsequent to the publication of Cornell's text, the Museum van de Caab on the Solms Delta wine farm was created, but it is currently facing difficulties. In 2007, South African artists Wilma Cruise and Gavin Younge won a commission

marketed with a degree of 'colonial nostalgia' in which slavery is situated as incidental rather than instrumental. Even the Slave Lodge – the institution designated *par excellence* to stage slave history – was still developing exhibitions completely disconnected from it. Although the Slave Lodge stages temporary exhibitions related to the afterlives of slavery, focussing on gender issues, sex work, and human rights, its permanent displays in the upper galleries contain objects from their ceramics, silverware, and Egyptology collections. These displays are clearly remnants of the museum's earlier function as the South African Cultural History Museum – a role it fulfilled until 1998. The transformation of the museum came as a result of the demand in 1997 by then South African president, Nelson Mandela, that the country's museums and heritage sector should address its inherent colonialism and racism (Cornell 1998, 259). Nevertheless, twenty years later, whilst we were installing *Under Cover of Darkness*, these collections were still on display. It was clear to us that the Slave Lodge as a museum held more unrealised potential for voicing anti-colonial and antislavery narratives.

Yet, the uneven focus on slavery within the museum space is not a result of a lack of awareness on the part of its curators of the need to transform their institution. Indeed, the Slave Lodge has signalled its intent to transform the galleries in the coming years. Their work is, however, made extremely challenging as the museum and its curators are subject to a multitude of pressures arising from both within and outside the institution. Lynn Abrahams and Paul Tichmann (2022) articulate their entangled position as follows:

> [A]s insiders of an institution that has roots in the colonial and apartheid eras and which continues to wrestle with transforming its structures, practices, and content, we cannot avoid complicity. The dilemma we face, then, is how to be agents of transformation while, at the same time, being part of an institution that has its foundations in colonialism and apartheid.

Abrahams and Tichmann, both long-standing curators at the Iziko Social History Centre, here voice the difficulty of being 'insiders' at the Slave Lodge and having to take on the enormous challenge of reshaping apartheid-era museums for a postapartheid South Africa. However, it is precisely in the context of the urgent task of remaking institutions of national memory that the continued relative lack of attention paid to slavery in South African

for a memorial to slavery that was installed in 2008 on Church Square, the site where enslaved people were sold.

public culture is so baffling. Bhekizizwe Peterson (2019) observes that the country is deeply engrossed in navigating the 'unfinished business of colonialism and apartheid' (356), something made especially apparent during the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests that occurred around 2015–2017. Why then does slavery not feature more prominently in the country's collective narration of its colonial past? As a South African deeply concerned with public historical narration, I am fully aware that we are a nation gripped by the aftereffects of centuries of oppression that reverberates in the very fabric of our society as we struggle with the unequal distribution of wealth and extractive labour practices. It would thus be logical to assume that slavery – the very root of these disparities – would constitute a vital component of a collective reckoning with the past. Curiously, however, this is not the case.[8]

Anthony Holiday (2013, 11), refers to the unconfronted legacy of slavery at the Cape as a form of 'symbol-blindness'. Gavin Younge (2017), who collaborated with Wilma Cruise to produce the *Church Square Memorial*, one of the very few memorials for enslaved people, elaborates on this symbol-blindness:

> A difficulty surrounding the history of slavery in South Africa [...] is a pervasive symbol blindness. For example, visitors to the Cape will be struck by the omnipresent 'slave bells' which were used formerly to call slaves to work, or to sound the alarm if a slave had absconded. But instead of these edifices being destroyed by slave descendants, they are lovingly given a fresh coat of lime wash every year. Not only do many of the old wine farms still display their slave bells [...] but some newly built security estates even provide a replica slave bell to authenticate the Cape vernacular architecture – white walls, small shuttered windows and a thatched roof. (57)

This chapter offers a response to the peculiar muteness of the history of slavery at the Cape. I trace the ways in which three scholars have understood the scarcity of commemorations of the enslaved in South Africa,

8 A distinction needs to be drawn between the lack of public commemoration of slavery and practices that remember other oppressions in the Cape. For example, the District Six Museum offers an outstanding and dynamic example of what Ciraj Rassool (2007) terms 'a democratic community museum' (156). Founded in 1989 and opening in 1994, the museum focuses on the people who were forcibly removed from District Six in Cape Town from 1966 to the 1980s. Whilst the community that suffered the injustice of forced removal is understood to be in part descendent from enslaved people, the focus of the museum is on the removals and the living memory of those who were removed, and not on slavery as such.

and signal how their works open possibilities for addressing this scarcity. My focus then turns to the story of Susanna van Bengal, whose presence in the archives offers a glimpse of the extreme depravation suffered by enslaved people at the Cape under the VOC. By narrating Susanna's story against the background of Worden's, Gqola's, and Baderoon's arguments, I propose that the commemoration of slavery by itself does not enable the restitution called for in postapartheid South Africa. Instead, I argue that the narration of the history of slavery is especially pertinent when laying bare the conceptual categories that interpolated both European and 'slave' during colonialism, and continue to shape the lives of South Africans, both within South Africa and globally.

Ways of Telling

Nigel Worden (1985, 6), a prominent historian of slavery in South Africa, indicates that slavery was introduced at the Cape at the behest of its first VOC commander, Jan van Riebeeck. Van Riebeeck relentlessly petitioned his employer to send enslaved people to the settlement because it required a great deal of work. The VOC eventually acquiesced, and the first ships carrying enslaved people landed at the Cape in 1658. Without their labour, the settlement would have failed. Yet, as Worden (2009, 23) argues, public commemoration of the foundational role of slavery in South Africa is something of an anomaly when compared to practices internationally.[9] He suggests that, unlike other places, the history of slavery was 'buried' within South Africa during the twentieth century, only to return to public commemoration after the end of apartheid in the 1990s. By way of example, Worden (2009) describes how, in the nineteenth century, the first of December was still widely commemorated in Cape Town as the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the Cape in 1834.[10] These celebrations took the form of 'special church services, street parties, dancing and the singing of *ghoemaliedjies* (drum songs) that satirized their former masters' (Worden 2009, 25). However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the desirability of 'whiteness'

9 Worden (2009) notes the move to acknowledge the history of slavery in the United States and Europe, and that '[i]n The Netherlands, recognition of the Dutch role in the Atlantic slave trade has begun to receive more public recognition, in large part provoked by the activism of Netherlanders of Surinamese descent' (24).

10 Even though slavery was formally abolished at the Cape in 1834, enslaved people were forced to work as 'apprentices' for their old masters, ostensibly to 'compensate' for the latter's loss of property and income.

rendered the possession of slave heritage detrimental to social standing. Thus, public commemorations of emancipation ceased.[11]

According to Worden (2009, 26), this trend to hide the legacies of slavery continued throughout the twentieth century as apartheid policies were instituted. The apartheid government endeavoured to establish the racial category of 'Malay' as founded on a Muslim religious identity, rather than on that of slavery heritage. After the formal end of apartheid, according to Worden (2009, 27), the descendants of enslaved people at the Cape did not, as might have been expected, overwhelmingly support the African National Congress (ANC) – seen by most South Africans as the party of liberation – with many people opting instead to vote for what remained of the apartheid National Party. The conflicts and struggles between descendants of enslaved people and Black South Africans continued to play out after the abolishment of apartheid in 1994 and persist to this day. For instance, Worden (2009) recounts the plans by UNESCO to establish a 'slave route', a guided walk in Cape Town and Elim, a town founded in 1824 as a Moravian mission that welcomed emancipated enslaved people. Ultimately, however, the route failed to materialise, as Worden (2009) explains:

> In part this was because the South African experience of chattel slavery, of the kind identified by UNESCO, did not include other forms of labour exploitation such as indenture, debt bondage and migrant labour which had been the experience of the majority of black South Africans. (29)

Worden thus appears to attribute the relative absence of commemoration of slave history to the way in which the various forms of oppression suffered by different races in South Africa are largely thought of as distinct. Although not stated explicitly, his analysis makes plain the necessity to make conscious and deliberate connections between the history of slavery and the various colonial dispossessions that have shaped the South African socio-political landscape.

The writing of Pumla Dineo Gqola (2010) exemplifies an approach that privileges the articulation of personal investment when narrating the history of slavery. Her work is distinct from most other writing on slavery in that she focuses on understanding 'slave memory and the uses of evoked slave pasts for post-apartheid negotiations of identity' (4), rather than producing historical accounts of slavery. Gqola contests claims that there exists a

11 A notable exception is the 'Walk in the Night', organised by the District Six Museum to commemorate emancipation day.

'lamentable' absence of slave memory amongst the 'ordinary people' of South Africa.[12] She insists that such absence can only be inferred if one limits one's scope to archival documents pertaining to the enslaved, rather than finding where 'slave memory is evident in various sites in post-apartheid South Africa' (5). Thus, Gqola argues for tracing the inheritances of slavery beyond archival documents and identifying how these inheritances survive in ways that are not immediately recognisable as such – that is, as 'masked memory'. To this end, she draws a distinction between 'memory' and 'history': 'whereas memory is a shadow always hovering and governing our relationship to the present and the future, history is the art of recording and analysing this consciousness of the past' (Gqola 2004, 8).

Gqola (2010) analyses the legacy of slavery in South Africa in her seminal text *What Is Slavery to Me?* She situates her writing in what she describes as 'a time of transition', namely the period immediately following the dawn of democratic rule in South Africa (1). Her aim is to articulate 'how slavery is evoked and remembered as part of negotiating current ways of being' – that is, ways of being in postapartheid South Africa, of finding ways to 'individually and collectively [...] envision ourselves differently than we had up until [27 April 1994]' (Gqola 2010, 2).[13]

Gqola's (2010) reflections on the ways in which slavery shapes identity in postapartheid South Africa are framed by the sense of possibility that permeated much of the South African body politic in the 1990s and early 2000s. This optimism was not only in anticipation of a democratic future, but also the expectation that the past would finally be reckoned with. Such reckoning was designed to take place through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that held hearings from 1996 to 2003. The TRC hearings, however, focused exclusively on the apartheid era. Gqola's writing serves to bring the history of slavery into conversation with the apartheid past,[14] thereby greatly extending the historical trajectories leading to the issues South Africans now have to confront. For Gqola, this entangled relationship, between articulations of slave memory and the

12 Gqola (2010) is referring in particular to the works of Zoë Wicomb and historian Robert Ross.

13 27 April 1994 is the date upon which the first democratic elections took place in South Africa. This election installed the African National Congress (ANC) to power.

14 Formally, apartheid was institutionalised from 1948 to the early 1990s, when the ANC was unbanned, Nelson Mandela was released from prison (both in 1990), and the first democratic elections were held (1994). However, such periodisation is misleading in that the racial segregation it enacted was already operative in various forms before 1948, and spatial and economic apartheid continues to shape life in South Africa.

struggle to fashion new identities in postapartheid South Africa, underscores the importance of reckoning with the history of slavery alongside that of more recent oppression (Gqola 2010).

In her article 'The African Oceans – Tracing the Sea as Memory of Slavery in South African Literature and Culture', poet and scholar Gabeba Baderoon (2009) reflects on the imagery used in narrations of slavery in South African art and literature. From her analysis, the figure of the ocean emerges as one that 'recovers evidence of slave lives otherwise erased from folk memory, as well as the decisively modern character of slave practices subsumed behind picturesque portrayals of the Cape' (89). Baderoon describes the inter-generationally transmitted memories held by descendants of enslaved people as the sense of one's history and origins being from 'somewhere else' – somewhere across the ocean. She terms such memories a 'two-ocean consciousness' (96) and argues that it arises from the 'alternative modernities' crafted by enslaved societies that were largely invisible to the colonial regime (96). Consequently, Baderoon implies the two-ocean consciousness remains to this day, albeit now articulated beyond the physical remains of colonial occupation, in particular the archival documents and the physical buildings that populate a colonial picturesque (Baderoon 2009).

Baderoon (2009) recasts not only the imagery used to give form to the history of slavery in South Africa, but also reframes the sources drawn on for the narrations themselves. She asks:

> Where is the Indian Ocean in South African memories of slavery? To find the Indian Ocean, I turn to the register of the private. […] In my family's memories, the Indian Ocean is the sea of pilgrimage. My grandparents' hajj was undertaken by ship along the East African coast, and letters from Mecca traveled back along the same route. (96)

Shifting attention away from the physical remains of colonial occupation – architectural and archival alike – Baderoon locates memories of slavery, of being from somewhere else, particularly in 'Cape Malay' food. She argues that '[t]he slave-holding society at the Cape led to the creation of new foods that fused African, Asian, and European customs' (98). Through analyses of texts in cookbooks, Baderoon demonstrates how the repertoire of this 'creole'[15] cuisine indelibly retains its connection to the African and Asian spaces from which enslaved people were brought to the Cape. Baderoon

15 I am here following Baderoon's usage of the term 'creole', but acknowledge its contested nature, especially in writing from the Caribbean.

further establishes a relationship between Afrikaans, the 'creole' language that emerged from communities of enslaved and Khoekhoe people,[16] and this culinary tradition (92). Afrikaans, which is today the third most widely spoken first language in South Africa, was initially known as a *kombuistaal* ('kitchen language'), since it was spoken by enslaved people and servants who laboured in the kitchens of colonial settlers. Far from being absent then, the history of slavery lives in the everyday practices of cooking and conversing. Many so-called Cape Malay staple dishes, for example breyani, are close derivates of South Asian staples, such as biryani. Likewise, the Afrikaans word for banana, *piesang*, did not originate from Dutch, but from the Malay word *pisang* (Baderoon 2009).

Respectively, Worden's, Gqola's, and Baderoon's writings can assist us in reframing the modes in which the commemoration of enslaved people might be approached. From Worden's work, it is clear that the inheritances of slavery are refracted into those racial categories founded by the apartheid regime as part of its divide-and-rule strategy. Addressing the misconception that the history of slavery only affects a small section of the population would not only assist in making this history more visible, but could also contribute to fostering improved dialogue throughout the entire South African population.[17] By demonstrating how the legacies of slavery permeate present-day experiences, Gqola brings them into the sphere of the individual and subjective, situating it as central to the fashioning of identity in postapartheid South Africa. Because of the pressure this history exerts on individuals today, her work makes plain the need for a wholesale reckoning with the South African past beyond the twentieth century, back to the colonial and pre-colonial eras. Baderoon challenges the reliance on colonial remnants to find memories of slavery. Her work guides us to

16 Khoekhoe people, together with |xam people, were some of the earliest inhabitants of the Cape.

17 Regarding the ways in which the history of slavery connects with other histories of colonial oppression, it is worth noting the fate suffered by Khoekhoe and |xam people. Yvette Abrahams (2000), a pre-eminent historian of Khoekhoe pasts and in particular of Sarah Bartmann, has for many years argued that Khoekhoe people were enslaved in all but name, even if the VOC prohibited their formal enslavement (Sarah Bartmann is also mentioned in chapter 10, where her name is written as Saartjie Baartman). Abrahams (2000) bases her assertion on sources of oral history, as she states that '[t]he question of slavery in Khoekhoe history is one which echoes in our oral history, and is one to which almost every Khoekhoe resistance leader has left evidence. This oral history is in marked contrast to the written history in which the question of Khoekhoe slavery has been, until very recently, regarded as controversial' (138). For more on Khoekhoe relationships with van Riebeeck and the Dutch settlers, as well as their position in relation to Dutch slavery, see Ross (1983) and Elphick (1979).

remember the ways in which archives, replete with profound silences, fail to 'capture' the past, and the need to find other ways of engaging with the aftereffects of slavery.

At the End of Her Tether

If narrations of the history of slavery in South Africa are to achieve the productive forms suggested by Worden, Gqola, and Baderoon, then they also need to confront the nature and limits of the VOC archives. As Robert Shell (1992) remarks:

> The first limitation of all the transfers concerns their inadequacy for revealing the long-term symbolic and psychological impact of sale. In a sense, a slave was only a slave because he or she could be sold. Every time a person was sold, his or her slave status was confirmed. Every transfer also reminded all other slaves about their primary identity as chattel. Selling people diminished dignity and undermined identity. Such effects can only be captured obliquely. (287)

Shell reminds us that being enslaved does not make a 'slave' of one. Enslavement is conferred upon a person by the actions of others. It nevertheless becomes the sign under which one is then forced to negotiate one's world, and under which one's existence is recorded. The exteriority of the category of 'slave' presents the most fundamental stumbling block in the narration of the lives of the enslaved, as it omits everything about a person not delimited by that designation. When we narrate the stories of enslaved people from the archives, are we not in fact narrating the story of the VOC? What kinds of histories might we be able to tell, and what kind of imaginaries might we help in shaping, if we apprehend the archives as revealing the operations of colonial domination in the first instance?

As is the case with most enslaved people from the early Dutch colonial period at the Cape, we learn Susanna (known as Susanna *een-oor* or 'one-ear') van Bengal's story exclusively through the archival documents of the VOC. On this occasion, these are the records of the court of justice. Mansell Upham's (2013) publication 'Consecrations to God'[18] provides as detailed an overview as possible from these documents of Susanna's history, revising

18 The text to which I refer in this chapter is a revision of the 2001 version of the article, published in *Capensis*. It is collected in the online publication *Uprooted Lives: Unfurling the Cape of Good*

the earlier account by Böeseken. Upham himself remarks on the limits of these records, noting that it does not reveal anything about Susanna's past before she was brought to the Cape. He asks, for instance, whether

> Susanna [had] her ear lopped off as punishment – a common practice at the time – as part of the sentence of her latest crime? Or did this happen because of an even earlier crime? Is her physical disfigurement reinforced by an unsubtle and self-evident nickname? (2)

Upham (2013, 3) further notes that since the baptismal records at the Cape began only in 1665, it is not known whether Susanna had any children before Andries and Elsje, who were baptised in 1666 and 1669 respectively. It is nevertheless painfully apparent even from the biased records that hers was a life that was marked by, and ultimately ended in, unspeakable cruelty. Yet the records position her as a villain.

Susanna van Bengal arrived at the Cape on board the *Malacca* as a convict from Batavia, whence she was banished, in 1658. She was given the 'nickname' *een-oor* because she had one of her ears severed before she was banished to the Cape. Susanna was housed in the Slave Lodge and was made to labour in the Company's Garden alongside other enslaved people. On 1 December 1669, five months after the baptism of her second child Elsje, Susanna contracted smallpox. Suzie Joubert (2022) observes that '[Susanna's] children were baptised which means each must have had a European father because only *halfslag* (half-caste) children were permitted to be baptised'. After returning to the Slave Lodge, sick and exhausted from work, Susanna strangled Elsje with rags. Other enslaved people living in the Lodge reportedly wrenched the infant from Susanna's arms, but the child died eight days later from her injuries. Upon Elsje's death, an autopsy was performed, the findings of which are recorded as follows:

> December 11th. — In the evening meeting the Fiscal reported that a female slave of the Company, named Susanna of Bengal, lying stiff and stinking of the small-pox in the slave house, did not hesitate to strangle her infant, a half-caste girl; he likewise submitted the sworn declaration of the surgeon, which mentioned that the poor innocent child had died in consequence. The Council having considered this serious affair at once,

Hope's Earliest Colonial Inhabitants (1652–1713): http://docplayer.nl/14427480-Uprooted-lives-consecrations-to-god-mansell-g-upham.html.

> ordered that [Susanna][19] should be placed in confinement in order to be punished according to her deserts. (Upham 2013, 8)

Following the determination of the fiscal, Cornelis de Cretzer, and his assistants, evidence was sought from the enslaved inhabitants of the Lodge. They indicated that upon hearing the moans of Susanna's child, they moved to investigate, and found Elsje between her mother's legs, as her mother was busy strangling her with 'strong rags' (Upham 2013, 9). On the basis of the findings by the fiscal, the severely ill Susanna was arrested, and her confession was extracted under thumb screws. Under this torture, Susanna admitted to ending her daughter's life. She declared that because of her severe illness, she had no breastmilk to suckle her daughter and no other women were willing to help feed her.

With the works of Worden, Gqola, and Baderoon in mind, it is vital to insert Susanna's story into public consciousness. The relentless demand that Susanna, both as a convicted person and as someone who was enslaved, had to labour in the Company's Garden constitutes an enduring series of the most extreme form of oppression. Then, when she fell ill with smallpox, she was not treated by a doctor, nor was she exempt from performing her 'duties'. Susanna's life is one that makes frighteningly clear how, as Tendayi Sithole (2021) observes, an enslaved person 'does not own [their] own life' (132). In this primal dispossession lies an important connection to the legacy of colonialism in South Africa more broadly. As an enslaved person, Susanna was abstracted to her labour. Colonialism and apartheid rendered the majority of the South African population primarily a (dehumanised) workforce as opposed to a group of humans. The country is still inhabited by a majority whose only 'value' is delimited by their capacity to provide cheap labour. Even though Susanna appealed to other enslaved women with whom she was living at the Slave Lodge, she could not persuade them to help her, since they were as depleted as she was. Under these conditions we can only imagine her desperation – that the child who needed her care did not fail to inspire her maternal sensibilities, as the VOC records would suggest, but became an unbearable reminder of her own fate now extended to her child, starving it. Her enslavement, exerted from outside, invaded that intimate relationship with her infant. Gqola's (2010) argument that slavery detrimentally affected the individual subject is particularly relevant here, in that it becomes clear how primary, familial relationships were wrecked by enslavement. Whilst the history of slavery in South Africa, as it has been

19 I am here redacting the hateful language used to describe Susanna in the records.

narrated on the pages of historical texts, provide a broad view, it is important to also apprehend how strongly its aftereffects are felt in the macroscopic socio-economic realities of South Africa. The individual inheritances of intergenerational trauma also shape people's identities, their hurt, and their anger. Importantly, as Baderoon (2009) reminds us, the memories of slavery are not reflected in the archival documents, but are present in a myriad of other, often unspoken ways – not least in the question of belonging, a particularly vexed subject in today's South Africa.

Susanna's story further lays bare, in the starkest of terms, the epistemological framework that shaped colonialism and slavery. The court of justice record of Susanna's trial and punishment makes for incredibly difficult reading. Susanna is described in unbearably disparaging language that shocks and disturbs a contemporary reader. (I will not repeat that language in this text.) What is also remarkable, however, apart from the (perhaps unsurprising) dehumanising language, is the categorical distinction underpinning this language, which opposes its own agents and Susanna in a binary of the 'civilised' Dutch and the 'barbarian' enslaved woman. Whilst the language with which Susanna is described situates her as the opposite of the 'civilised' VOC, it is the VOC that unleashed unspeakable violence, not only on Susanna, but also on the multitudes of people it enslaved. That Susanna arrived at the Cape as a convict bearing the mark of violence on her body – her severed ear – suggests that she had suffered this violence at the hands of the VOC. Moreover, since Susanna was taken to the Cape as a convict and used as a slave, her very presence at the Cape was the result of massive and pervasive structures of domination and violence that so typify the colonial.

The cruelty of the VOC intensified sharply during Susanna's trail and punishment. Her 'confession', in which she made her desperation plain, was extracted under torture by means of thumbscrews. She was sentenced to having her breasts cut out with hot irons and her body burnt to ashes. The symbolism that was intended to be conveyed with this punishment is clear. Her breasts, the very symbol of motherhood and the embodiment of motherhood's nurturing impulse and obligation, were to be violently amputated before she was killed. Had the court not realised that her breasts, the very parts of her body that had determined her actions and led her to this point, were already dry? Even as this extreme sentence was tempered with a different punishment, and she was ordered to be sewn into a bag with rocks and thrown into the ocean alive, 'where the body could reside there forever as one with the fish' (Joubert 2022), Susanna notably was denied the dignity of a burial. Instead, her body was condemned to the

realm of the animals, the non-human. On 13 December 1669, the sentence was read aloud and executed in front of congregated settlers and enslaved people. In its final cruelty to Susanna, the VOC made an example of her, her own struggle still unacknowledged, but rather her whole being completely subsumed by her transgression of VOC rules from which others had to learn.

Positioning Susanna as uncivilised, the Company insinuated that what she had done was unfathomable. As Joubert (2022) states, '[t]he court's judgement concluded that Susanna had totally lost her natural instincts for love as a mother'. However, the court could only have reached this conclusion by failing to recognise the extreme deprivation to which the VOC subjected Susanna. It is worth bearing in mind that slavery had already been illegal in the Netherlands since the Middle Ages (Shell 1992, 288) and so the Dutch understood it to be an inhumane and indefensible practice. Condemning Susanna for ending the life of her child within the circumstances they had created, betrays how fundamentally their worldview was shaped by their sense of categorical superiority.

I am not able to offer a perspective on what Susanna did. During the writing of this chapter, I entertained several possibilities for framing it: a deed of rebellion enacted on the one person who was at *her* mercy; an act of care, protecting her child against the bleak future that inevitably awaited her; an indication of the completely dehumanising dynamics of enslavement. Yet none of these ideas proved satisfying because in truth, there is no answer to be found. The purpose of narrating Susanna's history is not to pass judgement on her, as her humanity is not delimited by the category of the 'slave' used to describe her in the archives. What emerges through Susanna's story is rather the savagery of the VOC, naturalised by the European conception of self and other.

Like many enslaved and Khoekhoe people, Susanna was provisionally given access to the colonial society so long as she performed according to the expectations of the VOC. In my reading of the archives, any transgression by enslaved and Khoekhoe people was taken as confirmation of their irredeemable barbarism in the eyes of the VOC. In Susanna's case, it is exactly the punishment meted out to Susanna that affirms her foundational lack of humanity in the eyes of the VOC. As Sithole (2021), writing on the violence enacted on the enslaved, observes:

> The subject is the human, and a thing is not human. In other words, to do violence to the subject is not equivalent to doing violence to a thing. The subject can be accounted for because it has ontological weight as the figure of the human. In the event of death, the subject dies and there is

> mourning that follows. There cannot be mourning for a thing, as it has never existed. (134)

Conclusion: Narration beyond the Limit of Sources

Writing about the archival material pertaining to the history of the Cape Colony, Worden (2014) remarks: 'The Cape material has been better preserved than in any other region of VOC activity outside the Netherlands and in consequence its archive was inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World register in 2005' (26). He further suggests that during the apartheid years, the well-preserved collection of VOC archival material was a source of pride for white South Africans, cataloguing as it did the 'beginnings' of the white presence (occupation) at the southern tip of Africa (Worden 2014). The preservation of archival material did not occur by accident, but rather is the result of the long history of racial oppression in the country. As a nation, South Africa ostensibly seeks to redress injustice in both practical and symbolic senses, and so the implicated nature of these archives in systems of subjugation cannot be glossed over. The archives can instead be made to lay bare not only the acts of violence, but also – and perhaps more productively – the conceptual frameworks that enabled the enactment of such violence. Narrations of the history of slavery are likely to remain scattered and parochial until the world produced by colonialism, including its archives, is critically addressed by these endeavours. Such critiques might allow us to prise open the racialised demarcation of this history and make palpable its resonances for South Africans as we are forging postapartheid identities, and recognise the ways in which it shapes the intimate repertoires of our lives.

When I recently presented an overview of *Under Cover of Darkness* to a Dutch audience, I was asked whether our project was an attempt to restore the humanity of the enslaved women whose stories we were telling. The question left me dumbstruck, and angry. For the descendants of enslaved people, the humanity of the enslaved was never in question. There is no need to 'restore' it. An absence of humanity exists only in the minds of those for whom the category of enslavement is understood as successfully determining the essence of a human being. Gqola (2010) reminds us of the importance of resisting colonial binaries and hierarchies when she writes that

> [u]ncovering memory and history demands a critical attentiveness to the uses of the past to negotiate positions in the present. In this regard it is inseparable from postcolonial debates. The absence of published slave

> narratives by Dutch and British slaves was seen to confirm the slaves' inadequacy. (6)

On 19 December 2022, the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte apologised on behalf of the Dutch state to 'enslaved people in the past, everywhere in the world, who suffered as a consequence of those actions, as well as to their daughters and sons, and to all their descendants, up to the present day' (Government of the Netherlands 2022). The apology was made in preparation to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the abolishment of slavery by the Netherlands in 2023 (Theirlynck 2022). In his speech, Rutte openly acknowledged the need to tackle the aftereffects of slavery and colonialism in the Netherlands and its (former) colonies, saying 'we are writing not a full stop, but a comma' (Government of the Netherlands 2022). He continued by saying: 'Centuries of oppression and exploitation still have an effect to this very day. In racist stereotypes. In discriminatory patterns of exclusion. In social inequality' (Government of the Netherlands 2022).

Yet the speech did not cede much space to describe what is needed to address these aftereffects. What further remains unacknowledged is that the categories of the European 'human' and its *other* (the 'savage', the 'uncivilised', the 'slave'), which were instrumentalised through colonialism and slavery, form the basis from which these effects emerge. Rutte noted that the archival records of slavery shock us today

> [b]ecause they underline the absurdity of a system in which one human being makes a being commodity of another. A system so inhuman and unjust, that in 1863 it was not the enslaved people who received financial compensation from the State, but the slave owners. (Government of the Netherlands 2022)

It is one thing to look disapprovingly upon the past – to be outraged by historical instances of inhumanity. Perhaps there even is comfort in such outrage, as it suggests that we have come a long way. It is, however, quite another thing to realise how the category of the human is continually made and re-made in response to present material conditions and political currents, allowing other forms of inhumanity to emerge, albeit not in a recognisable form.

One does not expect to find the inhumanity of VOC slavery reproduced in the present, but that does not mean that inhumane acts – the kind that would outrage future generations – are not occurring. The Netherlands enjoys the wealth it was able to accrue in large part due to its colonial activities, and

yet continues to profit from global inequality and increasingly extractive labour practices within and outside its own borders. Like many Western powers, it is progressively limiting freedom of movement, amongst others via discriminatory visa and refugee programmes, all based on where it draws the line between 'self' and 'other'. An apology for slavery is effectively also a narration of it. The task with all these narrations is to resist the obstinate colonial epistemology and its imaginary, which afford some the status of inhabiting the 'human', whilst rendering invisible the shifting forms of dehumanisation enacted on others.

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About the Author

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10. (Re)Visualising Slavery: An Outlook on the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago

Nancy Jouwe

Abstract: The Dutch history of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean has only recently begun to gain traction as a (potential) part of the Dutch slavery canon, which has been dominated by a focus on transatlantic research and societal interest. Second, only recently, visual sources on slavery have gained more interest. Third, and more generally, a more critical outlook is being used when analysing the colonial past. Taken together, these developments mark a larger shift in recent engagement with the history of slavery in general, and the Dutch history of slavery in particular, making it all the more important to look critically at how this past has been visually represented and imagined, and what that signifies. What can we learn about slavery from visual sources that have played a role in shaping and reinforcing traditional representations of slavery, especially in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean area? And how can visual sources help break the (visual) silence of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago? This chapter attempts to cast some light on these questions.

Keywords: Visual representation; Indian Ocean; Indonesian archipelago; slavery

Introduction

Interest in the Dutch colonial past, and slavery in particular, has gained momentum in the past one or two decades in the Netherlands, making mainstream Dutch audiences more susceptible to the fact that the history

Paijmans, Marrigje, and Karwan Fatah-Black, eds. *Slavery in the Cultural Imagination: Debates, Silences, and Dissent in the Neerlandophone Space*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025. DOI 10.5117/9789463728799_CH10

of colonial slavery is also Dutch history. Alongside this development, several other important shifts are taking place. First, it is noticeable that attention for, and Dutch research on, slavery mainly focused on the transatlantic slave trade (Brandon et al. 2020; Oostindie 2007). However, even before this, the Dutch were clearly part of a growing slavery system in the Indian Ocean and the Indonesian archipelago: estimates on the number of people transported by the Dutch indicate up to one million enslaved people (van Rossum 2015). Research on this phenomenon in the Indian Ocean, although it has been conducted by scholars and researchers (Baay 2008; Hondius et al. 2014; Raben 1996; Vink 2003; Worden 1985) and the occasional journalist (Vanvugt 2002), went unnoticed by the larger audience until the 2015 publications by Reggie Baay (2015) and Matthias van Rossum (2015). Their work was picked up due to their insightful new research, accessible writing, and a growing societal interest in Dutch colonialism at the time. It steered our collective lens towards Indian Ocean slavery, culminating in the 2021 *Slavery* exhibition of the Rijksmuseum, which covered the history of slavery in the Americas, Africa, and Asia.[1]

These dynamics might be too recent to consider knowledge about Indian Ocean slavery as part and parcel of a collective memory culture in the Netherlands. Such awareness is still far from being firmly rooted in the Dutch collective consciousness or psyche, as shown by current debates about what exactly should be represented: a mere focus on the transatlantic slave trade and its afterlife, or on the Dutch history of slavery, involving Indian Ocean slavery as well? The recent processes of installing local slavery monuments in Dutch cities such as The Hague and Utrecht or the upcoming national museum of slavery (Regiegroep NTASM 2021) show the heated nature of this debate. Nonetheless, the widening lens from transatlantic to a more global view that includes the Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago, and the accompanying debates, show that a shift is taking place.

Second, with the creation of a growing and diverse corpus on the history of slavery, written archival material has been the dominant source for collective knowledge production in the Netherlands, with visual sources mostly functioning as an extra or a sidenote (Jouwe 2021, 22). This means that depictions and visual representations of the history of slavery have thus far been insufficiently scrutinised (Jouwe 2021, 7). Fortunately, a small group of historians and art historians have been looking at these

1 The exhibition was originally planned for September 2020, but was delayed until spring 2021, due to COVID-19, and ran until the end of August 2021. Filmmaker Ida Does initiated the accompanying documentary film *New Light: A Making of.*

visual sources (Hondius 2015; Kolfin 1997; Kolfin and Runia 2020; Kolfin and Schreuder 2008; Parker Brienen 2006; Ponte 2018), and their work is inspiring and of huge importance. Their collective work shows that visual sources form a distinct corpus with the capacity to unearth information that might otherwise remain hidden when focusing on written sources only. This work, however, and with few exceptions, yet again mostly focuses on transatlantic slavery, rather than Indian Ocean slavery (de Bruijn and Raben 2004). Interestingly, this shift towards visual sources is evident in more recent museum exhibitions in Tropenmuseum (now Wereld Museum), Museum Van Loon, Mauritshuis, and Rijksmuseum – all heritage institutions with canonical power.

Third, and more generally, this recent growing body of work on Dutch colonialism and slavery is espousing a more critical outlook. An array of stakeholders – activists, public historians, artists, community organisers, and scholars – have played a role in changing the discourse into a more critical one, sometimes working from a more intersectional and decolonial lens, in which aspects such as the hegemony of the white colonial gaze (Jouwe 2021, 24), questions concerning representation, the interrelatedness between gender, race, class, and sexuality, and the structural violence of a colonial system have been scrutinised more deeply.

Before I continue, it is important to emphasise that there has been a longer and much stronger tradition of international scholars (often focusing on the transatlantic slave trade), who have written about visual sources in relation to colonial and slavery history. However, within the confines of this chapter, there is no space to address all this; hence my focus on the Dutch scholarly landscape. However, I also think it is important to focus on Dutch historiography as a case in point vis-à-vis early modern visual sources, such as paintings and sketches.

This chapter will examine the aforementioned shifts (which are by no means exhaustive), discussing some of the stakeholders involved and what new insights these shifts have yielded. Visual representations of the Dutch in the context of slavery in the Indian Ocean and the Indonesian archipelago have not yet been sufficiently scrutinised. Therefore, I am especially interested in what we can learn about slavery from visual sources that have played a role in shaping and reinforcing traditional representations of slavery, especially in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean area. How can visual sources help break the (visual) silence of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago? After all, the Indonesian archipelago was shaped due to Dutch violent conquest and a Dutch colony for almost three and a half centuries. This chapter will attempt to cast some light on these questions.

The title of this chapter emphasises the fact that I commend – as others have done before me – the use of visual sources as viable autonomous sources (rather than as mere adjuncts to written sources). As has been said, there has been a longer debate internationally, but in the Netherlands this is relatively new with regard to the history of slavery. Such resources help us to see things we might otherwise overlook, such as enslaved people in colonial settings. Similarly, by re-visualising slavery, we can reinterpret – using a more critical lens – visual sources that for instance centralise those who were previously regarded as unimportant: take the dozens of Black figures in Rembrandt paintings (Kolfin and Runia 2020; Kolfin and Schreuder 2008) or those Black figures who were hidden in the margins of early modern paintings because they function as props rather than real people. Even if someone is depicted, it does not automatically mean that the viewer can see and understand what is being represented (Jouwe in Buikema et al. 2019, 35–37). John Berger's (1972) seminal work *Ways of Seeing* already helped us understand that the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. A more critical outlook can be gained through concepts such as visuality – how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and unseeing (Rose 2001, 2) – and the colonial gaze – in which the non-European other is made into a definable category of visual scrutiny that helped Europeans (re)establish themselves as superior human beings in an early modern global order.

This chapter builds on my work as an independent researcher and writer, including two research collectives in which I have been involved – MOED and *Mapping Slavery* – and recent publications resulting from this collective work. First, in MOED (an online research project that brings together artistic perspectives on equality and difference that strive for social change), Bart Rutten, the artistic director of Utrecht's Centraal Museum, and I curated the 2019 exhibition *What is Left Unseen*. The exhibition both problematised and disrupted the white hegemonic gaze in Dutch society and offered a counter-perspective by centralising the work of Black and Brown artists, and activists from the Netherlands and Europe.

Second, I will revisit insights from *Revisualising Slavery: Visual Sources on Slavery in the Indonesian Archipelago & Indian Ocean*, edited by Jouwe, Manuhutu, van Rossum, and Tosun (2021). This publication focused on the Dutch history of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago and Indian Ocean, foregrounding the visual (in the form of paintings, etchings, and photographs) rather than the written, as its primary sources. Taking visual sources as their starting point, the authors tried to present new insights on the Dutch history of slavery in the lesser researched area of the Indian

Ocean and Indonesian archipelago. In my own article, 'Talking Pictures: The Visual Source as Part of the Cultural Archive' (Jouwe 2021), I argued that, on the one hand, visual and performative artists were building a growing body of work that critically engaged with 'the colonial'. On the other hand, however, scholars and intellectuals inside and outside academia increasingly engaged critically with Dutch colonial history and (in some cases) its afterlife. The work of scholars on the one hand, and artists and activists on the other, I argued, could be considered as two sides of the same coin: the critical engagement with a Dutch colonial past in which the term 'critical' implies taking into account, critiquing, and challenging power structures. In earlier writing, we similarly noted the collective work of scholars, artists and activists (Jouwe and Suransky 2015), considering it both intersectional and decolonial (Jouwe 2018, 2019, 2020). In this chapter, I want to bring together these lines of thought, by discussing the work of scholars, artists, activists, and the shifts they collectively made possible whilst challenging hegemonic colonial structures. These people are, at least in part, indebted to, or (in)directly make use of, critical race theory, feminist theory, and postcolonial and decolonial theory.

In the first part, I will start by briefly looking into Dutch colonial history and how researchers, partly through commissioned research, helped build a public discourse in the Netherlands that more readily acknowledged the Dutch role in the history of slavery. In the second part, I will discuss the work that activists, artists, and heritage professionals, mostly outside academia, have played in pushing both increased awareness and a more critical outlook on Dutch colonialism and how it resonates in contemporary society. These two parts function as contextualisation for the third part, where I will focus on the importance of visual sources by focusing on seventeenth-to-nineteenth-century portraiture (and photographs) that depict scenes from Indian Ocean slavery by the Dutch, and what they can tell us.

A Colonial History

From the early seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic was active within the global slave trade. The Republic, until its eventual demise towards the end of the eighteenth century, used this growing system to supply Dutch (and other) colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Americas with enslaved labour. Systems of slavery have been in place for thousands of years. This historical (and current) fact has often been used to emphasise the uselessness of focusing on slavery: the fact that it has existed for centuries makes it a

moot point. However, communities whose ancestors have been enslaved would beg to differ. Moreover, it is useful to make a distinction between different types of slavery and to clarify what it is we mean when talking about slavery in a (Dutch) colonial context.

The type of slavery that is referred to here is chattel or colonial slavery – a strongly commercialised form of slavery connected to European colonial expansion from the 1500s onwards. This type of slavery is characterised by an extreme lack of individual freedom and by forced labour, in which people were bought and sold. Their status as enslaved persons was for life and was handed down to next generations. A child born from an enslaved mother was automatically a slave as well. Enslaved people worked for the production of goods for profit, and their treatment involved practices of extreme dehumanisation, including the severe use of violence and sexual abuse. These forms of dehumanisation gave room to racist theories that legitimised slavery and other means of social control based on skin colour (Brandon et al. 2020, 402–3).

Two Dutch chartered companies played a pivotal role within this global system: the East India Company (VOC), founded in 1602, and the West India Company (WIC), founded in 1621. Both companies issued shares, the sale of which enabled intercontinental trade. Both companies had armies that could wage war, were used as instruments against Spain and Portugal, could negotiate treaties with other countries, and could rule over areas. The companies divided the world in two, with the VOC active in the Indian Ocean, in an area that stretched from South Africa to Japan, from Persia to Madagascar, and from Taiwan to Papua, whilst the WIC exercised control over the transatlantic, linking Europe with West Africa and the Americas.

The first plantation society under Dutch colonial rule emerged on the Banda Islands in the South Moluccas. After the Dutch massacred a large part of the indigenous population on Banda in 1621, enslaved labourers were brought in from other islands in the Moluccas and Papua, as well as from Bali, Makassar, Java, and different parts of South Asia to work on the Bandanese nutmeg plantations. Matthias van Rossum (2015, 23) has indicated that this involved thousands of people – a number set to rise as time progressed.

With the WIC covering the transatlantic, there was a so-called 'Dutch moment' in which the Dutch dominated the transatlantic slave trade for some decades (Klooster 2016, 164). Yet, over time, due to constant conflict, first with the Portuguese and Spanish, and later mainly with the English, the area in which the Dutch colonial empire was active shifted. In the nineteenth century, after the demise of the VOC and the WIC, the Kingdom

of the Netherlands directly administered colonial rule across an immense territory, still spanning several continents.

The Dutch were responsible for the transport of around 600,000 Africans through the transatlantic slave trade, whilst in the Indian Ocean estimates show that half a million to over one million Asians and Africans were transported to Dutch colonies and trading posts within Asia and South Africa by the VOC. The history of chattel slavery reveals a global colonial system based on slave labour with active and longstanding Dutch involvement. Indian Ocean slavery involved people working in the fields, plantations, mines, shipyards, and other infrastructural work, as well as within households as domestic servants.

In 1814, the Dutch abolished the slave trade, but not slavery. This meant that in practice, they could not buy or trade new enslaved people, but could still use existing slave labour, thus upholding the colonial slavery system. Slavery was finally abolished only in December 1859 and January 1860 in the Dutch East Indies (Java, Madura, Banda) and on 1 July 1863 in the Dutch Caribbean. Slave owners were compensated for 'their loss of property'. In practice, slavery continued after abolition, both in some parts of the Dutch East Indies and the Dutch Caribbean (Baay 2015; Brandon et al. 2020). In the Dutch metropole, abolitionists spoke out and organised themselves, but as a movement they remained small compared to for instance the British abolition movement. After formal abolition, there was little public discourse around it. Dutch newspapers and politicians hardly, if ever, referred to the historical moment of the abolition of slavery.

This relative 'silence' signalled how the public memory of the history of slavery in the Netherlands would develop (Willemsen 2007). Locally, members of diaspora communities whose ancestors had been colonised and enslaved organised (collective) memory gatherings, and they even organised a public march through Amsterdam in 1963 to mark the centenary of emancipation from slavery in the Dutch Caribbean. However, in mainstream Dutch society, a 'deafening silence' could be heard with regard to slavery history (Jones 2012). For the most part, slavery heritage remained a non-issue, in both the public domain and collective memory until the twenty-first century. Yet, things were about to change.

Over the last decade or more, a multigenerational group of Dutch academics has been interpreting new(re)sources as well as reinterpreting sources that had been previously examined. The public history guides of the *Mapping Slavery* team, for example, made academic research more accessible to a larger audience and showed that the history of slavery was also Dutch history. They demonstrated that this history could be found everywhere in the

Netherlands, and that the Dutch history of slavery was not just transatlantic, but also encompassed the Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago. Studies commissioned by the municipalities of Amsterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague brought together new and older individual research and similarly showed that Dutch slavery was to be found both 'in the East and the West' (Brandon et al. 2020; Captain et al. 2022; Jouwe et al. 2021). In this way the positive image of the Dutch East India Company was debunked, something still very much alive in the 2000s, when 400 years of VOC was celebrated in the Netherlands and the then Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende referred to the 'VOC mentality' as something to strive for.

The Visual and the Material: Societal Debates concerning Slavery and Colonialism

The push for a national slavery monument in the (late) 1990s by the Black women's collective Sophiedela was successfully brought to fruition with the inauguration of a National Slavery Monument at Oosterpark in Amsterdam in 2002, as well as the founding of a heritage organisation called the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and Its Legacy.[2] The monument – which referred to transatlantic slavery – was a material and visual representation of a past (unknowingly) shared by Dutch people of all colours. Undoubtedly, its existence helped push the inclusion of slavery as one of the fifty topics in the 'canon of Dutch history' formalised in 2007. It meant that slavery – previously mostly recognised and memorised by the Dutch Afro-Caribbean diaspora – was now formally considered Dutch history.

This did not necessarily mean that the Dutch (higher) education system fully incorporated this insight. Nonetheless, it gradually became more mainstream with growing societal interest through activism, artistic work, journalism, and critical scholarly work. In an admittedly uneven step-by-step process, pushed mostly by the Dutch Afro-Caribbean diaspora, the history of slavery has now been acknowledged as Dutch history in public discourse. It is a history about which we can no longer remain silent, as then Prime Minister Balkenende publicly emphasised at the commemoration of the abolition of slavery on 1 July 2008 in the Oosterpark, Amsterdam. It was

2 The mission of the institute with acronym NiNsee is to develop and position itself as the national symbol of the shared legacy of Dutch trans-Atlantic slavery. It was founded on 24 June 2002.

the first time that a Dutch prime minister appeared at a commemoration such as this one in a formal capacity.

In that same year, two visual artists, Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss, developed an art project, commissioned for the group show *Be*(*com*)*ing Dutch* at the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven. Their work focused on the stereotypical figure of Zwarte Piet ('Black Pete'), the helper of Sint Nicolaas (a Dutch variant of Santa Claus) and by far the most popular annual Dutch children's festival. Parts of the current tradition were invented by Amsterdam schoolteacher Jan Schenkman in 1850 (Brienen 2014; van der Pijl and Goulordava 2014), who was also known for his anti-Semitic views (Sanders 2020). Criticism of Zwarte Piet has a long history and dates back as far as the 1930s, with individuals and collectives problematising the stereotypical reproduction of this Dutch blackface tradition. The artist and poet Quinsy Gario was inspired by Bauer and Krauss's work, and by an incident in which his mother was called 'Zwarte Piet' by her co-worker, to start the art project *Zwarte Piet is Racisme* ('Black Pete Is Racism'); the poet Jerry Afriyie later joined him in this project. They decided to be present at the annual parade marking the 'arrival' of Sint Nicolaas in the country with his Black helpers, which is traditionally followed by several weeks of festivities and presents, before culminating on 5 December with the 'evening of presents'. Every year a different point of entry is chosen for the arrival of Sint Nicolaas on a steamboat, and in 2011, the parade took place in the town of Dordrecht. Gario and Afriyie, together with Siri Venning and Steffi Weber, joined the parade wearing T-shirts proclaiming 'Black Pete is racism'. They were arrested and film footage of Gario's violent arrest was spread across social media. This would instigate a series of events, eventually spurring the birth of a second anti-racist movement in the Netherlands.

Not far from Dordrecht, in The Hague, another visual representation was problematised in 2011. Activists Jeffry Pondaag and Barryl Biekman (who lobbied for the National Slavery Monument), and parliamentarians Harry van Bommel of the Socialist Party and Mariko Peeters of GreenLeft, took issue with a side panel of the royal Golden Coach (see fig. 10.1). This carriage was a present to the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina in 1898 and had since been part of the private collection of the Dutch royal family. The coach was used annually on the third Tuesday of September by the Dutch monarch to ride from the royal palace to parliament, where King Willem-Alexander would open the parliamentary year in September. The contested side panel is entitled 'Tribute to the Colonies' and depicts African and Asian people as Dutch colonial subjects, offering colonial produce in various poses of submission to a white allegorical entourage centred on the Dutch Maiden,

Figure 10.1 Nicolaas van der Waay, *Tribute from the colonies* (drawing for side panel Golden Coach), 1898. Stadsarchief, Amsterdam.

who represents the Dutch kingdom. The coach was taken out of service for restoration purposes after the protests, and some years later, it became the central piece in a well-received exhibition at the Amsterdam Museum (2021–2022) that presented the critical public interventions and the colonial context in which the Golden Coach was produced. The coach will stay out of the public eye for the time being, but the Dutch King has not fully banned the coach but rather has called for a process of atonement first.

The ten-year timeline between protest and exhibition shows how public debates around the colonial had shifted, giving greater space to a wider, more critical, and decolonial perspective. It showed that calling out stereotypical visual representations of a glorified Dutch colonial past happened both in the public arena and within institutions of representation, such as museums. Furthermore, it showed how the history of slavery and its afterlife were purposely interconnected, which stirred pushback in the public arena.

As I argued elsewhere (Jouwe 2021), actual visual references of the Dutch colonial past, as displayed in internationally renowned museums such as Museum Van Loon, Rijksmuseum, or Mauritshuis, until recently either did not refer to, or used a particular lens to refer to Dutch colonialism. The Dutch audience was shown the riches, beauty, and cultural and economic power colonialism had brought it, captured in the phrase 'the Golden Age'. The setup of the Gallery of Honour at the Rijksmuseum, which leads to Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, is a case in point (Jouwe 2021, 322).

Next to *The Night Watch* there is another famous painting called *Schutters van Wijk VIII* (Militia Company of District VIII) by Bartholomeus van der Helst. This large painting clearly shows a Black boy in the middle of the painting, handling a bright red robe. He looks sideways and therefore does not 'own the gaze' in the same way as the white protagonists do in the painting, who mostly look at us, the audience. This might play a role in why he goes unnoticed to many. It is striking that this Black boy remains invisible

to the white gaze, even though he is in plain sight (Jouwe 2021, 324). In the documentary *New Light* (Does 2021), which accompanied the exhibition simply entitled *Slavery* (2021) at the Rijksmuseum, the white curator Eveline Sint Nicolaas explained that she only became aware of the Black boy a few years earlier, although she had seen (and studied) the painting for decades. In an earlier documentary from 2008, *Painted Black* (Boerman 2008), the independent white curator Esther Schreuder shared something similar. She and a Black friend visited the Rijksmuseum, where the Black friend immediately noticed the Black boy, whereas Schreuder could only see him after her friend had mentioned him. In the catalogue that accompanied our curated exhibition *What is Left Unseen* (2019), I discussed this phenomenon, which I consider to be a white hegemonic gaze:

> During the seventeenth-century Dutch Golden Age, painters like Rembrandt and Rubens painted black people. Art historian Elmer Kolfin counted more than twenty paintings by Rembrandt containing images of black people. Yet, prior to Kolfin's revelation, hundreds of art historians and Rembrandt experts alike had either neglected this fact completely, or simply deemed it unimportant – even if the black person had a central position in the painting. These examples show us how the white gaze renders black bodies invisible, thus perpetuating the hegemony of the white colonial gaze. The examples also show that black bodies, even when seen, were weighed differently and considered unimportant compared to white bodies. Often, black people appeared in paintings to highlight the important status of the white person next to them, thus functioning as a mere prop rather than a person. This produces normative ways of seeing that make invisible black bodies, even when they are portrayed in a central position in a painting. (Jouwe in Buikema et al. 2019, 35)

The inability of many, mostly white people to be aware of Black presences (or to find them relevant) seems to be influenced by another aspect: slavery happened 'elsewhere', not on Dutch soil, thus rendering the Dutch metropole an innocent space when it comes to slavery. Therefore, it serves a purpose to implicate Dutch space, and to visualise and mark spaces and places that point to Dutch slavery history, because it raises awareness that the history of slavery is Dutch history.

The public history project *Mapping Slavery*, which began in 2013, did just that. The project focused on intersections of the past and the material, engaging with questions such as: *Who* benefitted from slavery in the Dutch metropole and colonies? *Where* did they live and how did they make

decisions about the investments they made in slavery or the slave trade? *What traces* of slavery and enslavement can we find in the Netherlands – in the streets, museums, archives, and intangible heritage? *What African and Asian presence* was there in Europe in earlier ages? Three bilingual guides on Amsterdam, Dutch New York, and the Netherlands (Hondius et al. 2014, 2017, 2019) were published, including maps that visualised the presence of slavery in Dutch (colonised) spaces. To accompany these, Jennifer Tosch and I developed participatory walking tours in Utrecht and Amsterdam, using a method which I coined 'the city as an archive', which makes it possible to find visual remnants of the Dutch colonial and slavery past everywhere, once a critical lens is adopted. Visual and material remnants in the city, such as gable stones, monuments, and ornaments, but also paintings and busts within museums, all visualise fragments of a larger colonial history (see the chapter by Emmanuel Adu-Ampong in this volume). In the *Mapping Slavery* project, from the outset, we purposely chose to focus both on transatlantic and Indian Ocean slavery because several cities showed visual traces and local histories that told stories from the global Dutch Empire, and not just the transatlantic history.

The importance of visual signs of all kinds can inform us about the presence of slavery, how ideas on race developed, and what was deemed (un) important in reference to this history. Since we still know relatively little about Indian Ocean slavery and its visual sources, the following section will focus on paintings and other visual sources that refer to colonial scenes in VOC territory, using the insights of *Revisualising Slavery* (2021) as a reference point.

Revisualising Slavery

The traditional image of slavery in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean has been shaped and dominated by words such as 'mild' and 'domestic' (Jouwe et al. 2021, 11). This persistent image has clearly been reinforced in visual representations, as we argued in our publication *Revisualising Slavery*. An early example is the 1665 painting by Jacob Coeman depicting a European merchant, Pieter Cnoll, and his Eurasian wife, Cornelia van Nijenrode. The couple are portrayed in a domestic scene with their daughters and two Brown people who are enslaved servants. We see dogs, flowers, fruit baskets, and rich fabrics. The scene, in soft colours, shows opulence, emphasising the superiority of the merchant, whilst the enslaved people represent familiar faces in an intimate space near the seashore, emphasising the good-naturedness and harmonious practice of domestic slavery. New

Figure 10.2 Jan Brandes, *Gallery with son Jantje and Bietja, an enslaved girl*, 1784. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

research now recognises the male Brown servant as Surapati, who would become a fighter against, and much feared opponent of, the VOC. Holtrop (2020) suggests the VOC tracked down his corpse, burned it, and threw it into the sea to preclude any chance of it becoming a focus of pilgrimage. Today in Indonesia, he is considered a precursor to the struggle for independence and widely known as a resistance fighter (Holtrop 2020).

The work of the Lutheran Minister Jan Brandes (1743–1808), who left a body of work with visual representations of intimate colonial life in South Africa, Sri Lanka, and the Dutch East Indies, shows similar scenes of harmony, domesticity, and intimacy, even involving children, including enslaved children (see fig. 10.2) (de Bruijn and Raben 2004).

Another painting depicting domesticity, opulence, and close proximity between enslaved servants and their masters brings us to the metropole – the Netherlands. In 1697, Gerard Wigmana painted the portrait of Mayor Julius Schelto van Aitzema and his wife Sara van den Broecke in their Dokkum home. They are accompanied by a guest, onlookers, and several white and Brown servants ready to serve, all beautifully dressed. We now know that the Brown servants were brought in from the Indonesian archipelago (Holtrop in Jouwe et al. 2021, 89). The child-servant in the middle of the scene was Philander de Baron. His mother stands in the right corner and was called Rosette van Sambauwa. Rosette was brought to the Netherlands in 1689 by the mayor's wife, the white woman at the table, Sara, whose chair is held by a Brown servant called Martha. The painting is currently on display in Dokkum city hall (Holtrop in Jouwe et al. 2021, 90). Again, the scene portrays richness, harmony, and everyone 'in their place'.

The 2012 walking guide *Traces of Slavery in Utrecht* introduced Brown (enslaved) servants like Sitie, shipped from Makassar, and Sibilla from Batavia, who both served in households of the colonial elite in eighteenth-century Utrecht. In their cases, however, we can only imagine what they looked like. They are amongst the many faceless and often nameless enslaved servants hailing from different parts of the Indian Ocean, brought to the Netherlands over a period spanning three centuries. This is what makes the Dokkum painting from Wigmana so special and unique: all those in the painting, white and Brown, are depicted as real-life figures. Their roles and positions of power are distinct, in accordance with typical colonial settings, but their faces and names are now known again, cutting through their oftentimes sheer invisibility. They no longer represent an 'absent presence', by which I mean that, although physically present, enslaved people were not understood as humans, but rather seen as mere props, especially in early modern paintings – a group that had no discursive presence (see also Balkenhol 2010; Hesse 2002).

Not just in the metropole, but also in the colonies themselves, this absent presence is seen in paintings of colonial life, where enslaved people worked, often constituting the majority in settlements or cities (Raben in Jouwe et al. 2021, 27). If one watches closely, enslaved people are often hidden in the margins of paintings that are clearly not about them.

Similarly, as Wim Manuhutu (2022) notes, maps can give clues via such absences. Seventeenth-century mapmakers were immensely important because Europeans at the time were still figuring out what the world looked like. During this era, Dutch mapmakers such as Joan and Willem Blaeu were amongst the best in the world. Comparing maps of the Banda Islands, those made after 1621 show neat rows of plantations, yet from historical

Figure 10.3 Maker unknown, *Map of Lonthor with fort Hollandia*, 1600-1700. Nationaal Archief, Den Haag.

records we know that there were once villages where these plantations stood (Manuhutu in Jouwe et al. 2021, 99). These villages were destroyed and estimates suggest that up to seventy-five percent of the indigenous population was killed by the Dutch. The fortresses we see on maps and paintings in the relatively small Banda Islands show the importance of the spice trade and hint at the level of violence or the threat thereof that was necessary to keep the colonial order in place. These fortresses, including military personnel, were established not only to keep enemies out, but also to keep enslaved labourers on the nutmeg plantations in check. The absences in the map of the Banda Islands after 1621 clearly communicate this violence (see fig. 10.3).

The examples clarify, as Manuhutu (2022) argues, that maps are not neutral and objective renditions of a 'historical reality'. Second, the examples demonstrate that maps played an important role in imaging and promoting the colony. When written and visual texts, like maps, are combined, a gruesome story is revealed that might otherwise remain hidden or abstract.

Even when the enslaved are clearly not the central topic of a painting, they still can appear in larger numbers, as shown in a number of the images in Joan Nieuhof's book *Gedenkwaerdige zee en lantreize* (1682) ('Memorable

Figure 10.4 After a drawing of Joan Nieuhof, *Washing place*, 1682. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

travels by sea and land'). Thus, although present in substantial numbers, they are not important as human beings, but rather as entities that depict colonial life. It means that their representation as human beings has no qualitative or discursive meaning. Looking more purposely at pictures of Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, one can discern numerous enslaved people (see fig. 10.4). The same applies to the drawings of Jan Brandes (mentioned earlier), which depicted intimate domestic scenes involving children. These images disconnect enslaved women, men, and children from their actual lives, which were often filled with violence, through capture, sale, rape, punishment, brutal working conditions, and even killings. Again, representations of the enslaved by those who control the visual narrative are of a certain quality, meaning here that they do not show violence as a central part of their existence as enslaved people. As Stuart Hall (1997) taught us, 'the other' becomes a racialised spectacle that serves the purpose of the coloniser who imposes their colonial gaze upon the racialised 'other' or colonised, thus reiterating the supremacy of the European 'self' or coloniser (see also Bhabha 1994; Fanon 1952; Said 1978; Spivak 1985).

Considering visual representations of enslaved people in Indian Ocean slavery not only helps us to gain better insight into the hidden past of slavery,

but also to avoid misinterpretations. As an example of the latter, Eveline Sint Nicolaas describes:

> In 2005, a remarkable painting came on the market. It was an unusual depiction of a non-European landscape in which two shackled men are escorted away under the supervision of three guards, a man, and a woman. The auction catalogue described the painting as: 'Dutch merchant with slaves in West Indian hilly landscape, Dutch school, 18th century.' (in Jouwe et al. 2021, 61)

However, Matthias van Rossum (2021) pointed out that this could not actually be a painting depicting a West Indian scene. Based on landscape and clothing, it was probably an early eighteenth-century scene in Asia or, more specifically, colonial Indonesia. Painters were active in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Batavia, painting colonial scenes and stakeholders (Sint Nicolaas 2021, 64). After further research, Rijksmuseum changed the description.

Another way of misrepresenting an enslaved person was the 'slave woman' portrayed as a type in the nineteenth century, as Caroline Drieënhuizen argues (in Jouwe et al. 2021). The slave woman was attributed with unchangeable childlike and sensual manners, implying that they needed the guidance and protection of Western men (Drieënhuizen in Jouwe et al. 2021, 55–60). The female colonial subject, as the quintessential other who needed to be dominated and who served as the ideal sexual and forbidden fantasy for the coloniser, is a much-discussed topic (hooks 1992; McClintock 1995; Ponzanesi 2005; Stoler 2002). The fantasies concerning her sexuality can come in different degrees. This recalls the story of Sarah or Saartjie Baartman (1789–1815), the Khoekhoe woman born in the Dutch Cape Colony run by the VOC (present-day South Africa).[3] Baartman worked as an enslaved servant for a Dutch farmer named Johan Cezar. His brother brought her to Europe to show her body publicly as a visual spectacle. After she died, a cast was made of her corpse and parts of her body, including her brain and genitalia, were put on display in Musée de l'Homme in Paris until 1986 (Buikema 2004). Her body was considered the 'complete opposite' of the white European female body type, and Baartman was hypersexualised through a colonial male gaze both in life and death, as a prime example of a forbidden sexual fantasy of the quintessential colonial other.

3 Saartjie Baartman is also mentioned in chapter 9 (footnote 17) in this volume, where her name is written as Sarah Bartmann.

Misrepresentations and stereotypes, absent presence, and sexual violence – we can consider all these visual phenomena as expressions of violence against the humanity of colonised people, as acts of dehumanisation. However, such acts can be countered by critically reading and analysing visual sources, using a lens that aims to undo colonial mechanisms. In doing so, one comes to realise that slavery was an ever-present phenomenon, meaning we must 'counter-read' these visual sources, for instance by looking for absences – something we are not traditionally trained to do. If we do not purposely engage, these violent aspects will be in danger of being reproduced. Furthermore, we need to dig deeper into our knowledge production, as the case of the misinterpreted painting *Dutch Merchant with Slaves* taught us. If we fail to do so, faulty analyses lie ahead, reproducing silences and epistemic violence.

As spectators, we have seen visual representations of enslaved people in several settings, from the household to the field. Often, enslaved people are in the margins or are an absent presence. We know they were there, but we do not find them in visual representations of, for instance, plantation settings. Another absence in these representations involves the presence of structural colonial violence. Even if a rich and diverse corpus of archival material is available – court cases, rulings, listings of deaths and births, diary notes on punishments, the presence of fortresses and military, and so on – showing that various violent practices were frequently used within the colonial system, these are seldom depicted in colonial representations.

Conclusion

With today's world saturated by popular culture and social media, we are informed through screen culture, and much of our daily consumption is visual. For many, especially the digitally born, this has become second nature. Daily, millions of visual expressions of our cultures are produced through multiple platforms and consumed by billions more globally. Visual representations of our colonial past are a relatively new terrain for larger audiences and a new terrain of scientific scrutiny. Yet, the visual and cultural dimensions of Dutch Empire are too important to leave unexplored.

I consider the collective work mentioned in this chapter as vital, as it has brought about a paradigm shift, informing how various Dutch stakeholders (politicians, policymakers, media, students, and the general public) now engage with Dutch colonial history. Within this constellation of scholars, researchers, artists, and activists, who have pushed for slavery to be placed front and centre in Dutch discourse in a critical way, artists especially

have made use of the imaginary, entering a realm that is harder to access for scholars who have to stick to factual data that can be proven. Yet, it is often this imaginary that can help us gain more insight, not just rationally, but also in terms of what we hold in our hearts to be true. It is important to look critically at how we imagine the past and how it is installed in our cultural archive, especially visual representations – since they have been overlooked and give us information that stays hidden otherwise – and what they signify (Jouwe et al. 2021, 9).

This chapter looked specifically at slavery in the Indonesian archipelago and the Indian Ocean whilst placing visual sources centre stage. I related this to two other current shifts: one towards more critical engagement, and another towards greater focus on counternarratives. A third shift considers the Dutch colonial empire as one analytical entity, despite the dominant discourse in Dutch colonial historiography, which mostly focuses either on the VOC, the Indian Ocean, and Indonesian archipelago, or on the WIC and the Atlantic (Jouwe 2020, 11). The examples discussed show that a hegemonic white gaze has prevented many of us from seeing what is in plain sight, not least because the colonial past has been visualised by a colonial order. Disrupting this colonial gaze by counter-reading these visual sources helps to analyse historical visual sources more deeply, including unpacking the practices of colonial slavery and the public discourse that surrounds it. As such, I tried to argue that visual sources help us to be better historically informed. Within Dutch scholarly processes, it has helped to gain more insight of the importance of looking at Indian Ocean slavery, which has, because of visual sources, often been read as more benign than transatlantic slavery. A more critical approach to visual sources may help us to imagine the history of slavery in a different and dissenting way, moving beyond our colonial lens of white innocence (Wekker 2016).

Stereotypical visual representations of a glorified Dutch colonial past were propagated both in the public arena and within typical institutions of representation, such as museums. Visual representations of our colonial history are now beginning to be more closely scrutinised, contested, and problematised, steering public discourse in a direction that allows a more critical discursive space. Pushback is to be expected, but visual signs of all kinds cannot deny the presence of slavery, and with it the development of racial stereotypes and what was deemed (un)important as well as what was purposely rendered absent in the context of this history.

In the context of slavery in the Indian Ocean, these visual sources paint a picture of misrepresentation, silences, and absences, but on closer inspection, they also offer clear-cut representations that we could not

otherwise understand properly. These visual representations help us to relate to written historical sources (and vice versa) in more intricate and mutually beneficial ways. The sheer absence of enslaved people in visual sources, or the absence of violence, has helped us understand how visual depictions created a distorted presentation of colonial lives, for example for propaganda purposes. The realities they present were not mild domestic realities. In other cases, enslaved persons were present in pictures, even in large numbers, but were not recognised as human beings that matter. Scrutinising visual colonial sources critically means cutting through our colonial lens of white innocence, in order to understand these sources better as multi-layered and carrying more information than we are often able to see. Collectively, the work done by activists, artists, and scholars, as well as public historians and heritage professionals outside academia, can be read both as a collective push for awareness, and as acts of reparative justice.

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11. Making an Embodied Absence Present: Tourism and the Cultural Imaginary of Slavery and Colonial Heritage in the Netherlands

Emmanuel Akwasi Adu-Ampong

Abstract: Heritage tourism products are ubiquitous in all major European cities and often serve to forge a cultural imaginary of nationhood, identity, and belonging. In such a cultural imaginary, the stories of slavery and colonialism tend to be marginalised, even overlooked. Thus, whilst contemporary Dutch society for instance has a sizeable physical presence of people of African descent, their stories, heritage, and narratives are often absent from the national imaginary of belonging. By conceptualising this paradox as *the embodied absence of the past* – the physical presence yet narrative absence of the shared history, heritage, and role of people of African descent in European societies – this chapter explores how tourism in its practices and performances makes this embodied absence of the past visible. The TripAdvisor reviews of the Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours (BHAT) are examined through content analysis. The findings show that BHAT performs civic, cultural, and political activist goals in which tour guides act as important mediators in keeping the memory of slavery heritage alive. BHAT provides an eye-opening transformative experience that renders visible the embodied absence of the past by (re)inserting the 'Black presence' into the cultural imaginary of Dutch slavery and colonial heritage through the tour narratives.

Keywords: Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours; cultural imaginary; collective memory; embodied absence; tour guides; slavery heritage tourism

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> I cannot stress enough the importance of Jennifer's work, and of the rewards that attending the tour provides; both in terms of educating oneself on the history of one of the world's most infamous cities, as well as serving to commemorate those who played a vital part it [*sic*] constructing it. I strongly encourage everyone to attend the Black Heritage Amsterdam Tour.
>
> James A. (Review on TripAdvisor in April, 2017)

Introduction

Tourism is a ubiquitous part of contemporary society, with cultural tourism in general and heritage tourism in particular considered as one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry. Thus, from Amsterdam to Zaragoza, Petra to Lombok, historical and heritage tourism products abound in all major European cities and other cities around the world. The prevalence of historical and heritage tourism stems, more broadly, from the way in which tourism is perceived as a worldmaking force (Hollinshead et al. 2009) that shapes the cultural imaginary of people, places, and events – both past and present.

However, tourism's worldmaking potential is a double-edged sword. It has the potential to make visible ignored aspects of the world, but can also be used to reinforce caricatured imaginaries that actively erase other people, times, and places. In a recent study, Ormond and Vietti (2021) show that the 'tools of tourism' – guided tours, guidebooks, and tourism maps – offer profound pedagogical possibilities of civic learning of societal diversity. They argue that as 'one of the only contemporary sites outside of the education industry where explicitly designated, non-vocational learning about other times, places, and peoples takes place' (Werry 2008, 17), tourism faces an inherent paradox. On the one hand tourism can provide new perspectives, whilst on the other, it can perpetuate clichés. Thus, guided tours are seen as having the potential to challenge established dominant narratives of the past whilst providing new narratives that facilitate learning.

Narratives of the past – both old and new – are tied up with the cultural memory of places and people. Marschall (2012) argues that the tourism–memory nexus has been a neglected field of study and calls for a better understanding of this intersection. This is particularly important when it comes to sensitive aspects of the past, such as slavery, colonialism, and the holocaust. This is because the sites, traces, and artefacts of a sensitive collective past (memory) are commodified as heritage products to attract tourists. This raises certain questions about how tourists engage with such

heritage tourism products and the extent to which tourism practices and performances related to such sensitive pasts are able to challenge the existing collective memory and introduce new memory and engagement.

Using the case of the Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours (BHAT), this chapter examines how BHAT as both a tourism practice and performance undertakes the socio-cultural and political work of rendering visible and present aspects of the Dutch cultural imaginary of slavery and colonial heritage that are absent. In particular, this chapter focuses on a detailed analysis of reviews of BHAT left by tourists on the TripAdvisor platform in order to understand how they perceive both the tour and their experience thereof vis-à-vis the collective memory of slavery and colonial heritage in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Tourism, Cultural Memory of Heritage, and the Embodied Absence of the Past

Heritage tourism is one of the oldest forms of travel. Indeed, it is known that travel to historical sites of cultural importance was common practice amongst the ancient Egyptians and Romans (Timothy and Boyd 2006). In contemporary times, the growth of cultural and heritage tourism is closely aligned with the increasing production of cultural and artistic experiences offered for touristic consumption. Even sites associated with difficult historical events such as slavery, war, and mass death have seen increased visits in proportion to the increase in (inter)national memorialisation and commemoration practices through monuments, memorials, and exhibitions.

Whilst heritage tourism continues to bloom, the very concept of heritage remains contested. One of the most basic conceptualisations is to see heritage as the contemporary use of the past (Ashworth 2003; Graham et al. 2000; Lowenthal 2011). This broad approach to conceptualising heritage underscores both the tangible and intangible features of the past, where the past refers to the historical events that shape the socio-cultural and even natural landscapes of society. Traditionally, the understanding of heritage was bound up with the identification of grand, monumental, and old sites – artefacts and buildings that were considered aesthetically pleasing. Through discursive, technical, and management practices, these elements of the past were deemed valuable enough to be preserved and passed on to future generations. This is what Smith (2006) calls the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD), in which usually the state sanctions what is to be regarded as heritage and worthy of preservation. It is through such AHD that

a sense of nationhood, identity, and belonging to an 'imagined community' is forged (Anderson 1984). Within AHD, how identities become constructed from heritage sites is taken as a given. However, recent studies have shown that heritage is not simply the contemporary use of the past, but rather is produced in a continuous process of becoming that is open to contestations and new avenues of interpretive possibilities (Watson et al. 2012).

The process of heritage creation, recreation, and indeed, destruction (Ashworth et al. 2007), is used as an instrument of (re)constructing and promoting cultural memory, cultural imaginaries, and the identities of individuals and communities. In this way what comes to be seen as heritage is what forms the basis of collective memory – i.e., what gets selected for remembrance and how aspects of the past are memorialised and commemorated in terms of collective memory. Collective memory, according to Schwartz (1991), is 'a metaphor that formulates society's retention and loss of information about its past in the familiar terms of individual remembering and forgetting' (302). An important aspect of collective memory is that it is mutually constituted at the individual and group level. It is through social institutions that individuals get to learn which aspects of the past are considered worth remembering and which are mundane. In this way commemorative events – both formal and informal – play an important role in the construction and contestation of collective memory. Thus, cultural (re)productions – often sanctioned by national authorities, as part of commemorative events – offer a view to the shared representation of the past in the present. However, such representations can be contested through other forms of cultural (re)production developed by marginalised individuals and groups. Foote and Azaryahu (2007) assert that 'the cultural production of [collective] memory refers to both the medium of presentation and the process through which the representation of the past assumes its particular form, often an involving engagement of the senses, emotions, imagination, and intellect of visitors' (126–27). It is in this process that tourism, as a cultural production and product, offers an avenue for new interpretive possibilities through its practices and performances. Heritage tourism therefore often shapes the heritage (re)creation process in producing, contesting, (re)negotiating, and promoting local place identities, meanings, and collective memory, even when related to difficult pasts (Ashworth and Graham 2005).

The transatlantic slave trade represents one such difficult past, the entangled histories, memories, and heritages of which are intricately interwoven in the socio-cultural fabric of nations and contemporary society in general. In the four centuries from the sixteenth through to the nineteenth century,

an estimated 12,000,000 Africans (Eltis and Richardson 2010) were enslaved and shipped to the New World of North and South America to provide labour on plantations and mines – with some also shipped to Europe. For more than 200 years since its abolition, through collective silence and amnesia that rendered public discourse on the subject absent and almost non-existent (Rice 2004), the transatlantic slave trade remained outside the historiography of many of the nation states that were directly involved in it. It has only been since the 1990s that public commemoration and memorialisation have become more commonplace in what Pierre Nora (1989) calls 'sites of memory'. The rapid increase in the public memory of the transatlantic slave trade through commemoration and memorialisation was in part galvanised with the launch of the UNESCO Slave Route Project (SRP) in 1994, as well as the 'guerrilla memorialisation' (Rice 2004, 2010) practices of activists and marginalised groups who, in asserting their silenced identities, thrust the issue of the transatlantic slave trade into public consciousness and discourses across the Atlantic world.

In the Netherlands, aspects of slavery heritage were long 'silenced' in the Dutch canon of history and not expressed in the cultural imaginary of nationhood – notwithstanding a significant population of people of African and Afro-Surinamese descent (Balkenhol 2011; Cain 2015; Oostindie 2005; van Stipriaan 2007; Vliet 2020). Thus, whilst contemporary Dutch society has a sizeable physical presence of people of African descent, their stories, heritage, and narratives are often absent from the national cultural imaginary of belonging and the history of slavery. I conceptualise this paradox as the *embodied absence of the past* – the physical presence yet narrative absence of the shared history, heritage, and role of people of African descent in the Netherlands and in European societies writ large. I define the embodied absence of the past as

> the awareness of the physical presence yet narrative absence of the shared history, heritage and role of African-descent people in European societies. This collective amnesia, I argue, is challenged and activated through tourism encounters of slavery and colonial traces which trigger an evocation and reconstruction of personal and collective memories. (Adu-Ampong 2023, 103590)

This embodied absence of the past is made visible through tourism practices and performances that create and hold space for dissenting, challenging, contesting, and co-creating new narratives within the Dutch cultural imaginary. Slavery heritage tourism narratives in particular stimulate

plural public memories of the past which resonate as powerful presences in people's lived experience precisely because of the absence of such narratives. Absence here refers to that which is missing in relation to the things and people that are present. Presence and absence are therefore simultaneously produced and the authority of that which is present depends on the 'otherness' of that which is absent (Frers 2013; Meier et al. 2013). Absences are therefore experienced in various social practices and performances that are both extraordinary and mundane within the tourism settings of slavery heritage sites. Slavery heritage tourism as a form of guerrilla memorialisation therefore enables marginalised groups to assert and reinsert their heritage into collective social memory by offering new narratives and perspectives on the past.

In making the embodied absence of the past present, the common tools of tourism – guided tours, guidebooks, and tourism maps – are utilised (Ormond and Vietti 2021). Via these tools, the marginalised history of slavery can be reinserted back into the public consciousness. Amongst other things, slavery heritage tourism practices and performances often seek to stimulate cultural exchange and racial dialogue at slavery-related heritage sites. These objectives are achieved by bringing together people from different racial backgrounds, revealing cultural and historical assumptions and distortions whilst making clear the distinction between dominant and marginalised narratives pertaining to particular sites. These slavery heritage sites, open as they are to misunderstandings and contestations, are considered sensitive because of their potential to evoke strong emotions such as anger, sorrow, and/or anguish (Teye and Timothy 2004; Yankholmes and McKercher 2015). Such sites, however, offer the potential for transformative cultural experiences precisely because the tourism practices and performances they enable incorporate physical and emotional dimensions (Bagnall 2003; Crouch 2012). Hence, the physical and emotional dimensions of tourism practices and performances are co-constituted. The physical dimension, for instance, entails being together with people from different backgrounds, walking and talking together as you follow a tour, and interacting in ways that have the potential to create a momentary bonding or group feeling. Thus, the practice of following a tour in which you often stop to listen to a tour guide or to look at visual clues and traces provides moments of emotional engagement with the content of the tour as well as with other participants. Tour guides also play a key role in (un)intentionally generating these emotional dimensions, not only through the narratives they present, but also in the manner in which they are delivered. Thus, emotions such as shame, anger, sorrow, and even delight at learning about aspects of the

past take form in the context of the particularities of the practice and performance of tourism.

Visits to slavery heritage sites are therefore embodied performances of remembrance and commemoration through which a sense of place, belonging, and identity is (re)negotiated, (re)constructed, and (re)contested. It is in this performative moment of the slavery heritage tourism encounter that 'people remember, forget, commemorate and make sense of the present' (Smith 2012, 214). My use of the conceptual notion of the embodied absence of the past, which already denotes the corporeal presence (and absence) of memory, shows the ways in which the transformation of slavery heritage traces as sites of tourism creates absence-presence and present-absence of the memories and experiences transcribed into individual and collective bodies in terms of meaning, identity, and belonging. In this embodied absence of the past and the disruption of the dominant narrative that results, new and unexpected meanings emerge that unsettle familiar expected narratives, cultural resonances, and political meanings of the past and its effects on the present.

Yet such disruptions also create powerful effects in terms of possibilities for new narratives to emerge with different spatial resonances. The evidence of these can be seen in the comments that visitors leave, either in visitor comments books at slavery heritage sites and/or in digital spaces such as TripAdvisor. Such comments contribute to the (re)construction of new narratives, as has been shown recently by Buckley-Zistel and Williams (2022) in their study of how TripAdvisor comments create new transnational moral spaces of remembrance at emotionally sensitive (dark) tourism sites.

Case Study and Methodology

Ongoing evolution in information communication technologies has given rise to a diverse range of online social network sites that influence how tourists research, plan, and reflect upon their travel experiences (Ayeh et al. 2013; Xiang and Gretzel 2010; Zarezadeh et al. 2019). The emergence of Web 2.0 and the explosion in user-generated content (UGC) have made online travel reviews an accessible and popular avenue for people to share their travel experiences online, via websites such as Expedia, TripAdvisor, Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, X (formerly Twitter), and Booking.com (Ayeh et al. 2013). TripAdvisor is the best-known online review platform in the allied travel, tourism, leisure, and hospitality sectors. Because of the perceived credibility of reviews on TripAdvisor, the extensive number of

reviews, its vast user base, and high traffic, TripAdvisor is used by millions of travellers, compared to lesser visited sites such as Booking.com or Expedia, which have limited reviews and user bases (Ayeh et. 2013; Gursoy et al. 2021; SimilarWeb 2024). Consequently, this chapter is based on data derived from the TripAdvisor site for BHAT.

BHAT exemplifies the tourism–memory nexus and tourism's transformative potential in wider societal debates on the commemoration and memorialisation of slavery heritage. BHAT was established in 2013 as a guided walking- and boat-based sightseeing tour that explores Amsterdam to make visible the 'hidden histories' of the African Diaspora, slavery, and colonial history of the Netherlands from the seventeenth century onwards, as seen in the national landmarks, architecture, canal houses, and museums. BHAT is underpinned by two published guidebooks: *Amsterdam Slavery Heritage Guide* (Hondius et al. 2019a) and *Netherlands Slavery Heritage Guide* (Hondius et al. 2019b). BHAT expressly undertakes the cultural and political work of counter-mapping dissonant heritage (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) and empowering marginalised and absent voices by firmly fixing tourist gazes on the visual traces of slavery heritage in the cityscape of Amsterdam. In this way, the tour keeps the memory of slavery and colonial history alive as a platform of dialogue and explorations of the past and its contemporary implications in everyday social life. Thus, TripAdvisor reviews from travellers who have experienced the tour offer a valuable insight into the extent to which the goal of BHAT is achieved in terms of generating a counter-narrative to the Dutch imaginary of the past.

In May 2021, all 147 reviews written in English were scraped off the BHAT TripAdvisor webpage. At the time of data scraping, there were eight reviews written in Dutch, but these were excluded from the collated data for analysis. This was to prevent issues of (mis)translation and to ensure a consistent language basis for the analysis. The 147 English reviews were put into an Excel file, which was uploaded into the ATLAS.ti 9 qualitative data analysis software (version 9.0.23.0) for further analysis. The analysis of the data followed a systematic process after a broad understanding of the data was developed through an initial scanning. The analysis involved three processes: open coding; axial coding; and selective coding, in order to categorise and find themes and patterns in the reviews. Once coded, a thematic analysis approach was adopted in order to build up broad (sub) themes of commonalities rather than individual differences in reviews. The broad themes that emerged provide the basis for deriving meaning, salience, and connections in the TripAdvisor reviews as they related to the research question.

Findings and Discussion

In analysing the reviews, the initial open coding of all reviews line by line yielded 484 unique codes. This process allowed the data to be organised and classified into meaningful categories. These categories were analysed and further reduced into thirteen code categories that were considered as subthemes. In this process, the number of categories was further reduced by combining those that were similar and/or dissimilar into more extensive and inclusive categories. The final stage involved a selective thematic coding, thus further reducing the categories into the final four themes: hospitality and boat aesthetics; tour guides as mediators; transformative experience of absence made present; and recommendations. In this chapter, the two themes of 'tour guides as mediators' and 'transformative experience of absence made present' will be the main focus of the analysis and discussion.

In terms of an overview of the reviews, the table below shows that the majority of reviews were written by those who travelled with friends, followed by those who travelled solo. The majority of the reviews (78 reviews) were written between 2013 and 2016, with 2018 being the year with the most reviews (25 reviews). The top four months during which most reviews were written were June (20 reviews), March (19 reviews), July (14 reviews), and February (14 reviews). In terms of star rating of the tour experience, 141 of the reviews rated the tour with 5 stars; four reviews rated it with 4 stars; and one review each rated the tour with 2 stars and 1 star. Reviewers from eight countries shared their experience of BHAT, with the most written by visitors from the United States (63 reviews), followed by those based in the Netherlands (26 reviews) and those from the United Kingdom (12 reviews). A large proportion of the reviews were written by those who did not specify their country of origin, although the country of origin could be deduced from some of these reviews.

Table 1. Overview of TripAdvisor Reviews for Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours (2013–2020).

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Trip Type		
Travelled with friends	69	46.93
Travelled as a couple	19	12.92
Travelled solo	28	19.04
Travelled on business	5	3.40

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Travelled with family	12	8.16
Unspecified	14	9.52
Country of origin		
United States	63	42.85
Netherlands	26	17.68
United Kingdom	12	8.16
Germany	3	2.04
China	1	0.68
France	1	0.68
Hungary	1	0.68
Tanzania	1	0.68
Unspecified	39	26.53
Rating		
1 star	1	0.68
2 stars	1	0.68
3 stars	0	0
4 stars	4	2.72
5 stars	141	95.91

Tour Guides as Mediators of Memory and Experience

Almost all the reviews noted the role of the tour guide in their experience. The knowledge of the tour guide and the knowledge acquired from the tour were important for visitors. Moreover, the connection between the tour guide's own personal biography in relation to the narrative told was very much valued, as noted by one of the reviews: 'Jennifer of Surinamese parents has extensive knowledge of the Dutch involvement in enslaved Africans and the wealth that is distributed throughout Amsterdam' (C 74: Unspecified, 5*, United Kingdom). In their role, tour guides actively render the past visible and alive, creating the embodied experience sought by visitors, who note how the tour guide '[…] really made the history of the enslaved come to life' (C 11: Unspecified, 5*, United States). Thus, tour guides, through their practices and performances, play a significant role in shaping and (re)constructing the cultural memory and imaginaries of individuals. Particularly in the contexts of (slavery) heritage, tour guides as receptacles of extensive knowledge are expected to convey information, offer explanations, develop narratives, and mediate the experiences of tourists. This is replete throughout the reviews and is exemplified in this quote:

> Jennifer[1] is blessed with a historian's intellect, an artist's eye, a griot's storytelling skill and a poet's heart. She is a natural educator and an expert listener. Jennifer will show you Amsterdam as you have never seen it before and you will invariably tell your friends and family. Jennifer is simply captivating and infuses history with vibrancy, life, reverence for humanity and, love. (C 21: Female, 5*, the Netherlands)

However, the role of the tour guide as a meditator also has a downside, as a negative assessment of the guide tends to lead to a negative overall experience. A couple of the reviews pointed out issues with the tour guide that ultimately negatively influenced their experience. These issues related to tour guides arriving late to the start of tour, the use of notes, or a guide other than the one expected hosting the tour. One visitor in particular appears to have had the worst encounter with one of the tour guides, which ruined her experience, as shown in the long quote below:

> We had the combination walk/boat tour. Our tour guide was very nice. She was prompt and began the tour on time. She was not the one we expected to do the tour, but OK. However having us meet at a monument (the WWII monument) and not knowing how it fits into the African experience in Amsterdam was strange. As it was obvious the monument had people of color on it. Not a good way to start an African Heritage tour. She covered local sites that were associated with the African experience in Amsterdam, but it felt like she was only hitting the surface. She was able to give some great facts on how Holland became wealthy off the backs of black people and how people still benefit from that wealth today. Would have been nice if the guide had completed the tour without notes. If she has been doing this tour for 2 years (her words), then there should really be no need for notes. In my opinion there needed to be a little more passion. Again if you have been doing this for 2 years your passion for the subject should come through. (C 70: Female, 2*, United States)

As this quote exemplifies, visitors have certain expectations of tour guides, particularly in relation to the specific nature of a cultural tourism experience such as that offered by BHAT. Thus, any disconnect between expectation and reality can lead to huge disappointment, generating negative experiences. It has been argued that tour 'guides are of crucial importance in cultural tourism, as theirs is to the task of selecting, glossing and interpreting sights

1 Jennifer's name is used here with her explicit permission.

[…] [requiring] extensive expertise is regarded as a prerequisite by which to establish the guide's professional status as a mediator of culture […]' (Dahles 2002, 784). Thus, whilst tour guides tend to be primarily seen in terms of their cultural mediation role (Macdonald 2006), there is also a socio-political aspect to tour guiding (Dahles 2002) that needs to be acknowledged. These roles – both mediatory and political – are evident in the TripAdvisor reviews of BHAT and it is on this combination of roles that the visitors experience hinges. The political role is tied to how the use of guided tours and guidebooks actively engages in the heritage (re)creation process of contesting, (re)negotiating, and promoting new local place identities, meanings, and collective memory of the present traces of slavery in the cityscape.

Tour(ism) as a Transformative Eye-Opening Experience of Absence Made Present

Given that it is generally accepted that slavery did not take place in the Netherlands, existing slavery heritage tourism research has tended to focus on sites of departure of the enslaved in Africa (Teye and Timothy 2004; Yankholmes and McKercher 2015), sites of enslavement on the plantations of America (Buzinde and Santos 2009; Small 2013), and in the Caribbean (Best 2017; Jordan and Jolliffe 2013). Yet, the analysis of the reviews attests to the material traces of slavery heritage in the Netherlands. These traces, rendered invisible through the Authorised Heritage Discourse of the Netherlands as 'free soil' in relation to slavery, are made visible by BHAT. One reviewer illustrates: 'What makes this tour even more powerful is that the information that Ms. Tosh shares, is physically visible throughout the entire city of Amsterdam' (C 29: Male, 5*, Unspecified). Thus, the use of guided tours in slavery heritage tourism, in addition to educational work, performs both the cultural and political work (Adu-Ampong 2023) of making otherwise absent narratives present. The reviews repeatedly point out how the tour changed the attendees' perception by offering a new perspective on Amsterdam's (and consequently, the Netherlands') past. The tour is seen as eye-opening, making visible a history that has always been present, yet hidden. This is exemplified in this review:

> The tour through Amsterdam was also very eye opening, because I visit Amsterdam often and never noticed the traces of slavery history Jennifer pointed out, even though the spots are so visible and out in the open. So it was very refreshing to see the city from a new perspective. (C 37: Unspecified, 5*, Netherlands)

BHAT powerfully makes visible the embodied absence of the past by opening the eyes of visitors to 'so much "hidden" history right there in plain sight' (C 39: Unspecified, 5*, United Kingdom). This generates a transformative experience for visitors who come to see and appreciate the heritage of 'Black presence', yet narrative absence being (re)created and (re)inserted into the cultural imaginary of the city. As noted by one reviewer: '[t]his is a great tour surrounding a topic which is often sadly missing in the stories surrounding Amsterdam' (C 13: Unspecified, 5*, the Netherlands). Thus, in contrast to other tours, BHAT actively undertakes a 'Black presence' heritage (re)creation process, as exemplified in these two reviews:

> Unlike many of the regular tours, what sets the Black Heritage Tour apart is that it really highlights not only the early history of black people, but also the colonial history of the city and country. They point out sites that you would normally pass by, but by looking through the tour lens we see things that make the city come alive and show that there has always been a 'black presence'. (C 142: Unspecified, 5*, Unspecified)

> She changed my perception on how to read art by taking us to the Rijks Museum in Amsterdam, where we spent time exploring the meanings behind popular and sacred artwork. We also went on a boat tour with Jennifer. She showed us houses, churches, hotels and other buildings which had a lot of history and markings of Black presence. She explained why they were so significant and important to Amsterdam. (C 62: Female, 5*, United Kingdom)

The material traces of slavery shown on the tour therefore provide a basis for new perspectives on the commemoration and memorialisation of slavery's past in a city (and country) culturally imagined as 'slavery-free'. This transformative experience is recounted in this review:

> This tour was a game changer. I've lived in Amsterdam for 11 years but wow did I learn a lot about ways to look at the visual clues of the city. The tour pointed out and decoded signs of Black involvement in the establishment of the city and Dutch wealth and identity, issues which are politically, culturally, socially so important to engage with. (C 80: Unspecified, 5*, the Netherlands)

An outcome of the transformative experience of the tour is the call, in the form of recommendations, by reviewers for others to embark on the

tour. The findings from this study underline the relation between positive transformative experiences and the decision to recommend the tour, as exemplified in this review: 'We had an enjoyable and educational afternoon and walked away with a new perspective on Amsterdam. I enthusiastically recommend this tour' (C 7: Male, 5*, United States).

The emergence of Web 2.0 and increasing use of social media such as TripAdvisor has changed how tourism is marketed and managed (Ayeh et al. 2013; George et al. 2021). Thus, digital word-of-mouth recommendations affect potential future visitor intentions. Most of the reviews analysed in this study with a positive experience recommended the tour, with a number reiterating the commemorative worldmaking nature of BHAT relative to other tours in making the embodied absence of the past present, as seen in these reviews:

> I definitely recommend this tour, because it provides you with a piece of Amsterdam history that isn't shared in the regular mainstream information sources. (C 37: Unspecified, 5*, the Netherlands)

> Very interesting and fun too, for both Amsterdammers and tourists who want to know more about the city's past. (C 4: Female, 5*, the Netherlands)

> I highly recommend it to both locals and tourist, especially to the families with children, who want to see this beautiful city with a unique eyes [*sic*]. This is definitely a must for visiting Holland. After all, what made Amsterdam, or the Netherlands famous today is its abundant historical heritage, [in] which the black and colonial heritage cannot be neglected. (C 34: Unspecified, 5*, China)

> If anyone is intrigued, curious and seeking to enlighten themselves on aspects of Dutch History relating to its Golden Age, the colonies & the peoples that made the wealth possible. Look no further than this particular tour. (C 119: Unspecified, 5*, United Kingdom)

As highlighted in the quotes above, recommendations to take the tour were directed not only at international visitors, but also at local Amsterdam (Dutch) residents.

Conclusion

Tourism's ubiquitous status in contemporary society calls for more concerted efforts to study its effects on wider social processes beyond the economic

contribution it makes to the economy. Tourism, through its practices and performances, is a worldmaking force through which the past, present, and future are (re)negotiated, contested, and (re)created. Tourism has the transformative potential to keep heritage and memory alive, particularly difficult aspects of the past, such as slavery and its contemporary ramifications. In this chapter, the socio-cultural and political work of BHAT was explored by assessing the reviews of this tour on TripAdvisor. The goal was to understand how visitors perceived their experience of the tour, both in relation to the collective memory of slavery and to colonial heritage in Amsterdam. In particular, the analysis focussed on the ways in which BHAT highlights and renders visible the embodied absence of the past.

There are two major findings in this chapter in relation to making an embodied absence present. First, tour guides play a significant role as mediators of what is remembered and experienced. It is the embodied performance of tour guides that makes the history of slavery come alive and the material traces visible to visitors. This process is further enhanced when the tour guides' personal biographies are directly connected to the narrative told. Second, the findings show that visitors consider their experience to be eye-opening and transformative because the tour provides a new perspective on the visual cues and material traces of the city in relation to its slavery heritage. BHAT is seen as providing a depth of historical knowledge, connecting Amsterdam's history vis-a-vis its 'Black presence', which is missing from other general tours. The positive experience resulted in enthusiastic recommendations of the tour directed at local Dutch residents and international visitors alike.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that slavery heritage and the cultural imaginary associated with it is not necessarily a site or an artefact, but rather a cultural performance and/or process (Smith 2006). Thus, BHAT as a cultural performative experience that incorporates physical and emotional dimensions provides an avenue for keeping heritage and memory alive. Through its practices and performances, BHAT plays an important role in creating encounters in which new and unexpected narratives and meanings emerge, allowing individuals to feel and (re)think the familiar. It is through this process that tourism comes to (re)shape the cultural imaginary of slavery and the colonial heritage of the Netherlands by making an embodied absence present.

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12. Reframing History: The Artistic Reclamation of Colonial Photography and the Quest for De-Victimisation

Brenda Bikoko

Abstract: In the quest to understand the historical context and the enduring impact of nineteenth-century colonial and enslavement photography, this chapter explores the artistic re-appropriation of daguerreotypes, particularly those commissioned by Louis Agassiz. These images, of individuals like Delia and Renty, served as tools for racial classification, embedding racial stereotypes into the fabric of society. The study examines these photographs not merely as historical artefacts, but as active participants in the perpetuation of racial hierarchies. Through a critical analysis, informed by the transformative methodologies of Azoulay and Campt, the chapter aims to deconstruct the objectification inherent in these images, reconceptualising the photographed individuals not as mere subjects, but as people with agency and dignity. Exploring modern artistic interpretations of historical photographs, the study underscores consent and decolonisation in visual history. The transforming re-appropriation of these images in contemporary art challenges historical narratives and aids in reclaiming the depicted individuals' humanity. It is argued that through empathetic engagement and critical inquiry, it is possible to transform how these historical images are perceived and utilised, contributing to a more inclusive and just representation of history.

Keywords: Daguerreotypes; decolonisation; artistic re-appropriation; racial stereotypes; visual archives

Introduction

The daguerreotypes (an early form of photography) of Alfred, Fassena, Jem, Renty and his daughter Delia, Jack and his daughter Drana anchored slavery's

Paijmans, Marrigje, and Karwan Fatah-Black, eds. *Slavery in the Cultural Imagination: Debates, Silences, and Dissent in the Neerlandophone Space*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025. DOI 10.5117/9789463728799_CH12

history in my consciousness – not just through their content, but through their presentation. These images have catalysed a better understanding of the systems behind slavery and exploitation, particularly the economic factors that play a crucial role in oppression, and techniques such as deportation, separation from loved ones, and denial of proper education and care. What I find particularly striking and symbolic is how these photographs were taken: without consent. The economic dehumanisation for exploitation raises questions about the influence of these systems on academic knowledge production. This realisation underscores the need for a critical approach to producing and evaluating academic knowledge. My motto is 'even best practices need to be revised'. This series of images has led me to this understanding. The fact that these images were only exhibited once at a meeting of the Cambridge Scientific Club in September 1850 (Rogers 2010, 233–34) adds to their iconicity. Legal scholar Yxta Murray (2013, 2) argues that they were only exhibited once because the rise of Social Darwinism increasingly marginalised polygenists like Louis Agassiz, a Swiss professor who had emigrated to the United States, where he taught at Harvard and was respected in the fields of geology, palaeontology, and ichthyology, and a major public figure in the context of natural history (Rogers 2010, xiii). Most Darwinists sided with the monogenetic Ethnological Society and rejected the polygenetic stance of the Anthropological Society (Hodgson 1999, 230). Despite the widespread acceptance of evolutionary theory in the second half of the nineteenth century, Agassiz clung to the idea that humans had evolved from fundamentally different races. This does not mean, however, that the monogenists regarded everyone as equal. In their view, the theory of 'survival of the fittest' explained why one race was superior to another. Despite the scorn and dismissal of Darwinists (Irmscher 2020, 206, 211), Agassiz went on an expedition to Brazil with his wife in 1865, to continue his brutal photographic scientific project in an attempt to prove polygenism (Agassiz and Agassiz 1868, 529). In the daguerreotypes we can see a range of emotions, from anger and pride to helplessness and sadness in the eyes of those photographed.

Discovered by Elinor Reichlin (1977) in the attic of the Harvard's Peabody Museum in 1976, the daguerreotypes of Delia and the others became icons of the United States' history of slavery. The series includes fifteen daguerreotypes, showcasing the subject frontally and in profile, focusing on their phrenology. Especially disturbing are the lesser-seen images of Jem and Alfred, depicted nude from various angles to highlight their physiognomy, marking a distressing aspect of early anthropology (Rogers 2010, 35, 66, 154, 192–212; Wallis 1995, 46). These photographs categorised

African Americans into 'teachable' racial categories for 'white supremacist' propaganda (Hecimovich 2020, 106–7), casting the camera not just as a recorder of moments, but as an archival apparatus (van Alphen 2014, 6). Encountering these images invites further investigation of the context and history behind their creation. These nineteenth-century daguerreotypes, once anthropological instruments for polygenic theory, now stand as a poignant visual testament to enslavement and the (un)willing production of racist knowledge. These perspectives inform our scrutiny of Agassiz's motives behind these images.

The commissioning of Joseph T. Zealy by Harvard's Louis Agassiz to photograph enslaved individuals – who were likely held in prison industrial labour camps owned by B. F. Taylor or F. W. Green in South Carolina – points towards the roots of racist scientific practices (Hecimovich 2020, 72, 75–77). This study contests the euphemistic term 'plantation', preferring instead Howard French's (2022) term 'prison industrial labour camp' to characterise these brutal labour environments more accurately. The point is to acknowledge and empathise with the people who endured prison labour camps and could not free themselves from it.

In this chapter, I delve into the historical context of the daguerreotypes and its impact on the artistic re-appropriation of nineteenth-century colonial and enslavement photography. Re-appropriation in art means that artists use already existing objects or images in their artworks, only minimally changing or reshaping the original source (Tate n.d.). My aim is to reconstruct and de-victimise the personalities depicted in the daguerreotype series through a critical visual and textual analysis. To this end, I draw upon the transformative methodologies of Ariella A. Azoulay and Tina M. Campt, both of whom are experts in photographic archives.

Azoulay (2019, 65) challenges viewers to think beyond the immediately visible, encouraging an engagement with what and who is absent from the photographic narrative. The absent ones can broadly be defined as the individuals, events, and narratives that are excluded, actively silenced, and erased from these historical images and the archives that hold them. These absences often reveal underlying biases or agendas. When looking at the photographs, ask yourself: Who is the absent person? This could be someone present the moment the photograph was taken, but not represented in the photograph or its archival context. It could be a person absent from the event, or even someone who is missing in the sitter's life. From an archival point of view, I pose the following question: What related event or photograph did not make it into the historical record? What happened just before the photograph was taken? What, for example, did Zealy have to do in order to

bring his sitters to take off their clothes? The absent events in an archive inevitably turn it into a subjective tool rather than an objective depository of neutral facts.

Similarly, Tina M. Campt (2017, chapter 3) employs a synesthetic method that enriches the analysis with the sound, smell, and taste of what the images portray, thereby transcending traditional forms of engagement with vernacular photography and archives. In the context of the series of daguerreotypes, the following questions can be posed: How did the people depicted in the images experience the smell of the chemical damps needed to develop the photographs? Could this have left a taste in their mouth? Were there people screaming, making sounds opposing the event that took place? This speculative nature of interpreting the past is akin to writing an (auto)biography: inherently subjective, even when the author narrates their own life story. It is incomplete, as is biography. It is never error-free, and it is telling the story in one's own terms. This speculative inquiry can be related to Gandhi's autobiographical 'experiments with truth' (Marcus 2018, 15). By adopting this methodology, this study acknowledges the uniqueness of the daguerreotypes and their historical records, enabling the construction of narratives that place these partially imagined personal histories within the reality of nineteenth-century African American slavery.

By employing the methods of Azoulay and Campt, the dignity of the subjects is not only recognised, but sought to be restored. Their objectification is stripped away in order to understand the depicted individuals and their experiences. Their portrayal as mere objects is refuted, and their personhood is highlighted, which is essential for reimagining their stories, recognising their full humanity, and the emotional impact of their involuntary representation. Together, these approaches allow us to read racialised photography with a newfound depth, employing empathy and imagination as tools to reinterpret and give voice to historical experiences. The first subsection of this chapter will build upon these methodological foundations to scrutinise the specific historical context in which these daguerreotypes were produced.

In the second section, after establishing the historical context, I then turn to explore the techniques applied in the re-appropriation of Delia, Renty, Drana, and Jack by the contemporary artists Carrie Mae Weems, Frida Orupabo, Jennifer Davis Carey, and Sasha Huber, focusing on the theme of re-victimisation. Drawing on Lorenzo Rinelli's (2021, 128) profound query, I focus on how formerly colonised and racialised subjects pierce the visual archive, not as passive spectators or mere objects, but as active participants. This approach fosters an interdisciplinary dialogue and propels activism

concerning the dissemination of images and personal data, thus deepening our historical comprehension of colonialism through artistic practices. The third subsection will then transition from this artistic engagement to the wider implications of such representations in contemporary technology and society.

The transition from the historical use of photography to current technologies reveals a transformation, yet also a reflection of past principles. The camera, historically used to categorise individuals during colonial times, now finds its parallel in facial recognition technology, balancing its role between empowerment and control (Rinelli 2021, 108; Sealy 2016, 3). This concept is further examined through an analysis of *The Recognition Machine* by Antje Van Wichelen, created with Nicholas Malevé and Michael Murtaugh in 2019, which serves as a case study for the third section's focus on archival reorganisation and the persistence of colonial practices in today's surveillance software. Addressing these issues without simplifying history is complex (Foliard 2022, 6), highlighting how such technologies can continue to marginalise and potentially echo past dehumanisation.

In grappling with the complex legacies of colonial imagery, this study prepares for a concluding discussion on their enduring relevance. An empathetic and critical examination of historical photographs reveals narratives that were once silenced. Such an approach not only enriches our historical comprehension, but also draws parallels to contemporary issues and activism concerning facial recognition and race in Belgium and the Netherlands. In this context, the persistent dynamics of surveillance and categorisation, reminiscent of the non-consensual exchange of images during the colonial era, raise pressing concerns. They compel us to critically reflect on current practices and their implications for individual privacy and autonomy.

Reframing Delia: Historical Context and Contemporary Reclamation

To fully appreciate the re-appropriation of Delia's image in contemporary art, and the critical engagement with colonial archives and the counter-archive exemplified by *The Recognition Machine*, first, the historical complexities that shaped colonial photography are given attention. This foundation is essential to understanding the significance of the artistic and archival responses that seek to address and reinterpret the colonial legacy.

In particular, the daguerreotype of Delia emerges as a poignant symbol of this era's dehumanising gaze. Her image – stark against a plain backdrop,

her hair arranged simply, her expression one of poignant resignation – is encased in an etui, which starkly contrasts with the subject's vulnerability. Accompanying her image is a note by naturalist Robert W. Gibbes, recording her as 'Delia, country born of African parents, daughter of Renty, Congo' (Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology n.d.). This caption, far from being a neutral descriptor, is an indicator in the act of her documentation (Hecimovich 2020, 89; Rogers 2020, 67). Agassiz's selection criteria for his photographic subjects not only reveal his obsessive pursuit of 'pure' racial types, a pursuit deeply rooted in the racial prejudices of his time but could also serve as evidence of ongoing illegal activities. In particular, his choice of subjects may indicate violations of laws against the importation of slaves, suggesting that the kidnapping and imprisonment of Africans in industrial labour camps may have continued despite its official cessation because of the supposed age of some of the men (e.g., Renty) in the images (Azoulay 2008, 181; Wallis 1995, 44). Physician Samuel G. Morton's possession of a photograph taken by Friedrich Langenheim in 1848 showing an African American child served as an important source of inspiration for Agassiz. It is plausible that this photograph, along with calls in European scientific journals for the establishment of an archive of the human species, further contributed to Agassiz's motivation. In this context, Agassiz must have been aware of the work of Édouard Thiesson, who, as early as 1844, was taking similar pictures of half-naked Black women in Lisbon, focusing on the breasts, thus making the link with photographic pornography readily apparent (Irmscher 2020, 210; Maxwell 2008, 25; Wallis 1995, 45).

Delia's photograph is an example of a uniform photographic style that facilitates examination and comparison, effectively erasing individuality and context to support racial classifications. Her facial expression seems to convey profound sadness, which can be seen in her direct gaze at the camera and the downturned corners of her mouth. It seems that she has been crying. Scholar in American history Molly Rogers (2010) must have had a similar feeling, for she entitled her book on this subject *Delia's Tears*. Delia's upper body is bare, while a piece of fabric is visible around her waist, probably from a dress. Such reframing implies that photographs participate in the construction and understanding of narratives, not just as passive objects, but as entities with agency that can 'speak' or 'reply' to viewers and other discourses.

Photographs are not only historical mirrors, but also serve as mediums for critical interaction with history and contemporary issues. Azoulay's (2008, 176–78) critique reveals the unseen aspects and events in photographs, raising questions about ethics and power, whereas Campt's (2017)

sensory-focused method invites a deeper, multi-sensory engagement with images like Delia's, beyond mere sight. Together, these approaches offer a profound interpretation of Delia's daguerreotype, recognising it as a narrative of her resilience. Contemporary scholars like Margareth Olin (2017) and Daniel Foliard (2022) encourage a critical examination of historical images. Olin (2017) views these photographs as participants in ongoing discourse, whereas Foliard (2022) cautions against modern readings that distort the past. They provide a lens to examine Delia's photograph beyond its surface, discussing its enduring statements on race, power, and colonial legacy (Olin 2017, 97–98).

Building upon critical and empathetic analyses, Delia's personal life through examination of historical records offers valuable insights. Greg Hecimovich's (2020) archival research reveals the broader socio-economic conditions that shaped her life. The will document of industrial labour camp owner Benjamin F. Taylor mentions Delia in relation to an individual named Sam, who was the industrial labour camp's blacksmith (79). Hecimovich concluded from the estate papers that Delia was imprisoned for work on Benjamin F. Taylor's Grub Field southwest of Columbia from at least 1850 to 1852. After Taylor's death, she was deported to the estate of Benjamin's sister-in-law, Sarah C. Taylor, to help pay outstanding debts of Benjamin F. Taylor's estate. She probably remained there until Sarah C. Taylor's death in 1857 and the settlement of the estate in 1859. After 1852, Delia's father and younger sister Molly were the only members of her family who remained (83).

The daguerreotypes reveal a spectrum of emotions under colonial duress, recorded often non-consensually. Modern curators and artists face an ethical conundrum: how to exhibit these works without continuing past harms? Hiding them could further side-line the depicted communities yet showcasing them demands sensitivity to prevent the subjects' re-victimisation. Consequently, this examination raises awareness about the exploitative character of these images and of non-consensual – colonial – photography in general, casting a critical light on nineteenth-century anthropological non-consensual photography. Historical images need a conscientious understanding of their complexities. On the one hand, there is the historical significance, and on the other the justified demand for dignity in display. This contributes to a more ethical engagement with a shared visual history that unravels the power dynamics of the era.

What did Delia tell Sam or Molly about the event? In considering who was absent when Delia's daguerreotype was captured, the common practice of family separation under slavery must be acknowledged. It is likely that her father, Renty, was present, but earlier separations in her life remain

undocumented and later separations, as mentioned above, are documented, leaving room for speculation about the deeper personal losses these photographs do not reveal. Mental distress, suicides, and infanticide were often the harrowing consequences of forced separations. The Dutch government has now admitted on its website that its history of slavery still resonates today.[2] The consequences of this history are opportunity inequality, discrimination, and racism, which lead to unequal treatment in, for example, education, employment, and the justice system.

Turning to the methodologies presented by Azoulay and Campt, the historical records support the human aspect that was given far too little attention before. Regarding the daguerreotype process, exposure to chemicals such as mercury fumes was involved in preparing and developing the plates. Whether the odour permeated the photo studio and the impression it may have left are unknowns, much like where Renty was when the daguerreotype was taken. How Delia perceived this is left to conjecture. These absent details from historical records accentuate the silent narratives lost over time, emphasising the necessity of a sensitive approach to these images, mindful of the subjects' lived experiences and creation contexts.

Appreciating these complexities is essential to their re-appropriation in modern art. Artists such as Jennifer Davis Carey, Sasha Huber, and Carrie Mae Weems connect eras, dignifying those portrayed while addressing the scars of colonialism. Delia's image, once a symbol of scientific objectification, is given new life by contemporary artists. They counteract her historical reduction as a mere 'subject' by infusing these depictions with individuality and humanising the voiceless through decolonial practice.

Olin's (2017) and Foliard's (2022) scholarship positions photographs as dynamic discourse participants, advising against projecting modern views onto historical images. They encourage delving into the implicit stories and emotions conveyed by portraits, such as pain and resilience. Contemporary artists use this emotional fabric to reinterpret these images, resonating with today's viewers. Acknowledging and empathising corresponds with Ibrahima Thiaw and Deborah Macks' (2020) viewpoint, who argue that confronting and actively engaging with these painful legacies is crucial. By addressing this history, the suffered inequalities of the conquered are acknowledged, ultimately offering comfort and care (150, 153).

2 Slavernijverleden Koninkrijk der Nederlanden.' 2019. Rijksoverheid.nl. https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/discriminatie-en-racisme/slavernijverleden/slavernijverleden-koninkrijk-der-nederlanden#:~:text=Op%2019%20december%202022%20heeft,zijn%20behandeld%20en%20geleden%20hebben.

As the discussion shifts to the works of Weems, Carey, Huber, and Orupabo, critical theories are employed to interpret their representation approaches and agency restoration. Their art contributes expansively to debates on identity, remembrance, and historical narrative.

Empowerment through Art: Decolonising Discourse and Societal Critique

This section begins with the artistic techniques of Weems, Carey, Huber, and Orupabo, whose works re-appropriate the daguerreotype of Delia and the others. These works are imbued with respect for the depicted, seen through the eyes of a woman who faces double othering because she is not white and because she is a woman – an approach that led Weems to use images like Delia's without Harvard's approval, an action that nearly resulted in legal repercussions and is thoroughly discussed in Yxta Murray's (2013) article 'From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried: Carrie Mae Weems' Challenge to the Harvard Archive'. The photographs, standardised in size and chromogenic print, shift from the tranquil blue of the initial and final images to the intense red of the intervening photographs. The blue induces a 'feeling blue' sentiment, while the red casts a sombre and more aggressive mood. Encased in black, circular mounts within ebony frames – the wood symbolising black skin, as acknowledged in the Black is Beautiful movement (Craig 2002, 143–44) – each image invites a gaze through what appears to be a photographic lens (Museum of Modern Art New York n.d.), hinting at the original voyeuristic capture of these individuals (Ponzanesi 2017, 168). This circular framing not only alludes to the invasive nature of the photography, but also, by resembling a medallion, bestows an emblematic heroism on the subjects. Weems's framing choices reflect the beauty standards promoted by Black is Beautiful and the broader societal embrace of Black culture, evidencing shifts in perception and representation. Yet this market influence does not diminish the necessity for decolonial practices. Rather, it emphasises that colonial images can be transformed to promote healing. By unifying the photographs in colour and size, Weems creates coherence and an egalitarian emphasis, with the larger blue frames suggesting an ancestral connection and encapsulating the journey's inception and conclusion.

Each framed image in Weems's series is overlaid with sandblasted Roman script and one musical score excerpt, introducing a reflective barrier, as noted by Weems ('Carrie Mae Weems on Her Series: *From Here*

I Saw What Happened and I Cried', 2011). The engraved texts labelled on the bare-chested figures of Delia, Renty, Jack, and Drana, highlight their reduction to scientific categories in the original images, now contrasted with Weems's textual reflection and dialogue directed at them and the audience.

> *YOU BECAME A SCIENTIFIC PROFILE* – Delia, *A NEGROID TYPE* – Renty, *AN ANTROPOLOGICAL DEBATE* – Jack *& A PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECT* – Drana.

In an interview podcast for the Museum of Modern Art New York, Weems stated:

> I'm trying to heighten a kind of critical awareness around the way these photographs were intended, and then of course, the way they are ultimately used by me as a strategy. That I hope gives the subject another level of humanity and another level of dignity that was originally missing in the photograph. (Museum of Modern Art New York n.d.)

In the title of the work, Weems employs the second-person pronoun *YOU* to engage with the depicted and her audience intimately – a technique highlighted in the *Hidden Witness* exhibition, where booklets prompted viewers to relate personally to the images (Liss 1995, 21). Although Weems has not revealed the details of the booklets, which may be due to their intimate nature, it seems that her strategy is to encourage interactive viewing. By reframing the photographs, she challenges the passive consumption of images, encouraging viewers to recognise the subjects as individuals, rather than as the 'scientific objects' they were reduced to. Her work re-appropriating iconic African American photographs actively critiques and reshapes the production of academic knowledge in favour of a multifaceted agenda that includes personal and collective memory, narrative and storytelling, interrogation of power dynamics, knowledge production, sexuality and the aesthetics of re-appropriation.

At ArtsWorcester's 2021 exhibition *Redemption*, Jennifer Davis Carey presented her *Redemptions* series, utilising an innovative technique of blending photography with enamel on copper, producing vivid hues. She depicted Delia and the others in refined attire and African textiles, directing focus towards dignity and ancestry (ArtsWorcester n.d.; 'Artist Talk. Jennifer Davis Carey: Redemption (Part 2)', 2022). These updated portrayals, encased in copper vintage cases, evoked personal heirloom photographs. In a critique

Figure 12.1. Sasha Huber, *Tailoring Freedom,* 2021, Metal staples on photograph on wood, 97 x 69 cm, Courtesy the artist and Tamara Lanier, http://www.sashahuber.com/?cat=10093&lang=fi&mstr=4.

of historical narrative construction, Carey incorporated Agassiz's texts and daguerreotypes into folders within an artwork titled *According to the Professor*, aiming to counteract further harm. Additionally, audio interviews of formerly enslaved individuals were included, deepening audience connection with the subjects' humanity (ArtsWorcester n.d.).

In *Tailoring Freedom* (fig. 12.1), Huber dressed Delia, Renty, Jack, Drana, Fassena, Jem, and Alfred in her signature staple practice, drawing inspiration from the dress styles of prominent abolitionists in African American history, such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman (Crooks 2022, 163, 165; Sharpe 2022, 159). This series was on view as part of her solo exhibition *You Name It* (2022–2024). Huber, who has researched and critiqued Agassiz over the years, made a significant number of artworks concerning him in a broader context than the daguerreotypes alone.

In 2004, Huber began her stapling practise, which consists of painting images on wood with a metal stapler. The stapler is a metaphor for a weapon, but also refers to its daily use as an organiser of documents (Mignolo 2022, 146; Sharpe 2022, 157). Her methodology evolved from making portraits 'shooting back' at people in power, to 'stitching together colonial wounds' of people who were oppressed (Pekkarinen 2020). Her activism led to the re-naming of Louis Agassiz Street in Neuchatel, Switzerland, into Tilo Frey

Street, named after the first Swiss member of parliament of African descent (Fässler 2022, 36).

The photomontages of Frida Orupabo are made of different layers, and in their final assemblage, Orupabo pins them permanently together. At times, the images reach a point at which they become violent because of the composition of the images, which are unusual, provocative and cause a certain discomfort when looking at them. Art curator Stefanie Hessler (2021) interprets this approach as an imperative to dismantle systems of control across race, gender, beauty, and class, advocating for their disruption and deconstruction: A form of reparation as if the harm and violence in the images can be fixed (24).

Delia is part of an assembled body with scarification on the trunk. The scarification of the body – often represented as decorative elements – is related to African cosmology or social status. Depicted in a charged, assertive pose with a male hand clutching a cigarette, the figure is breaking away from traditional racial and gendered narratives. This bold image challenges the observer with a direct gaze, drawing parallels to the Dadaist works of Hannah Höch, who disrupted conventional binaries and provoked reflection on cultural 'otherness' in her *Ethnographic Museum* series. In contrast, Okwui Enwezor (2010) critiques Höch's approach as merely creating 'Surrealist fantasies of otherness' (29). Orupabo's work continues to push these boundaries, compelling viewers to confront the complex dialogues of race, identity, and agency.

Orupabo's work aims to empower those depicted, urging audiences to acknowledge their humanity. Her technique, for instance, reconstructs Delia within a multifaceted collage, prompting viewers to ponder the visual narrative, which is rich in interpretative possibilities. In all these works, the once passive subjects are recast as dynamic figures in their own stories.

Artists like Huber and Carey, contributing to de-victimisation discourse, now portray these historical figures in a familiar way. Both choose to reunite fathers and daughters in one image. They employ a decolonial practise in which the people photographed are visually brought to life and treated as individuals deserving of proper appreciation. This distinction is highlighted by Cherise Smith (2019, 46).

Carey donated the profit of the works to the Black Excellence Academy in Worcester (MA), which organises afterschool programmes ('Artist Talk. Jennifer Davis Carey: Redemption (Part 1)', 2022), thereby effectively challenging systemic inequalities. Huber donated *Tailoring Freedom* – Delia and Renty – 97 x 69 cm – to Tamara Lanier's family, descendants of Renty, as a comfort and to bring them home (Sharpe 2022, 160).

Orupabo deconstructs the objectification of the Black body, while interdisciplinary dialogues intersecting history and activism highlight the necessity of acknowledging alternative histories, critiquing racial inequalities and image gaps in traditional archives. Artefacts re-appropriated for these purposes not only challenge systemic injustices, but also pave the way for understanding and healing within the broader narrative of history and tolerance.

Colonial Archives and Facial Recognition Databases

In this final section, parallels are drawn between colonial archives and facial recognition databases, especially in their retention of biased imagery acquired without consent. The invisible operation of facial recognition technology, often unnoticed by those captured, parallels the consent issues of colonial archives (Fontes et al. 2022, 9). Transparency and fairness in data management are underscored as ethical imperatives to ensure usage serves the public interest (Fontes et al. 2022, 10). While European governments enforce stringent policies such as Article 7 of the European Data Protection Directive (Directive 95/46/EC) for identity verification,[3] the application of facial recognition by private firms is often less regulated, presenting notable challenges to consent and data sovereignty.

An example was provided when Cher Scarlett, an American computer engineer, utilised PimEyes to delete personal, explicit images (Hill 2022). Despite payment for their removal, the images remained accessible. Informed of this, PimEyes CEO Giorgi Gobronidze indicated that manual, regular deletion was necessary, offered a refund, and noted the availability of a free tool on their website. PimEyes, which advises users to search only for their own faces, lacks control over its mainly American and European users. Described as 'stalkerware' by policy adviser Ella Jakubowska of European Digital Rights (Hill 2022), it leaves individuals vulnerable to abuses like revenge porn. The indiscriminate uploading of images without consent, ignoring privacy rights, is a central concern. Additionally, European web publishers, using American servers, elude accountability for content such

3 Article 7 of Directive 95/46/EC allows personal data to be processed only if there is unambiguous consent, if it is necessary for the performance of a contract, if it is required by law, if it is essential for the protection of vital interests, if it is necessary for a task carried out in the public interest or by a public authority, or if there are legitimate interests that do not override the data subject's rights and freedoms.

as racist propaganda – a practice that remains out of reach for European enforcement (Sorensen 2005, 167, 169–70). In comparison, the images of colonised individuals were distributed without their consent, their privacy rights scarcely acknowledged, and effectively treated as property by others. Lessons from daguerreotypes reveal the extent of this abuse, underscoring the importance of de-victimising the subjects and looking beyond mere portrayal.

The Recognition Machine (fig. 12.2) is presented as a re-appropriated artwork questioning facial recognition technology and its colonial parallels, aimed at refining categorisation within photographic archives and personal datasets. Developed by Antje Van Wichelen, in collaboration with Nicholas Malevé and Michael Murtaugh, *The Recognition Machine* (2019) employs 16 mm film to reinterpret nineteenth-century colonial archives. The artwork's deliberately flawed colonial portraits, aiming to unsettle and challenge viewers, reflect the artists' critical engagement with historical imagery through computational methods. It utilises an existing algorithm to merge altered colonial images from various ethnographic archives, such as the AfricaMuseum (BE) and Rautenstrauch Joest Museum (DE). Participants' self-portraits are algorithmically matched with similar emotions from a nineteenth-century colonial photographic database, employing seven emotional labels from the Facial Expression Recognition 2013 dataset (The Recognition Machine n.d.) of nearly 30,000 images where each image is assigned a label representing an emotion. FER trains a statistical model which allows a computer program to automatically classify new (as yet unseen) images based on the seven emotion labels it is assigned. This interactive artwork using FER engages viewers by integrating them into a decolonial archive, prompting reflection on their 'emotional match' and encouraging exploration of the original archives. This act fosters a global dialogue, facilitating a connection between past and present.

Upon taking a self-portrait, participants typically question their appearance and resemblance to the 'emotional match' from the database. This reflection is not the goal; rather, it is to prompt contemplation on the nature of emotion recognition by humans versus algorithms. The often-ambiguous portraits elicit thoughts of past lives and the enduring legacies of those depicted, resonating with Barthes's (1981, 6) concept of photographs as a return of the deceased, and Gordon's (2008, 168) notion of ghosts representing lingering social figures, whether they depict the deceased or the still living. The de-victimisation strategy, which equates the image's subject to

Figure 12.2. Antje Van Wichelen and SICV, *The Recognition Machine*, 2018, website, https://recognitionmachine.vandal.ist.

the viewer through 'emotional matching', serves as an act of reparation, shielding the portrayed from further harm.

The colonial archives' dehumanising nature is illustrated by an anthropometric photograph from the Pitt Rivers Museum ('1998.311.122', n.d.), which, despite its historical value, features no human reference in its categorisation. In the photograph, a barefoot, minimally dressed man is kneeling on the ground, holding a long wooden tool with both hands. He is muscular and wears a simple loincloth. His expression is serious as he looks directly at the camera. The background is dark and plain, probably a studio set, with a tall anthropometric measuring device next to him. This approach is critiqued by *The Recognition Machine*, which employs numerical categories to prompt discussion. Respectful re-categorisation that acknowledges indigenous dignity is advocated, requiring a commitment to long-term equity (Benjamin 2019, ch. 5, doc. 43). Such categorisations, reflecting cultural narratives, inherently influence what is recognised as knowledge and what is marginalised (Olson 1998, 252).

When a category becomes unacceptable in an archive, it should be adjusted or removed. Whether in the context of the colonial archive or contemporary facial recognition technology, this process is best done through engaged debates and conversations with individuals and civil society groups. It is not only about the way in which those depicted are categorised, but also to what purpose.

Conclusion

It has been recognised that the re-victimisation of historical subjects is to be avoided by contesting past atrocities and legitimacy of inequality. It is with commitment that researchers such as Azoulay and Campt, and artists such as Weems, Huber, Carey, and Orupabo, engage with colonial archives and endeavour to address or produce imagery as part of a decolonising narrative. The descendants of Renty requested that their ancestor ought to be portrayed with humanity, demonstrating that de-victimisation is important for people with a family history of being oppressed. This revelation has led to a change in the way the daguerreotypes of Renty, Delia and others are reclaimed, in particular by presenting them in a more dignified way. Carey and Huber, through a technique of their own innovation, have been instrumental in this change.

The work of Weems, despite its near three-decade inception, opts not for adornment, but for a confrontation of the viewer with stark realities in an alternative manner. Alternatively, Orupabo creates provocative anonymous assembled images. They stare right back at their audience, prompting viewers to think about the image they see and how they feel about it. While Carey's and Huber's images appear less confrontational, what unifies these artists with Weems is the thematic of parental bonds within their creations. Orupabo, however, takes a different approach by creating image/photomontages in which various bits and parts come together to form an anonymous person or image. It is in part due to such artist-led re-appropriations and their introduction to public discourse that these images have ascended to iconic status.

Other measures, such as renaming and educational initiatives, have contributed to the de-victimisation of those depicted, thus ascribing to them the dignity of content. Some artists pay attention to the perceptions of their audience, gathering feedback, but the sharing of such insights remains limited. This lack of shared reactions underlines the significance of *The Recognition Machine* within this research. Audience comments are presented for a better understanding of different emotions and experiences in colonial and non-consensual photography in general. Yet, the contributions are few, perhaps due to a lack of awareness of the value such input holds for artistic evolution. Additionally, the interactive nature of *The Recognition Machine* as encountered during moments of leisure might not encourage visitors to engage in the reflective practice necessary for providing in-depth feedback. The setting or the way in which the machine solicits responses may not be conducive to the kind of contemplation that yields extensive commentary.

Further, parallels have been drawn between colonial photographic archives and the personal data of the present, underscoring the subject depicted not only as historical, but also as reflective of the viewer or

participant, thereby encapsulating a universal experience of image misuse and the imperative of consent in facial recognition technology. These facets are critical in the portrayal of the individual, for once a victim's image has become a stereotype, reversing this perception proves challenging.

With renewed appreciation for the subjects both within and beyond the Afro-American context, this chapter calls for global engagement with the following questions: How might artistic practices evolve to address and heal collective historical traumas across diverse cultures? In what ways can emerging technologies foster a decolonial approach to historical narratives in archives and ensuring ethical engagement? These queries beckon a more inclusive and universal discourse, considering local differences such as those in the neerlandophone space, extending the significance of the work beyond its current scope.

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13. Imagining Dutch Slavery Legacies Through the Rural-Urban Divide in the TV Show *Grenslanders*

Anke Bosma

Abstract: The Netherlands is often imagined as dichotomously divided into the 'Randstad' and the rest of the country (sometimes referred to as the 'province') and often issues related to colonial legacies are imagined similarly. Such a view of the Netherlands ignores the lasting negative impacts of colonial legacies throughout the Netherlands. This chapter explores how imaginations of colonial legacies, in particular the transatlantic slave trade, and imaginations of the rural-urban divide interact with and co-construct one another by analysing the TV programme *Grenslanders* ('Borderlanders'; dir. Erik de Bruyn 2019). The show focusses on a human trafficking ring located in rural Zeelandic Flanders, tracing back its history to the transatlantic slave trade. I contend that on the one hand, the show mounts an effective critique of the role of the imagination of the rural within a colonialist worldview, by revealing the horror of the idea of the 'idyllic' countryside. On the other hand, however, the show ultimately also relies on colonial narratives. Moreover, the ruralisation of the province of Zeeland perpetuates rural stereotypes and forecloses any critique of colonial legacies as systemic by distancing its locus from the mainstream and thereby making it into an anomaly.

Keywords: Transatlantic slave trade; the rural; Zeeland; *Grenslanders*; rural-urban divide; social imaginary

Introduction

The Netherlands is often imagined as dichotomously divided into 'the Randstad' and 'the province'. The Randstad is the urban conglomerate in the

Paijmans, Marrigje, and Karwan Fatah-Black, eds. *Slavery in the Cultural Imagination: Debates, Silences, and Dissent in the Neerlandophone Space*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025. DOI 10.5117/9789463728799_CH13

mid-west of the country, which contains the four largest Dutch cities: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. Any part of the Netherlands that falls outside this area (not including the Caribbean parts of the Dutch kingdom, which are virtually invisible in the mainstream imagination of the Netherlands)[1] is sometimes referred to as the *regio* (region) or, as I will do in this chapter, the *provincie* (province). These parts of the Netherlands are somewhat more rural, although this is not an absolute divide. Five of the ten most populous cities in the Netherlands are located outside the Randstad, and even the remotest villages are never far from a larger town. The Randstad also includes the famous tulip fields and 'het Groene Hart' ('the Green Heart') – a relatively sparsely populated area primarily used for agriculture and recreation.

Nonetheless, 'Randstad' and 'province', especially in popular depictions of the latter on film and TV, are imagined along an urban-rural divide. Even larger towns and cities in the 'province' are usually represented as much smaller, more rural, and more isolated than they actually are. Additionally, such portrayals of the Dutch countryside are often idyllic.

This imagined divide also influences the public debate on the Dutch colonial past. Issues related to colonial legacies – be it systemic racism, for example in the form of 'Black Pete',[2] or the renaming of streets currently named after perpetrators of colonial violence – are often imagined along the same lines. Some conservatives argue that progressive changes are being wrongly imposed upon parts of the Netherlands by appealing to the false idea that colonialism was only done from and for the major cities in the Randstad. This argument is further bolstered by the common imagination of the rural as a white space, in which people of colour are made invisible.

1 Typically, when 'the Netherlands' is referenced, it is imagined as just the European area, even though technically, the islands of Bonaire, Saba, and Sint Eustatius are part of the Dutch nation. The Kingdom of the Netherlands also includes the constituent states Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten. The European borders in the Caribbean are often unacknowledged, also for other European countries (Boatcã 2017, 198).

2 The Dutch equivalent to Santa Claus, Sint Nicolaas, traditionally had (and sometimes still has) a 'helper' named Zwarte Piet, or 'Black Pete': a blackface character with curly black hair, large gold hoop earrings, and exaggerated red lips. Many people in the Netherlands, especially Black people, have long objected to the character. In the 2010s, this opinion slowly started to gain traction after an increasing number of demonstrations, starting with one by Quinsy Gario and Jerry Afriyie in 2011, when they explicitly called out 'Black Pete' as being racist. These protests elicited vehement and aggressive reactions from many, mostly white people, and it became a heated national debate (for an extended discussion and critique of these reactions, see Wekker 2016, 139–67). As I write this in 2022, public opinion has generally shifted towards acceptance of the new iteration of 'Black Pete': 'soot Pete'. Still, many hold to the racist caricature. For a more detailed discussion of the 'Black Pete' debate, see also chapter 10 in this volume.

As I have argued elsewhere on the basis of Sara Ahmed's 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', George Yancy's *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, and Fred Moten's *In the Break*, the prominence of the idyll in rural imaginations exacerbates this view, because it projects the rural as a completely knowable space, which facilitates a racialised regime of visibility where white people are perceived as fitting in perfectly and people of colour's hypervisibility is reinforced (Bosma 2023). Based on the same false rural-urban dichotomy, in the imaginations of progressives the Randstad is sometimes cast as forward thinking and the rest of the Netherlands as 'backwards' (Smouter 2017). The lasting negative impacts of colonial legacies across the Netherlands are thus ignored.

As argued by Gloria Wekker (2016) in *White Innocence*, ignoring the colonial past is central to the collective Dutch memory. Wekker states that white Dutch people tend to think of themselves as tolerant, colour-blind, and innocent. In the mainstream national narrative, the Dutch are not perpetrators of colonial violence, but victims of the Nazi occupation during the Second World War. Wekker contends that the wealth amassed during the seventeenth century (still often referred to as the 'Golden Age') and maintained during the Netherlands' imperial period is imagined to have come from 'trade', whilst the violence accompanying such trade, including that done to enslaved Africans and the genocidal acts committed in the Americas and Indonesia, are omitted from the story white Dutch people tell about themselves (12–15). As she rightly remarks, regional differences, rather than race, 'have been foregrounded as the primary differences that need to be taken into account when examining our culture' (Wekker 2016, 21).

However, in her book Wekker does not examine how such regional differences, for example rural-urban divisions, figure in the Dutch collective imagination of its colonial past. I want to build on Wekker's work and explore how the regional differences that are so often foregrounded in the Netherlands intersect with the Dutch understanding of its colonial past. In addition, I will investigate how whiteness and rurality are intertwined by building on her notion of white innocence as well as on the work of scholars such as Saidiya Hartman and Charles W. Mills.

In the British context, as Corinne Fowler (2020, 5–6) argues, the rural is not usually imagined as containing colonial traces, despite the fact that country houses were often built with colonial wealth. The Dutch too often imagine the rural to be a particularly white, innocent space. Country houses built on colonial wealth can also be found in Zeeland (van den Broeke 2016, 45), with further examples throughout the Netherlands (Vogelzang 2018, 26). Indeed, research undertaken by Dienke Hondius, Nancy Jouwe, Dineke

Stam, and Jennifer Tosch (2019, v) reveals sites connected to legacies of slavery in every province in the Netherlands. However, it was not only the urban wealthy who were part of the Dutch colonial enterprise: for example, the international crews of the ships also drew heavily from the Dutch rural population.[3] There was a significant interaction between the rural and the urban when it came to the accumulation of colonial wealth. In the case of the province of Zeeland, the money made in the cities Middelburg and Vlissingen, including from the slave trade, was invested in the countryside, which resulted in profits that were then in turn poured into urban enterprise. It was precisely this symbiosis between the rural and the urban that made the province wealthy (van Cruyningen 2014, 101).

In order to understand how imaginations of colonial legacies and those of the rural-urban divide interact with and co-construct one another, I will analyse the Dutch-Belgium detective show *Grenslanders* ('Borderlanders'; dir. Erik de Bruyn 2019). I will do so using a cultural analysis approach. Rather than applying theory to an object, cultural analysis takes what theoretical concepts contribute to understanding an object as seriously as how cultural objects might transform concepts through their mutual encounter (Bal 2007, 36). In this case, through my close reading of *Grenslanders*, I want to further an understanding of concepts such as rurality and white innocence. Whilst my aim is to be critical of whiteness, I also acknowledge my limitations in this, as I am a white scholar working in Dutch academia, which is in itself centred on whiteness.

Unusually for Dutch popular media, the TV show deals with the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and how it reverberates in the present. The show is set in a rural area outside the Randstad in the province of Zeeland, where the creator, director, and writer of the show, Eric de Bruyn, grew up. Both he and the single other co-writer of the show, Rik D'hiet, are white and so the show can be characterised as a mostly white production. It was broadcast by the broadcasting corporation AVROTROS on Dutch public television, which aims to make programming for all Dutch population groups, as its website states: 'AVROTROS is the broadcaster for all of us. We emphasise that we are truly there for everyone.'[4] By analysing the show, I explore what the rural imagination it presents clarifies about colonial legacies and what it continues to obscure.

3 For example, of the Zeelandic people sailing for the Zeelandic chamber of the VOC between 1700 and 1760, around one in five were from rural areas (Delahaye et al. 2006, 64).

4 'AVROTROS is de omroep voor ons. Hiermee onderstrepen wij dat we er echt voor iedereen zijn.' https://www.avrotros.nl/over-avrotros/organisatie-bestuur/.

The main character in *Grenslanders* is a Black female police detective called Tara Dessel who, in the course of her work, has moved from Rotterdam (Randstad) to Zeelandic Flanders (province), the southernmost part of the province of Zeeland. There she encounters the case of a fourteen-year-old Black girl, Afi, who appears to have been trafficked to the Netherlands from Africa. As the series unfolds, it is revealed that the human traffickers operating in the area are a cult-like group called the 'Lorrendraaiers'. This group traces its history back to the transatlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century, when they started illegally capturing, selling, and buying enslaved persons. The group is led by a woman named Cornella Dingemanse, who wants her son, Tommy Dingemanse, to become the next leader. He is apprehensive, however, since, it is later revealed, he has fallen in love with Afi, who was forced to work as an unpaid maid in the Dingemanse mansion, and who is now pregnant with his child. Despite the fact that she is a minor and he is the son of her employer, this relationship is portrayed as mutually consensual and romantic. Meanwhile, a Chinese crime syndicate is trying to take over the Lorrendraaiers organisation. Eventually, all the traffickers are caught and arrested.

The setting in Zeeland is no coincidence, since this province played a particularly significant part in the transatlantic slave trade. The province was responsible for the trafficking of almost half of all enslaved people that were transported by the Dutch from Africa (Paesie 2010, 12). The reason why Zeeland focused so much of its economic activity on the slave trade was related to its peripheral position in relation to Amsterdam and Rotterdam. In the sixteenth century, as a consequence of war, the Dutch border was strategically drawn around Zeelandic Flanders. In 1587, during the Dutch revolt against the Spanish empire (1566–1648), the Dutch forces captured the area in order to block the port of Antwerp – then a major trade hub for the Spanish loyalists. Zeelandic cities such as Middelburg and Vlissingen had benefitted from their proximity to Antwerp, but after the blockade Zeeland effectively went from being at the centre to being peripheral. As a result, a significant amount of economic activity was moved to cities in the county of Holland, which has lent its name to the current provinces of North and South Holland, which encompass most of the Randstad, such as Amsterdam (Paesie 2014, 18).

In his book Lorrendrayen op Africa, Ruud Paesie (2008, 19–21) describes how, in 1621, the Dutch state granted the West India Trading Company (WIC) a monopoly on the Atlantic trade, including the slave trade. Non-WIC traders were considered smugglers. In *Grenslanders*, the name 'Lorrendraaiers' is used for the cult involved in human trafficking, but in the seventeenth and

eighteenth century, lorrendraaiers was a common term for smugglers and smuggling ships (Paesie 2008, 15). Smuggling was not a marginal phenomenon; at times the illegal slave trade exceeded the official numbers (Paesie 2008, 332). Furthermore, historical lorrendraaier' did not exclusively smuggle people; around two thirds of such smugglers were not involved in the slave trade (Paesie 2008, 329).

The WIC had a chamber in Middelburg, Zeeland, and whilst around twenty percent of WIC slave ships sailed from Zeeland, its main office was in Amsterdam and two thirds of slave ships sailed from Holland (Paesie 2010, 3). Zeelandic merchants were convinced that the WIC monopoly had been put in place by Hollanders to further destroy the Zeelandic economy. As a result, local governments did not prosecute smugglers (Paesie 2008, 331–32). In the heyday of smuggling, from 1685 to 1720, it was a distinctively Zeelandic activity, and over seventy-five percent of lorrendraaiers were from Zeeland.[5] Smuggling started to decline after 1720, when the Middelburg Commercial Company (MCC) was established. Many merchants who had made their money in smuggling now invested in this legal trading company (Paesie 2008, 330). After the dismantling of the monopoly of the WIC in 1730, the MCC became increasingly involved in the transatlantic slave trade. As Paesie (2008, 74–75) states, the MCC was effectively little more than an organised and legalised continuation of the illegal trade in goods and human beings from West Africa. The final MCC slave ship set sail in 1803 (Paesie 2010, 10).

In placing Zeeland's involvement in the slave trade centre stage, *Grenslanders* highlights a violent history that has hitherto often been glossed over. This suggests that *Grenslanders* takes a very different approach to the typical representation of the Dutch countryside as an essentially isolated place. *Grenslanders* frequently uses establishing shots of large container ships looming over small towns to illustrate how international trade is tied to the area, which its plot specifies as including human trafficking and, historically, slavery. At the same time, however, *Grenslanders* makes reference to, and plays with, the idyllic image that exists of the peripheral areas of the Netherlands. The way the community in this area is portrayed

5 See Paesie (2008, 329-30). At the same time, it is important to note that there were also *lorrendraaiers* in Holland (Paesie 2008, 129). Zeelandic smugglers frequently worked closely with people in Holland, as well as with people from other European countries (Paesie 2008, 131). Legal and illegal trade were also not completely separate. Investors in smuggling ships and the WIC were part of the same network and, indeed, were sometimes the same people (Paesie 2008, 131). Smugglers also leached off the WIC by bribing officials for the use of trading posts (Paesie 2008, 331). In addition, the WIC would sometime hire lorrendraaiers (Paesie 2008, 333).

has many similarities to this rural idyll: everyone knows everyone, there is an active grapevine, and there is a local bar that everyone frequents. However, in contrast to many other depictions, *Grenslanders* portrays a community that, rather than being romanticised, is ultimately portrayed negatively, as enabling the persistence of criminal, dehumanising, and racist practices.

In playing with the idyll rather than reinforcing it, *Grenslanders* resembles what David Bell (1997) describes as the 'anti-idyll': a genre in which an idyll is conjured up and then dispelled by turning common romanticised myths about rurality on their heads. The anti-idylls Bell focuses on are US horror films in which the rural-urban division is central. Typically, the urban person is the innocent victim who finds themselves in an isolating and alien rural environment full of 'monsters' (sometimes literal, sometimes figurative), who are depicted as originating from the rural. The films start with the arrivals from the city in search of the escapist pleasures of the rural, but by the end of the narrative, 'their innocent picture of the countryside – as a place passed through or to holiday in – is forever bloodied' (Bell 1997, 96).

Whilst *Grenslanders* is not a carbon copy of this pattern, it does clearly allude to it. Tara is an urbanite who goes rural, stating that she is looking for 'fresh air' and 'peace and quiet' (episode 1). When she arrives to take up her new job, however, she finds herself physically and socially isolated. She is perceived by the rural community as an outsider, an urban newcomer who does not understand the local customs.

The tight-knit community portrayed as exclusionary is a central feature of Bell's (1997) anti-idyll, in which '"local patriotism" merges into xenophobia' (94). Indeed, as Lauren Alexandra Sowa (2022) argues in her article comparing female detectives in *Grenslanders* and *Law & Order: SVU*, 'discrimination based on [Tara's] intersecting identities of race and gender is apparent' (429). As soon as she arrives, Tara is referred to in racist terms by the police receptionist. Over the course of the show, she endures several more racist slurs from the villagers, all of whom are white. Tara encounters no people of colour who live in the area: a false representation of the rural as a homogenously white space. The idyllic 'peace and quiet' Tara claims to seek is never available to her, because she is excluded from it on the basis of her race. Even the suggestion that she sought an idyll in the first place turns out to be false, as in the penultimate episode, it is revealed that Tara went to the area not for personal reasons, but to follow a lead in a police investigation.

Despite Black communities in the Netherlands being far from monolithic, Black people are often treated, both in general and in the media, in a way

that glosses over cultural specificities.[6] This is also largely the case for the character of Tara, who is an example of a general transnational trope of Blackness: the Black female cop is a variation of the strong Black woman, or angry Black woman, which has its roots in the Sapphire Caricature (Pilgrim 2008, 212). Although the series presents Tara in a way that parallels some characteristics of this racialised trope – she is at times stubborn, bitter, and selfish – the show frames these as urban characteristics. Two aspects of Tara's identity, namely Blackness and urbanness, are thus linked together, and inform the clash between her and the white rural locals. Despite the parallels with the Sapphire Caricature, however, Tara is not a one-dimensional trope and the show is mostly focalised through her. Whilst viewers are prompted to find her anger and irritation at the locals somewhat off-putting at first, the audience is later prompted to sympathise with her as Tara's personality is given depth and vulnerability, and a trauma in her past is revealed. Moreover, her anger and irritation at the locals is soon revealed to be justified, as the audience incrementally learns of more and more locals being involved in the human trafficking enterprise.

These revelations imply that the entire community might be villainous and that it is precisely the tightness of the seemingly idyllic community that allows this. Even those who do not consciously assist the Lorrendraaiers are unknowingly implicated in their activities. This is most pertinently the case for Tara's superior, Harry Biegel. It is only confirmed that he is not part of the criminal organisation halfway through the final episode. Until then, he appears suspicious because he continually stands up for the locals, taking their side when Tara suspects them and condoning their racist remarks. Multiple times he reiterates the sentiment that 'we do things our own way around here', including himself in the local collective. In episode three, he and Tara discuss Cornella, who at that point in the show has not yet been unmasked as the leader of the Lorrendraaiers, but has been portrayed as an insider in the community:

Harry: You know, Dessel, people here know one another, make time for one another. This is the borderland over here, we do things our own way here.
Tara: But you understand that [Cornella] is constantly provoking me, right?

6 Rather than *a* Black community in the Netherlands, it is more appropriate to refer to Black communities in the plural. They include people who have roots in the former Dutch colony of Suriname and in the Dutch Caribbean Islands, but also people who can trace their origins to specific places in Africa, without the interjection of a setting in the Americas (Wekker 2009, 282).

Harry: People are a little bit different here, not quite as, uhm, polished as in Holland. Cornella may be a bit, uhm…
Tara: Rude.
Harry: Straightforward. But, a good person nonetheless.[7]

Harry not only stands up for Cornella, but does so on the basis of a notion of the idyllic community as a place that is essentially good and where problems can only come from outside. He conceives of the borderland as distinctive from the urban centre, which he calls 'Holland', referring to the provinces North and South Holland. The way he draws this opposition evokes a kind of defensive pride: he seems to believe people in Holland look down upon those in 'his' area for not being 'polished', and thus he defends them by claiming a superiority grounded in social cohesion.

Harry's belief that his community cannot harbour criminals because it is close-knit is reminiscent of how social control in rural villages can lead to a decrease in crime, but in other cases 'high cohesiveness can facilitate and support offending behaviour' (Somerville, Smith, and McElwee 2015, 222). Shared norms can, for example, allow for certain crimes, such as domestic violence, to be socially accepted. In addition, people might be more likely to turn a blind eye to crimes committed by people within their close-knit community. Through its depiction of Harry's naiveté, *Grenslanders* highlights the way in which high social cohesiveness can facilitate crime in the way Somerville, Smith, and McElwee (2015) discuss. Harry's propensity to 'turn a blind eye' is extreme: he is so invested in the idea of the idyllic community that he has let a criminal organisation thrive from the day he started working in the area as a police officer. Moreover, by opposing Tara he actually facilitates the criminal organisation's cover-up.

The show's critique of an idyllic notion of rurality is expressed most explicitly in episode four. This episode features a scene on a remote piece of land at night, a threatening locale made even more sinister by the figures in it: a group of masked cult members. They are holding guns, which is unusual for the Dutch context, and suggests they are conspiring to do something violent: the scene is a visual reference to the Ku Klux Klan. Led by Carlos Tierenteyn, a customs officer, the cult members proceed to force Cornella's

7 Harry: 'Weet je Dessel. De mensen kennen elkaar hier, maken tijd voor elkaar. Dit is het grensland hier, hier doen we de dingen op onze eigen manier.' Tara: 'U begrijpt toch wel dat ze mij de hele tijd loopt te provoceren.' Harry: 'De mensen hier zijn een beetje anders, no zo, eh, gepolijst als in Holland. Cornella is misschien wat, eh…' Tara: 'Asociaal?' Biegel: 'Rechtuit. Maar wel een goed mens' (episode 3 34:35). All translations are by the author.

son Tommy to get into a coffin and they then bury him alive. This scene reads as a shift to the horror register, even when it is revealed that it was actually an initiation ceremony: for the Lorrendraaiers, being buried alive is the ultimate marker of belonging because it is a literal embedding in the land. This embedding is linked to racist ideas in a speech Carlos delivers at the ceremony:

Carlos: Companions! Companion Lorrendraaiers, friends! Our ancestor once said: 'I do not part with ground of the forefathers whose bravery made it our inheritance.' Indeed, we should not. We do not choose where we are born. Likewise, we do not choose from whose loins we spring. However, even though we do not have a say in these things at all, we will never betray our birth ground, never!
Cult: Never!
Carlos: Never!
Cult: Never!
Carlos: We will always stay loyal to the ground we stem from, always!
Cult: Always!
Carlos: Always!
Cult: Always!
Carlos: The ground is ours! It belongs only to us! Whoever betrays their birth ground commits a crime that can only be compared to the betrayal of one's own parents. The betrayal of one's own blood.[8]

Both the act of initiation through burial and the speech glorify the rootedness of the local community that is so central to the rural idyll, which is marked by 'a grafting of life and its events to a place, to a familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies' (Bakhtin 1996, 225). This rootedness is often romanticised and as such tends to be accepted as natural by the general Dutch population (Bosma and Peeren 2021, 116). In his speech, Carlos says

8 'Kameraden! Kameraden Lorrendraaiers, vrinden! Ons voorvader heeft ooit gezegd: ik sta geen grond der vaderen af wier kloekheid ons dat erfdeel gaf. Wij moeten dat inderdaad niet doen. We hebben niet te kiezen waar we geboren worden. Gelijk dat wij niet te kiezen hebben uit wiens schoot wij geworpen worden. Maar, ook al hebben wij daar totaal geen inspraak over, wij zullen onze geboortegrond nooit verraden, nooit!' Iedereen: 'Nooit!' Carlos: 'Nooit!' Iedereen: 'Nooit!' Carlos: 'Wij blijven altijd trouw aan de grond waaruit wij voortgekomen zijn. Altijd!' Iedereen: 'Altijd!' Carlos: 'Altijd!' Iedereen: 'Altijd!' Carlos: 'De grond is van ons! Hij behoort alleen ons toe! Wie zijn geboortegrond verraad, die pleegt een misdaad die alleen te vergelijken is met het verraad aan de eigen ouders. Het verraad aan het eigen bloed' (episode 4 6:00).

the ground is of their forefathers, and he later equates this ground to one's parents and one's blood. The show thus explicitly evokes blood and soil nativism, an ideology in which genetics are tied to land and are taken to determine who has the right to that land (Soborski 2013, 112). The way in which this scene is coded as horrifying within the series encourages viewers to recognise the idyllic glorification of rootedness as sinister and reveals the horror inherent in such ideas.

After the speech, Cornella arrives at the scene and is revealed to be the leader of the Lorrendraaiers. When this is revealed, and also in later scenes, Cornella appears in an elaborate dress and coat made from luxury fabrics that look historical. Significantly, she is dressed very differently from how she presented herself to Harry and Tara in earlier scenes. In those scenes, she wore simple, loose-fitting outfits associated with rurality. Cornella also has two houses that function like her clothing. Her official address is an old brick farmhouse in the Netherlands, but the place where she is truly at home is a large mansion in Belgium. The first aligns with a typical image of the rural Netherlands, whilst the second is linked to a mostly disavowed colonial rural. The mansion is white, with this colour constituting a visual reference to colonial buildings in Indonesia and Suriname, as well as a symbolic reference to the whiteness of its owners. The interior of the mansion features models of ships and displays with a rudder and several sabres and guns. These displays are reminiscent of Dutch colonial museum exhibitions in which, historically, weapons featured heavily as a display of conquest (Bosma 2018, 229–30). Cornella and her family are members of an upper-class elite, but she strategically uses the accoutrements of lower-class rurality as a mask to hide who she really is: a mask that is particularly effective due to the association of (white) innocence with the Dutch countryside. Cornella's outfits and houses can thus be read as a critique of the amnesia that surrounds colonialism in the Netherlands: the jovial rural image hiding the colonial truth.

In contrast, several other aspects of the show reaffirm and rely on colonial narratives. In episode four, Afi, the trafficked girl who sparks Tara's investigation, is revealed to have worked for Cornella and Tommy in their mansion. Afi was unable to leave and had to clean and cook without being paid. Another trafficked woman, called Imelda, who is from the Philippines, was similarly confined, forced to work unpaid. The situation set up by the show, then, is that of a white family in a house coded as colonial that has two women of colour working in a modern state of slavery. In this case, nevertheless, the show does not opt for a framing in the horror register. To the contrary, despite the unequal power relations (in terms of agency, age,

race, and class), Afi and Tommy are seen to be falling in love in a flashback that clearly espouses a romantic register. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman (1997, 109) writes that in sexual encounters between enslaved Black women and white men, for the women, the distinction between a degree of choice and nonconsent cannot be sustained. Nevertheless, in the context of chattel slavery in the United States, Black women who were victims of rape were often attributed agency with the claim that they had seduced their rapists. This narrative justified the sexual abuse of enslaved Black women through romanticisation: 'seduction erects a family romance – in this case, the elaboration of a racial and sexual fantasy in which domination is transposed into the bonds of mutual affection' (Hartman 1997, 89). No such exact narrative of seduction is employed in *Grenslanders*. Nevertheless, the possibility of consent for Afi would in reality be non-existent, and thus *Grenslanders*, like the narratives Hartman discusses, presents a benign representation of what in reality would be a case of sexual violence enacted upon an enslaved child.

Apart from the relationship, the portrayal of Afi and Imelda as characters also relies on colonial archives. Afi, who is only fourteen, and in contrast to Tara is hardly ever the focaliser, is portrayed as happy to become a mother. The fact that this teenage pregnancy is portrayed so positively is an instance of the adultification that is typical for the perception and portrayal of Black girls (Epstein, Blake, and González 2017, 1). Moreover, her portrayal as 'motherly' is in line with how women of colour have historically often been presented across imperial contexts: in the Southern United States in the guise of the 'mammy' character, and in Imperial Dutch Indonesia in that of the baboe (Chakraborty 2018, 18). Imelda is also presented as motherly: although she escapes the house and is thus presented as being defiant and as having some agency, she only does so at the moment she can help Tommy escape too. Both Imelda and Afi can be said to be rooted in transnational stereotypes of female domestic colonial servants of colour.

In addition, Afi's pregnancy is presented as carrying with it the promise of overcoming racism and the remnants of colonial violence. Tommy chooses Afi and their unborn child over continuing the white Lorrendraaier line. Because of this choice Tommy has the agency, irrespective of Tara's investigation, to bring an end to the cult. With this narrative, through the mixed-race baby, the series suggests the possibility of a post-racial future, in a way that glosses over the problematic origin of the baby and over the clear presence of racism in the area. The storyline espouses the idea that hybridity can 'exorcise the reality of unequal histories and identities' (Radhakrishnan 1996, 160). In one of the final scenes of the show, Tommy and Afi are happy

together in a bus that is driving, possibly away from the borderland area. This is a similar ending to a scene Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan (1996) describes as an example of the commodification of hybridity, in which 'two young lovers walk away into the rain in a Hollywood resolution of the agonies of history [...] the only thing that matters is the bonding between two bodies that step off the pages of history' (208). Indeed, reading this ending as the resolution that it is presented to be in *Grenslanders* requires the existence of a completely tolerant space that is not affected by the legacies of history. The show makes clear such a space does not exist in the borderland, but here suggests it might exist outside it.

The series can portray racism as relatively easy to overcome through the problematically romanticised relationship between Afi and Tommy because it does not present racism as a structural problem. This follows 'orthodox mainstream liberal understandings of the Western social order', which, according to Charles W. Mills (2017), 'frame race and racism as "anomalies" to an inclusivist liberal democracy' (476). The series' portrayal of Harry as an apologist in the face of the explicit racism Tara faces goes some way towards a portrayal of racism as systemic, but at the same time, Tara herself is a police officer too. Her being a representative of the power of the Dutch state supports the false idea of the neoliberal state as diverse and inclusive. The racist slurs, meanwhile, are attributed to cult members, which suggests racism in the Netherlands only occurs in sectarian organisations. *Grenslanders* thus follows the typical pattern of many television programmes, the bias of which is 'invariably towards an interpretation of racism as a personal affliction and not a problem of a white-dominated society or system' (Withall 1990, 51).

Moreover, the plot is almost entirely located in the remote borderland of Zeelandic Flanders. *Grenslanders* distances this rural community from the Netherlands in general, both geographically and by making use of negative rural stereotypes. In the Netherlands, a negative image of rural people is commonplace and the Dutch word for farmer, boer, can be used as a slur to denote an oafish, unmannered person. The locals in *Grenslanders* are presented as backwards and the racist ideology they espouse is identified as part of that backwardness. By distancing the cult in these ways, the show potentially endorses the problematic idea that culpability for racism and colonial legacies can be ascribed to a small group of overt racists at the margins of Dutch society so that the Netherlands' official and mainstream self-image as tolerant and non-racist can remain intact and unscathed.

The distancing and ruralisation of the area portrayed in *Grenslanders* is partially achieved through the representation of urban spaces, or lack thereof. As I mentioned earlier, it was precisely the symbioses between

Zeelandic cities and countryside that made the slave trade profitable for the province, but no Zeelandic cities are depicted in *Grenslanders* at all. There is only the remote area of Zeelandic Flanders and the city of Rotterdam, in the Randstad. Rotterdam, moreover, is not portrayed as part of the network of the Lorrendraaiers, but as the urban other that also contains another other: a Chinese-run human trafficking ring with ties to a triad. These traffickers are depicted as being from China – although specifically where in China is not explained – not as Chinese-Dutch, which could have also been the case, since people of Chinese descent have been part of the Dutch Empire for hundreds of years and have had a significant presence in the European part of the Netherlands for at least a century.[9] In the series, ultimately, these Chinese traffickers and not the Lorrendraaiers are the main threat and antagonist; they are the real target for Tara's investigation and the reason she came to Zeelandic Flanders.

Whilst there are Chinese human traffickers active in the Netherlands, unlike their depiction in the show, these are rarely tied to triads (Ramesar 2009). Hence their depiction in *Grenslanders* is an instance of the negative stereotypical figure of the sinister Chinese gangster – a common trope in Western literature and media since the nineteenth century (Wong 2012, 7). Moreover, the fact that the urban foreigners are from China plays into alarmist discourses about the rise of China in the geopolitical arena. Since China has become a serious economic competitor to Western hegemony, the racist 'yellow peril' discourse has found a new iteration in the West. It is expressed in anxiety vis-à-vis China's foreign economic politics (Chen 2012, 2) and in accusations of China stealing technology and manufacturing jobs (Li and Nicholson 2021, 4). The COVID-19 pandemic has seen an additional rise in anti-Asian racism, both directed at China as a country and at people of Asian descent living in predominantly white countries (Li and Nicholson 2021, 5).

9 There are many people who are part of the Chinese diaspora living in the Netherlands with a variety of historical and geographical backgrounds. Amongst them are people with a history in the Dutch colonies: Peranakan Chinese lived in the Indonesian archipelago since before Dutch colonisation (Ang 2001, 26), and starting in 1853, Chinese people worked as indentured labourers in Suriname. The history of a larger Chinese presence in the European part of the Netherlands started when people of Chinese descent were brought over by Dutch shipping companies from London in 1911. They were put to work as strike-breakers in the Dutch port cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam (Benton and Pieke 1998, 127). Despite this long history, Dutch people of Chinese and other East Asian descent are often still not seen as being truly part of Dutch society. Historically, they have been targeted by racist policies, such as deportations in the 1930s. Currently, East Asians in the Netherlands are often seen as a model minority, quiet and hardworking, whilst racist jokes about Asians are ubiquitous and typically treated very casually (Wu 2019, 186–89).

The urban Chinese crime syndicate is not just Tara's antagonist; they are also at odds with the Lorrendraaiers. They want to start smuggling through Zeelandic Flanders due to its low level of policing. This interference of the Chinese human trafficking ring causes a rift between Cornella, who refuses to work with them, and Carlos Tierenteyn, who is more open to collaboration. Both Cornella's and Carlos's perspectives and motives in dealing with the syndicate are extensively explored. The characters from China, however, all remain one-dimensional. For example, much emphasis is placed on Cornella's difficulties in legitimating her leadership as a woman in what is at its core a patriarchal organisation, and when she makes morally reprehensible business decisions, several long shots of her walking and pondering show these taking an emotional toll on her. The Chinese leader, 'Sister Li' – as the name implies, also a woman – is not granted this psychological depth. In a scene where Carlos has a business meeting with her, he is portrayed, in line with the negative stereotype of the boer, as a bumbling fool not used to these kinds of business negotiations. Conversely, Sister Li is portrayed as a cold businesswoman who openly states that their human trafficking ring is built upon greed. She is another example of a woman of colour in the show who is based on a trope, in this case the 'Dragon Lady' trope: 'the typical, feminised representation of the yellow peril' (Wu Clark 2012, 102). Sister Li is presented as a one-dimensional villain. Carlos's revelation that Afi, at that point recently recaptured, is pregnant is met by the following response by Li: 'there is a huge market for adoption babies out there'. She smiles slyly and pats Carlos on the cheek as she continues: 'I am very pleased with you.' As she does so, Carlos frowns and looks insecure, as if even he is apprehensive about selling babies. In the series, the Lorrendraaiers are certainly portrayed as an evil cult, but in the final episodes, the Chinese crime syndicate is set up as more (openly) greedy and even less empathic.

The dynamic between the Chinese crime syndicate and the Lorrendraaiers takes shape along the lines of an idyllic notion described by Bakhtin (1996) as 'opposed to this little world, a world fated to perish, there is a great but abstract world, where people are out of contact with each other, egotistically sealed-off from each other, greedily practical' (234). The storyline thus perpetuates the idyllic trope of the rural family – and its business – being threatened by urban or foreign (or in this case, both) influences. The Lorrendraaiers are wealthy and part of an elite, but in the urban-based foreign-run syndicate the show creates an even larger, wealthier, more violent antagonist to both Tara and the Lorrendraaiers. This prompts the viewer to empathise with Cornella as the underdog in this turf war, and perhaps even to start seeing her as a sympathetic rural

rogue. In addition, Harry Biegel only takes Tara's side when he learns that outsiders are involved – something that is portrayed as a positive, rather than questionable development. Harry is also the one who finally captures and arrests Li, enabling him to be redeemed without having been confronted with the consequences of his idyllic beliefs.

Conclusion

Initially, *Grenslanders* mounts a pertinent critique of the role of an idyllic imagination of the rural within a colonialist worldview. The show centralises the important topic of the role of Zeeland in the transatlantic slave trade, which is often glossed over in mainstream Dutch discourse. Locating a show about the legacy of slavery, not only in Zeeland, but also in a specifically rural environment, allows *Grenslanders* to question the often still glorified idea of the 'pure' countryside as a space of white innocence. The show reveals the horror of this idea by showing that it is tied to the blood and soil ideology.

At the same time, however, albeit to greater or lesser extents, women of colour are represented in a relatively narrow register, and are limited to transnational tropes, such as the Sapphire, the motherly domestic servant, and the Dragon Lady. In addition, the show relies heavily on a rigid rural-urban divide between the 'province' and the Randstad. Zeelandic Flanders is mainly presented as a remote place populated by backward, unworldly people. The series' orthodox liberal understanding of racism as an anomaly means that the legacies of colonialism are portrayed as limited to that place and its people – a portrayal that can easily feed into the misguided idea that the Randstad is a progressive haven. Moreover, these legacies are shown to be easily overcome by a problematic interracial relationship. The urban, meanwhile, is shown to harbour villains, in the guise of a racist stereotype. Despite its initial critique, the show also reproduces idyllic and racist tropes in which the white rural is under threat from foreigners. *Grenslanders* thus exemplifies that imagining the Netherlands as divided into urban and rural spaces can easily repeat problematic narratives and significantly hinder a critical engagement with Dutch colonial legacies.

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About the Author

Anke Bosma obtained her PhD as a researcher in the ERC-funded project 'Imagining the Rural in a Globalizing World' (2018–2023) at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) located at the University of Amsterdam. Her work explores how the rural is imagined in the Dutch cultural consciousness in relation to globalisation. Another area of interest is (de) colonial theory and history in the Netherlands, which she developed whilst conducting research at the Research Centre for Material Culture, the research institute of the Wereldmuseum, Netherlands.

Philosophical Imaginations

14. Born in Bondage: Slavery, Freedom, and Enlightenment in Spinoza

Hasana Sharp

Abstract: This chapter considers the fact that Benedict de Spinoza does not begin with the standard Enlightenment premise that all human beings are born free and equal. By maintaining that we are all born in bondage, Spinoza treats freedom as a fragile social accomplishment rather than an inalienable right. Nevertheless, by universalising bondage and considering right in terms of power, Spinoza's philosophy offers avenues for claiming freedoms that differ from the standard model. This chapter concludes by reflecting on various interpretive efforts to think with Spinoza about resistance to oppression, domination, and colonial slavery.

Keywords: Spinoza; freedom; slavery; bondage; Enlightenment; colonialism

Introduction

It was commonplace amongst Enlightenment thinkers to recognise freedom as a universal attribute of human beings and, at the same time, to accept or ignore the reality of slavery. For example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau opens his famous *Du contrat social* (1762) with the declaration that 'man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains', but he inveighs against moral and political rather than chattel slavery (Rousseau 1997, 41). For Rousseau, like Descartes, the natural freedom of human beings consists of our given ability to exercise our wills, to act in contradiction to our impulses and passions. For them, mechanical, physical laws – including the mechanical, physical laws of our own bodily processes – do not constrain our volition. Therefore, we can become independent legislators of our own wills, responsible for ourselves, and co-authors of the laws by

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which we live.[1] Nonetheless, people are everywhere 'enslaved' to custom, adapting themselves to the expectations of others, and thereby increasingly alienated from their autochthonous desires. Social and political dependence so habituates us to the demands, norms, and requirements of others that, Rousseau fears, natural freedom ceases to animate and attract us. 'Slaves lose everything in their chains, even the desire of escaping from them: they love their servitude, as the comrades of Ulysses loved their brutish condition' (Rousseau 1997, 43). Rousseau's criticism of moral subservience to custom and his contempt for submission to tyrants was uncompromising. Yet, he commits not a word against the colonial slavery of Africans.[2] We are familiar with this widespread paradox of Enlightenment thought, which 'upholds slavery even as it condemns it, maintains servitude even as it ridicules it, extols submissiveness yet glorifies revolt, crushes liberty at the same time as it celebrates it' (Sala-Molins 2006, 30).

What happens, however, when the premise changes? What does the promise of universal freedom look like if we affirm, with Spinoza, that we are all born into bondage? What if freedom is fragile, a 'difficult and rare' accomplishment rather than a given feature of human nature? Louis Sala-Molins (2006, 30), in his powerful critique of the French Enlightenment, suggests that, despite its murderous neglect of enslaved African people, the commitment to universal freedom and equality marks a decisive step beyond Spinoza. According to the ancient anthropological hierarchies, some do not belong to themselves by nature and are thus born slaves (Aristotle 2013, 1.1254a14–16). Descartes (1985) breaks from this view, maintaining that all souls share the same power of free will and an equal capacity for self-mastery.[3] For Sala-Molins (2006, 53), Enlightenment thinkers shrank from the practical implications of their own principles, which were only realised when Toussaint and Dessalines led their fellow enslaved Africans in a revolt to claim their birth right. Nevertheless, the *philosophes* provided a necessary alternative to Spinoza's anthropology of the passions, which, for Sala-Molins (2006, 30), is too beholden to the ancient conviction that people enjoy only 'gradations' of self-determination. Freedom and equality,

1 Rousseau's notion of freedom is notoriously complex. I refer to him only for illustrative purposes. For further reading, see McDonald and Hoffman (2010); and Neuhouser (1993, 2011).

2 For a provocative effort to bring his thinking to bear on chattel slavery, see Klausen (2014).

3 Descartes' doctrine of free will is a common feature of various Enlightenment doctrines, developed differently in the philosophies of, for example, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel. See his fourth *Meditation* (Descartes 1985, vol. 2). He is clear in the *Passions of the Soul* that anyone can, through habituation, arrive at perfect self-mastery (Descartes 1985, vol. 1, article 50).

in Spinoza, are not absolute, unadulterated, given properties of the human being. They are precarious and reversible social accomplishments that come only in degrees. The inspiring declarations of the Enlightenment insist that we are 'born free', but Spinoza roots his ethical and political philosophy in the reality of profound natural dependency: we are born 'capable of very few things, and very heavily dependent on external causes, […] conscious of almost nothing of [ourselves], of God, or of things' (E5p39s).[4]

Several interpreters, including myself, have disagreed with Sala-Molin's assessment, arguing that the ostensible liability of Spinoza's ethical and political thought – the fact that freedom and equality are not universal, identical, and metaphysically guaranteed in all humans – is its strength (Gatens 1996; Montag 1999; Sharp 2011). Spinoza, in contrast to Rousseau, does not commit himself exclusively to democratic or popular rule. Likewise, he (arguably) offers a weak metaphysical basis for universal rights and freedoms. Yet, numerous thinkers have found resources in his context- and power-sensitive analyses, his demanding call for social transformation, and his 'revolutionary' approach to collective power (despite Spinoza's own caution with respect to revolutionary practice). Spinoza's understandings of bondage and freedom have been mobilised and celebrated by thinkers to understand a range of phenomena, including (but by no means limited to) capitalist domination (Althusser and Balibar 1975; Lordon 2014); mass fascism (Deleuze and Guattari 1977); globalisation (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004, 2009); feminist concepts of liberatory embodiment (Gatens 1996); and the climate crisis (Ruddick 2020). Freedom, for Spinoza, is the power to think and act in a way that preserves and enhances our being. 'Right' is not grounded in an aspect of the human being that calls for respect. Rather, right is coextensive with power (*TTP*, 16.1–5; *TP*, 2.3–4).[5] Our right, as an expression of our particular power, is highly variable, contingent on circumstances, and not equally enjoyed by all people. Yet it is precisely because freedom and equality are not given properties of human nature that must be recognised and enshrined in 'the rights of man' that they need to be established, achieved, and sustained through institutions and ways of life.

Although he does not share the metaphysical view of human freedom of many Enlightenment thinkers, Spinoza shares their silence with respect to chattel slavery. Despite his antithetical starting point, and despite his

4 Citations of Spinoza's *Ethics* will be from Spinoza (1985), and use standard notation (E = *Ethics;* followed by part number; p = proposition; s = scholium; etc.).

5 Citations of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (*TTP*) and *Political Treatise* (*TP*) are all from Spinoza (2016). They refer to the chapter number, followed by the paragraph.

criticism of ethical and political servitude, Spinoza, like Rousseau, had nothing to say about those human beings subject to chattel slavery. His radical interpreters who liberally evoke the language and imagery of slavery (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari 1997; Lordon 2014) do not draw upon Spinoza to grapple with the realities of colonial slavery, even as they do not hesitate to bring Spinoza's thinking to bear on problems quite remote from his own concerns.[6] If Sala-Molins was too quick to dismiss Spinoza's ethical and political thought, we would be well-served to consider forms of servitude beyond subjection to superstition, charismatic authority, or the imperatives of capitalist production. Why have those who find radical resources in Spinoza's account of human bondage to explore issues of more recent concern largely declined to reflect upon the violence of colonial slavery? Admittedly, when Spinoza is mostly silent on such questions, they are not easily posed. I will not arrive at answering these questions here, although I am undertaking this (daunting) task elsewhere.[7] Here, I will restrict myself to exploring his notion of bondage and to identifying some interpretive approaches that may be useful for reading Spinoza in light of colonialism and slavery, thereby acknowledging 'the facts of power' that 'informed and enabled' thinking in the seventeenth-century Netherlands (Said 1993, 195).

De Servitute Humana

Best known for advocating the freedom to philosophise and the liberty to develop and communicate one's ideas independent of dogma, tradition, and political authority, Spinoza ostensibly fits into an understanding of Enlightenment that relies on our natural reason, universal amongst human beings, to arrive at true beliefs.[8] *Sapere aude!* Yet, on Spinoza's account, we do not equally or easily enjoy intellectual independence. If most of us struggle to conform our minds to the demands of authority and custom, this is not typically a mark of rationality and integrity on Spinoza's account. Rather, we tend to go our own way by virtue of idiosyncratic passion. Neither the state nor religion can hope to master our minds, for the simple reason that we are not masters of our own minds (Steinberg 2010). The state should not try to restrict and command our thinking, because, even if we wanted to, we could not think as we are commanded (*TTP*, 20). For Spinoza, there is

6 For exceptions, see Ford (2017), Goetschel (2016), and Taylor (2021).

7 I am completing a manuscript on Spinoza and slavery.

8 On Spinoza's notion of freedom to philosophise, see Laerke (2021).

nothing unknowable in principle. Mystery, miracles, and the occult have no place in his philosophy. Likewise, all human minds – indeed, all minds – include the foundations of reason (the common notions; E2p38–p40). However, the consistent exercise of reason, such that we might live a life guided by it, is something for which only few of us can hope, with practice and luck, to enjoy in maturity. Moreover, rationality and independence remain precarious and vulnerable to reversals of fortune. In a well-ordered, flourishing commonwealth, virtue, the power to think and act from our natures, might be relatively widespread (*TP*, 5.2–3). However, we generally depend upon these external circumstances, largely outside of our power, to enjoy ethical freedom, understood as knowingly living in a way that empowers our minds and bodies. This is because each of us is a tiny part of nature, 'always necessarily subject to passions' (E4p4c), and thus 'heavily dependent' on the power of external things.

One strategy for refuting a picture of humanity as unequal and divided into those who can grow up to be free and those condemned to remain dependent is to insist, like Descartes, that, if we have minds at all, we have the same faculty for freedom and an identical potential to learn to use our freedom well (see *Discourse*, Descartes 1985, vol. 1). This view has the virtue of appreciating all human beings as capable of reason, naturally free, and worthy of respect. At the same time, a failure to learn to use our wills well and an inability to effectively command our passions and exercise our reason represents a moral failure, a weakness of the soul. Although he aspired to a scientific study of the passions *en physicien*, Spinoza suggests that Descartes' analysis does not sufficiently depart from Stoic or theological views that understand human *pathos* in moralistic terms as disgraceful and contemptible. As long as there have been slavery and domination, 'slavish' susceptibility to passion has been considered a sign that someone (or entire groups) need to be controlled, mastered by another (Davis 1966).

Spinoza, however, universalises human servitude as the condition into which each of us is born, and which continues, by necessity, to contour our entire lives. Vice, for Spinoza, is not sin or deficiency. Vice is merely the lack of strength to do that which is most conducive to preserving and enhancing one's mental and physical life (E4p18s). Virtue and freedom, in contrast, are nothing but the power to knowingly – rather than accidentally – do that which is most conducive to one's mental and physical vitality (E4def8). Spinoza explains human vices – such as hatred, a desire for vengeance, or excessive ambition – as externally imposed and, therefore, as phenomena 'to be imputed to the commonwealth' (*TP*, 5.3). A widespread inability to act in accordance with one's true advantage (vice) indicates that a commonwealth

has not alleviated our natural human bondage to fortune, to those passions that move one to 'do the worse', even if one sees the better (E4pref). Certainly, a civil order can be structured to systematically and harshly command subjects, or a portion thereof, in contradiction to their good. In this case, Spinoza will say that it imposes 'slavery' and should be called a 'desert rather than a commonwealth' (*TP*, 5.5). What is important for my purposes is that freedom or servitude must be explained, for Spinoza, by recourse to a wider constellation of causes. However, since we are 'always necessarily' determined by that wider constellation, we cannot – *pace* the Stoics and Descartes (as Spinoza interprets them) – hope to insulate ourselves from fortune or command our passions absolutely (E5pref). Susan James (2020) thus remarks that 'slavery is an inevitable part of human existence. The freedom that Spinoza recommends is not fully attainable, and the model of the good life that he holds out to us will always be offset by *servitus*' (139).

As finite beings that exist in and amongst others, we can never be causally independent. We exist and act by virtue of the powers of others. Our minds and bodies dwell within webs of causal relationships that we can never transcend (E1p28). We are parts of nature, determined by its laws, and thus our individual natures (essences, or powers) can never be the exclusive source of our thoughts, feelings, and actions (E4p4). For James (2020), 'there is something paradoxical and even sadistic about an image of the good life that will in practice always be at least in part a life of slavery' (139). Spinoza's account is only 'sadistic', however, if our servitude is something we should detest, condemn, and denounce. Certainly, Spinoza thinks that we strive, by nature, to increase our power to act, and thus to increase our freedom. And if we are dominated or suffer violence, we resist (Bove 1996; Matheron 2020, ch. 9). However, Spinoza's view is not as classical as James implies. Being compelled by forces beyond our control to do what disadvantages us is not disgraceful. Epictetus, the Stoic, highlights how humans, like caged animals, would rather die than accept slavery (Epictetus 1998, IV.1.27–28). Early modern republicans exhort those who regard themselves as free to repudiate domination, tyranny, slavery, and all forms of 'fawning' dependence (see Nyquist 2013). These views typically represent the suffering of slavery and subjection as shameful, feminine, and unbefitting of free persons. Spinoza's view, on my interpretation, does not advocate a masculine triumph over demeaning servitude.[9] Rather, servitude and dependence on external causes

9 His view is more complicated than I claim here, since he does repeatedly decry, for example, 'womanly compassion'. Especially when describing a phenomenon that distresses him, such as mass superstition or the abuse of political power, Spinoza violates his own commitment to considering affects with mathematical detachment.

are something no natural thing can possibly avoid. Dependency and external determination bear no disgrace, but are instead natural and inescapable.

Neither dependence nor passions are unequivocally harmful. External causes bring us into being, nourish us, sustain us, and enable us to grow and learn. Spinoza (1662), in his early *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, represents human beings as essentially, by definition, 'God's servants [*dienaars*] – indeed, his slaves [*slaven*]' (127). And 'our greatest perfection is to be such necessarily. For if we were left to ourselves, and so did not depend on God, there would be very little, or nothing, we could accomplish' (Spinoza 1985, 127). I suggest that we understand Spinoza's early embrace of the Biblical image of humanity as God's servants as an effort to deny the classical view of slavery to passions as a distinctively moral failure. His claim that we should understand our servitude to God as the source of our perfection and power appears when refuting Cartesian doxastic voluntarism. One of his earliest and most persistent philosophical commitments is his rejection of a metaphysical faculty of the will that allows us to suspend, affirm, or deny our mental representations (see Carriero 2015). Our minds necessarily affirm, be it weakly or more emphatically, all of their ideas, which are indistinguishable from their contents. To think anything, to represent something, is to 'affirm' or believe it to be the case. Such mental affirmations (P) can be displaced and overcome by ideas that exclude them (~P), but they cannot be entertained in an entirely neutral way. In other words, ideas and their contents have motive force, which may be amplified or depleted by other ideas (see Sharp 2011, ch. 2).

For many Enlightenment thinkers, free will is a necessity if we are to liberate ourselves from the authority of custom, tradition, and superstition. Spinoza, however, has a different intuition. He maintains that, without a robust appreciation of our limits, constraints, and lack of power, we cannot hope to know what we can and cannot do (E4p17s). By the time he wrote the *Ethics* (1677), Spinoza had a more ambivalent understanding of dependency than he does in the *Short Treatise*. Being 'in God' (nature) delivers us our power and perfection. Nevertheless, it is complicated to persist amongst those infinitely many others within God (nature). Since we are inevitably enabled and constrained by ambient others, we are also inevitably subject to passions, servitude, and fortune. Servitude becomes something to mitigate, resist, and transform. Yet, it is not something to 'bewail' or from which to recoil in shame. It is not an index of a lesser nature, of belonging to another due to a defective power of reason. As one amongst infinitely many others, we are inevitably compelled by external forces, some of which are antagonistic to our well-being.

Passions name those changes in our power of acting of which we are only a partial cause (E3def3). By virtue of our finitude and our immersion within a vast constellation of causes, much of our experience is governed by the general laws of nature rather than by 'the laws of our own nature' – the particular striving by which each of us perseveres and endeavours to thrive. Spinoza describes the 'dictates of reason' as prudential guidance for acting in agreement with the laws of our own nature, for doing those things that preserve and enhance the powers of our minds and bodies (E4p18s). We often struggle to do so because we are determined externally in a haphazard way, according to the laws of nature in general rather than the laws of our particular natures. Furthermore, if we live in harsh circumstances, or if we are the target of violence or abuse, it becomes even more difficult to do what most nourishes the power of our minds and bodies. Even in the most advantageous circumstances, we are typically moved more by passion than by intellect.

Nevertheless, although we are always determined by causes of which we are ignorant, those causes may enable us to live, grow, learn, and develop virtue. For example, an infant can be called the cause of very few of her own thoughts and actions. The infant may influence the quality of her care with her gaze, smile, and cries, but her survival and well-being depend profoundly on the actions of others, along with the conditions of her environment. If, however, a newborn is well cared for, she will be externally determined in ways that support and enhance her nature. If she lives and grows at all, even if her care and social circumstances are poor, she is enabled to some degree by external causes, human and non-human, to persevere. If she were abandoned, or if her community suddenly lost access to potable water, she would not survive. Spinoza urges us to see that we are all more or less like children, profoundly dependent on external factors over which we have limited power. Even a heavily dependent newborn, however, is not necessarily 'enslaved' to fortune. A nursling is unfree because she does not knowingly do what is to her advantage. Nevertheless, hopefully, she desires milk and affection, which will enable her mind and body to grow.

Servile Character(s)

There are, however, ambiguities in Spinoza's account of servitude. He offers several examples of slavery to fortune, including depression, illness, and ecstasy. Similarly, he decries the harms of slavery to superstition, which can capture human hearts and drive people to sacrifice themselves to the

whims of charlatans and tyrants (*TTP*, pref). However, Spinoza reserves the highest expression of servitude for human bondage to pleasure: 'the person who is drawn by his own pleasure, and can neither see nor do anything useful to himself, is *most* a slave. The only free person is the one who lives wholeheartedly according to the guidance of reason alone' (*TTP*, 16.32, emphasis added). Here, Spinoza betrays the more classical sensibility informing James's analysis. Excessive indulgence and unruly appetites are the mark of a 'tyrannical soul', led by *eros* rather than by *logos* (Plato 1968, Bk. IX). The identification of pleasure as the greatest source of servitude is a common feature of a rhetorical tradition that Mary Nyquist (2013), following Kurt Raaflaub, calls 'anti-tyrannicism'. The tyrant who does as he pleases, indulges every lust without regard for the cost to others, and is wholly ignorant of any costs to himself, may be politically powerful, but he is not self-determined. This anti-tyranny tradition represents the tyrant as someone who respects only the law of self-gratification and is therefore the 'real slave', even though his social status is highest. Anti-tyranny discourse insists that someone who is advantaged materially and politically is often more servile, morally speaking, than the subjects he terrorises and deprives (see Paijmans, this volume). Albeit with a ring of falsity, exaggeration, and moralisation, this discourse is calculated to encourage collective indignation and inspire resistance to domination.

If we reflect on Spinoza's critical reconstruction of freedom in the *Ethics*, we will notice that he targets those who equate the experience of being unconstrained with freedom. We may feel like the masters of our fates, but it is only because we are ignorant of the causes that move us to wanting and willing (EIapp). However, who feels like a master of his fate? It is not those whose lives are precarious and deprived, or those who live in constant fear of a tyrant, master, boss, or authorities. Spinoza's objection to standard ideas of freedom is aimed, first and foremost, at those who boast of a liberty that they do not actually possess. It targets those who enjoy ample advantages, which they erroneously credit to their independent agency.

Those subject to political domination or to the whims of a master are typically well aware that external forces oppose their well-being. This does not mean that servants are *actually* freer than their masters, as thinkers of moral slavery like to argue. Rather, their consciousness is not characterised by the same kind of delusional freedom. Those who encounter few insuperable obstacles to their pursuit of pleasure, who experience nature as if it were organised in service to them, are ignorant of their natures and their true good. They are dangerous to themselves and to others, imagining they are free when they are, like a ship, tossed about by the waves on the sea.

By emphasising how unfree even the most powerful remain, Spinoza demonstrates how universal human servitude is. Everyone will benefit from looking to their circumstances, their causal environment, and trying to better understand the extent to which their affects encourage and impede the power of their minds and bodies. Those who are forced to work by masters, prison guards, or bosses are acutely aware of their constraints, although they may not grasp every element of the vast network of relationships that hold dominating power in place. With his universalist anthropology of the passions, Spinoza strives to show how vice, weakness, delusion, and ignorance are not confined only to the 'vulgar' – those with low social status. It is not only women, as the misogynist stereotype of Spinoza's day suggests, who cannot hold their tongues: 'Not even the wisest know how to keep quiet' (*TTP*, 20.8). It is not only servants and the enslaved who deceive. Political order is typically arranged to hide its own operations (*TP*, 7.27) and punish those who speak their minds (*TTP*, 20.34). The result is a picture of humanity with a highly variable capacity to exercise virtue, or freedom. Because our constraints and circumstances vary so widely, so does our power. Variations in our power to think and act do not imply different natures, but rather different contexts which remain open to transformation, albeit with great effort and no guarantees.

Thus far, we have surveyed Spinoza's view that we are all subject to fortune – those external forces that can move us to our disadvantage. On the standard model we are all, by nature, free and capable of learning to use our wills well and in accordance with rational judgments. We are free and equal by nature, but we may live in virtuous or slavish ways, depending upon factors such as our habits, education, or temperaments. With great practice and discipline, even the weakest souls, Descartes (1985, 348) promises in his *Passions of the Soul*, can enjoy the exercise of their freedom. However, for Spinoza, in the quest to perfect ourselves, self-discipline cannot get us very far:

> It is impossible for man not to be a part of nature and not to follow the common order of nature. But if he lives among such individuals as agree with his nature, his power of acting will thereby be aided and encouraged. On the other hand, if he is among such as do not agree at all with his nature, he will hardly be able to accommodate himself to them without greatly changing himself. (E4app7)

We must, instead, change the commonwealth within which we live. Thus, as Steinberg (2018, ch. 5) argues, Spinoza's response to fortune is one of

civic activism. Fortune and external circumstances can be transformed with great effort, which can be sustained through institutions sensitive to human nature 'as it really is', more often subject to bondage than guided by reason (*TP*, 1.1). Rulers and ruled alike are prone to short-sighted reactions and need support – and constraint – to establish conditions conducive to thinking and living well.

Emancipations

Yet what about those – women, physical labourers, and servants – excluded from the *civitas*? And if the commonwealth is the source of both vice and virtue, both the threat and support to our intellectual and physical power, is it not unlikely, according to Spinoza's model, that the most oppressed will have the resources to produce a more empowering social and political order? Do not dominated minds and bodies reflect (and compose) rather than transcend their circumstances? Does this not imply that when domination is at its most severe, such as under conditions of slavery or colonialism, change is immensely difficult?

Spinoza scholars interested in the problem of political freedom and emancipation have taken at least three approaches to the problem of domination. The first is what Sandra Field (2020) calls the 'constitutionalist' approach.[10] This approach highlights Spinoza's view that it is not in the interest of sovereign power to exclude, oppress, and abuse its subjects. If a commonwealth or a dominant group relies upon the exploitation and coercion of an underclass and fails to deliver what human beings cannot help but desire, it undermines the very source of its sovereignty. Human psychology and passions conform to particular laws, such that 'there will never be a supreme power who can get everything to happen just as he wishes' (*TTP*, 17.2). A commonwealth will enjoy greater stability, widespread willingness to adhere to its laws and norms, and thus greater right and power to the extent that it appears 'useful' and 'good' to its constituents (*TTP*, 16.20). If the ministers of power censor the population harshly, try to compel them to love what they hate, or command them to believe what appears to them to be false, they will provoke civil disobedience, inspire martyrdom, and even risk mass rebellion (*TTP*, 20). Thus, the prudential and vital interests of the commonwealth and its constituents naturally converge. Sovereignty is more

10 Field (2020, 170–71) argues that most interpreters of his political philosophy do not acknowledge the extent to which Spinoza tolerates the 'nonideal endurance' of oppressive political orders.

stable and effective to the extent that constituents experience obedience to commands to be 'useful' or advantageous to themselves.

This approach focuses on the relationship between subjects and the law. Spinoza's best-known examples centre on direct, open criticism of the laws, which would presumably be carried out by citizens rather than by women, prisoners, or servants. This approach does not tend, therefore, to address those who are excluded, let alone radically so. However, if, as Spinoza insists, right is coextensive with power, questions of formal inclusion are in no way the sole basis of political power. Social and political order relies just as much on its workers, women, and servants to function on a daily basis as it does on its citizens, lawmakers, and consiglieres. Hence, Spinoza's exclusion of the vast majority is not only illiberal and unjust. As Warren Montag (1999) argues, 'from the point of view of Spinoza's philosophy as a whole, it is absurd' (84). If there is not mass obedience, as Étienne de la Boétie (2012) famously points out, there is no commonwealth. In Spinoza's political philosophy, therefore, there is no strong distinction between citizens and subjects with respect to the right, or power of the state. Whether they are democracies or tyrannies, 'the commonwealth's right is defined by the common power of the multitude' (*TP*, 3.9).

Thus, several radical critics develop a second approach to understanding domination and servitude in Spinoza. Following Alexandre Matheron (2020, ch. 9), they point to indignation as a kind of naturalised substitute for the right of revolution (Bove 1996; Del Lucchese 2009; Sharp 2013). Whereas a classic Enlightenment thinker such as Locke ([1662] 1997) enshrines the right to revolution against illegitimate states that do not fulfil their *raison d'être* (the protection of life, liberty, and estate), Spinoza does not. Some scholars condemn Spinoza's failure to endorse revolt against violent rulers who pillage, violate, and kill their subjects (e.g., Curley 1995). Some observe that Spinoza does not seem especially optimistic about the ability of the dominated and enslaved to produce a better way of life, and therefore does not endorse revolution (Rosenthal 2013). Yet, in the *Political Treatise*, as Matheron (2020, 131) points out, Spinoza implies that political order often – even typically – emerges *against* a shared source of oppression, arising from the indignant passion to avenge a common harm. Civil order, according to the *Political Treatise*, is not the consequence of a rational agreement amongst equals to mutually restrain themselves. It is often an alliance formed for self-defence against a common threat (Matheron 2020). Affects unite people: 'a common hope, or fear, or a common desire to avenge some harm' (*TP*, 6.1). When Spinoza declares that humans 'naturally agree' by virtue of affect rather than reason to form a commonwealth, as Matheron (2020, 126) observes, he refers his reader to a passage describing not the

establishment, but the dissolution of a commonwealth. Any constituted 'power or right is diminished to the extent that it provides many people with reasons to conspire against it' (*TP*, 3.9). The genesis of political order, in other words, has something in common with the Hebrews, united by hatred of their oppression to create a commonwealth of their own to care for one another and defend themselves against those who would harm or enslave them. Or, as Matheron (2020) observes, 'under a tyrannical regime, common fear can turn into indignation and lead to an overthrow of oppression' (127). This approach pushes the constitutional approach past the principles of prudential rationality to insist that the affects themselves, including the saddest and most destructive passions, engender both human servitude and the (perpetual) collective reconstitution of 'the right of the multitude'.

Neither approach, however, reflects expressly on racial domination or colonial slavery. The first approach highlights how domination is fragile insofar as constituents cannot grasp the utility of obedience. Thus, it is not in the medium- or long-term interest of those in power – indeed, it is irrational – to rule in a way that is disadvantageous, exploitative, and harmful to subjects. The second approach places a heavier emphasis on how the affects of the multitude constitute the substance of power and right. As a result, social and political life is 'regulated' and 'constituted' by collective indignation and resentment of the harms and evils that 'civilisation' necessarily entails (Matheron 2020, 131). The production and enforcement of laws, norms, and institutions always entail a degree of evil, repression, and harm. The internal threat of collective indignation and conspiracy for revenge, therefore, always remains. It does not require much imagination to see how this dynamic has played out historically, for example, in plantation economies where violently enslaved people outnumbered their oppressors ten to one. Yet, as Matheron (2020) notes, Spinoza's claim is 'ontological' rather than historical (130) – it follows from the laws of human nature and the logic of the passions. In my view, the ontological position that Matheron describes represents an attractive alternative anthropology to the no less metaphysical claims about human rights and the right of revolution, such as we find in Locke (1998), which are understood as inalienable features of human being as such.

A third approach links Spinoza's (1985) thinking and biography to *marronage*, specifically to Palmares, one of the most enduring Maroon communities in the Pernambuco of Brazil, which lasted almost the entire seventeenth century (1605–1694).[11] Spinoza never writes expressly of racial

11 'Marronage' names the practice of fleeing slavery and domination. Maroons are those people who escape and form autonomous communities of refuge and mutual defense against

slavery. However, in a much discussed letter, Spinoza describes an experience of waking from a dream and being unable to shake the image of 'a certain black, scabby Brazilian' (Spinoza 1985, letter 17).[12] Remembering this dream from the previous winter, he describes how this apparition 'remained vividly before my eyes as if the things had been true' (Spinoza 1985, 353). He endeavoured, he writes, to divert himself from this image by training his eyes on familiar objects in his room, but 'the same image of the same Black man appeared to me with the same vividness, alternately, until it gradually disappeared from my visual field' (Spinoza 1985, 353). Several commentators connect the imagery from this dream to the expulsion of the Dutch from Brazil ten years earlier, carried out partly by Black soldiers, Maroons, and the enslaved (Feuer 1957; Ford 2017; Montag 1999, 88). However we interpret the dream, it serves as an obscure index of the fact that Spinoza could not have been ignorant of colonial slavery in Brazil.

Anyone in the Talmud Torah community in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, such as Spinoza and his family, would be more or less aware of colonial slavery, since the congregation had substantial interests in Brazil and the Caribbean (Wiznitzer 1960). The community funded and otherwise encouraged many of their members, both entrepreneurs and the impoverished (and orphaned), to establish their presence and participate in the plantation economy. Two of the four rabbis who served the Amsterdam Sephardim had strong connections to Brazil. Rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca went to Pernambuco in 1641 to serve the congregation's spiritual and economic needs. Rabbi Aboab was forced by the reconquest to return to Amsterdam, which he did in time to preside over Spinoza's excommunication in 1656. Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, the junior rabbi employed by Talmud Torah at the time, had hoped to be assigned to Brazil instead of Aboab. When this failed to materialise, he sent his entrepreneurial brother Ephraim Soiero to join his brother-in-law in Brazil in pursuit of profits to support his intellectual vocation (Nadler 2018, 101). Menasseh dedicated one of his books to the directors of the Dutch West India Company (WIC), praised the dispersal of the Jews across the globe, and inspired others to understand colonial settlement as part of Jewish destiny (Watson 2014, 198). Spinoza's direct concern for the displaced settlers is documented in a charity contribution he made to the Jewish poor from Brazil (Yovel 1989, 77).

re-capture and enslavement. For an analysis of the kind of freedom that this historical practice exemplifies, see Neil Roberts (2015).

12 For a detailed discussion of this letter, see chapter 15 in this volume.

Warren Montag (1999) suggests that the Black Brazilian haunts Spinoza precisely because he both identifies with *and* excludes the outcasts and oppressed from his political thought. Spinoza was banned from his natal community, deemed a heretic to whose name 'the Jew' was nevertheless often affixed, forced to exercise extreme caution in all of his dealings, and treated as a threat to social and political stability for most of his life. Spinoza's philosophy upholds the right of the state to exclude most of the population. Yet, he shared a 'kinship with this outcast', the Black Maroon who invented and defended at all costs a community beyond – but only just barely and only precariously – the reach of domination (Montag 1999, 88). James Ford (2017) takes Spinoza beyond his own words, bypassing his political equivocations, to declare that the joyful sociality that his ethics and politics prescribes is precisely what *marronage* makes possible against all odds. Not without cost, and not without incalculable loss, Maroons make social life and establish erotic bonds, driving out slavery and social death (Ford 2017). The third approach ceases thinking only *about* Spinoza and comes to think *with* him, and perhaps even *against* him. It involves an act of imagination that brings the colonial context in which his philosophy was composed into the foreground and presses his ideas into the service of thinking about how enslaved people created something new, something unauthorised, from 'a common hope, or fear, or a common desire to avenge some harm' (*TP*, 6.1).

Conclusion

The imaginative hermeneutics that align Spinoza with Maroon thought may let Spinoza off the hook for failing to address chattel slavery too easily. Interpretation can involve an element of wish fulfilment, yet there is no interpretation without some creativity. We do not simply uncover what is already there, but let the propositions, demonstrations, and narratives affect and move us. Even if it remains all too relevant today, readers of Spinoza need to stop imagining freedom and slavery primarily or exclusively within the framework of free-thinking and religious persecution. In the seventeenth century, human bondage did not consist exclusively in suffering from superstition, or in being a subject of corrupt monarchy. It consisted in being enslaved, trafficked, and forced to labour in the colonies. Domination was not only the suppression of the freedom to philosophise; it was also kidnapping African children, exposing them to abuse, and compelling them to work in Dutch households. It was the plantation economy upon which

several religious minorities relied to secure their relative autonomy from the Inquisition and other forms of interference. In other words, bringing Spinoza's thought to bear on the reality of colonialism and slavery would not introduce anything foreign to it. Even if Spinoza was silent on the matter, we need not remain so.

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15. Coordinates of a Slave's Body in a Philosopher's Dream

Thomas van Binsbergen

Abstract: A remnant of the slavery in Dutch Brazil appears in Spinoza's imagination as the dream of a 'black, scabby Brazilian' (letter 17). Spinoza considers the dream, but not the Brazilian. Commentators have, on their part, speculated on the haunting image of slavery, on the unconscious omen of political distress, and on the effort to exorcise colonial ghosts. The persistence of dreamlike images testifies to the confusion provoked by a philosopher's dream of a slave's body, an enslaved body. It is then proposed that through bodily imagination – an imagination directly rooted in the body – the object of imagination, i.e., the enslaved body, calls the dream into question and engages the world. Bodily imagination prefigures the ontological plane on which the 'slave' resists slavery, affirming a materialist strategy that radicalises the dissent from colonial discourse: 'the strategy of the conatus', liberating reality. This chapter sets out a Spinozistic intervention in early modern Dutch dreams of freedom and slavery. Accordingly, the colonial imagination is contrasted with a bodily imagination stripped of all discourse.

Keywords: Dutch Brazil; Spinoza; bodies; dreams; imagination

'Oh my body, always make me a man who questions!'
Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*

One morning, as the sky was already growing light, I woke from a very deep dream to find that the images which had come to me in my dream remained before my eyes as vividly as if the things had been true – especially [the image] of a certain black, scabby Brazilian whom I had never seen before. For the most part this image disappeared when, to divert myself with something else, I fixed

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> my eyes on a book or some other object. But as soon as I turned my eyes back away from such an object without fixing my eyes attentively on anything, the same image of the same black man [*Aethiopis*] appeared to me with the same vividness, alternately, until it gradually disappeared from my visual field.[1]

Introduction

Interestingly, one of the first instances of colonial discourse in early modern philosophy occurs in a Dutch philosopher's dream. The physical appearance of a dream character is described ('black and scabby'), as is its geographical origin (Brazil, then a Dutch colony to which Africans were shipped as slaves).[2] The description is part of a letter signed by Benedictus de Spinoza on 20 July 1664, in Voorburg and addressed to his friend Pieter Balling.[3] In the letter, Spinoza attempts to explain the strange sighs of Balling's terminally ill son as products of his friend's imagination, testifying how he himself once experienced similar hallucinations to Balling in the image of a 'black man' with African roots (*Aethiopis*), an image inevitably related to the Dutch dreams of modern slavery. Spinoza's testimony recalls the period during which the Dutch West India Company (WIC) engaged in transatlantic slavery on a massive scale and the Dutch Republic became a commercial empire and agent of the global economy (Fatah-Black and van Rossum 2015; Weststeijn 2014). Dutch Brazil proved to be an important testing ground for this project, from the conquest of Olinda and Recife in 1630 to its downfall, starting in 1644, when the then governor and 'wise merchant' John Maurice of Nassau returned to his homeland and the colony fell back into Portuguese hands in 1654.[4] Moreover, while leaving much to the reader's imagination, Spinoza's dream nonetheless brings to mind, on the one hand, the ambitious presence in Recife of merchants and believers of the Portuguese Jewish

1 This chapter's original version was submitted on 23 March 2022, the revised version on 10 September 2022, and the final version on 4 January 2025. All citations from Spinoza's letter 17 and the *Ethics* (Spinoza [1677] 1985) are translations by Edwin Curley.

2 While it is more sensible to speak of an 'enslaved person' rather than a 'slave', the philosophical point that the human condition is mostly one of bondage is fundamental, see chapter 14 in this volume. In other words, at the level of discourse, we are only displacing the problem, because what is this supposedly free 'person'?

3 For a discussion of Spinoza's letter 17 in the context of seventeenth-century Amsterdam's Jewish community, see chapter 14 in this volume.

4 In *Rerum per octennium in Brasilia* (1647), the Dutch intellectual and ideologue Caspar Barlaeus finds in John Maurice the prototype of the wise merchant he had earlier described in *Mercator Sapiens* (1632).

community of Amsterdam and, on the other hand, the neglected presence of 'black and scabby' bodies in the city and community in which Spinoza grew up (Hondius 2008; Israel 2007; Ponte 2018). The historical conditions of the dream are thus rather clear, but its philosophical ramifications have remained much more obscure. What are the philosophical coordinates of a slave's body in a philosopher's dream? How do we orient ourselves in thought with regard to Spinoza's so-called colonial discourse and 'cultural imagination of slavery'?

Commentators of Spinoza's letter have interpreted the dream in historical or even prophetic terms as silently anticipating the many racist theories to come in modern philosophy– in Locke, Hume, Kant, or Hegel, amongst others (Hund 2014; Tatían 2018). In more philosophical terms, the dream has figured as advancing the challenge of the liberatory constitution of truth by the imagination (Negri [1981] 1991, 86–87), or as a call for a theory and practice of the multitude's freedom (Montag 1999, 122–23), for instance, by interpreting the supposedly enslaved Brazilian as a Maroon, radicalising the ideas of critique and mass politics (Diefenbach 2019; Ford 2018). On the other hand, the very figure of the dream seems to symbolise a horizon of thought, with dream metaphors filling in the gaps of that horizon, forcing words onto acts of dissent, and reducing the escape out of a dream of slavery to an issue on discourse. Accordingly, commentators have described the enslaved Brazilian as a spectre with mystical powers distressing revolutionaries (Feuer 1957), Spinoza as haunted by the ghost of race (Rosenthal 2005), or the whole testimony as carrying both the memory and dreams of postcolonialism (Goetschel 2016). The dream metaphor professes to express something more than what can rationally be thought. The vividness of certain dream figures contrasts the generalised obscurities of life and makes the dream seem more real than reality. As such, the dream gains a certain self-obsessive quality – it is indeed hypnotising. Then, only a momentary pause, perhaps offered by 'a book or some other object', can bring some diversion, an imagined escape from the imagination and from a dream thus repeating itself, becoming a nightmare. At other times, it is asserted that a dream is just a dream, a private fantasy of the dreamer who expels the subjectivity and consumes the objectivity of the dreamed-of. Being caught in someone else's dream – which is the case for the so-called 'black, scabby Brazilian' – is a terrible thing, as Gilles Deleuze ([2003] 2006, 318) once put it. One is fixated into the void, a dramatically deflated ontology from which nothing follows. A whole history of slavery seems dissolved in just a few words. However, the trace of colonial discourse leads nowhere if the coordinates of a slave's body in a philosopher's dream are not elaborated

following an ontological strategy. Only then do we recover the ground to engage with history in terms of reality instead of merely moralising about how to write or speak.

In other words, reality cannot be reduced to language, just like the history of slavery cannot be understood by representing it as a terrible dream come true. One commentator of Spinoza's dream rightly remarks on the dreamer: 'To affirm that in the past "all" were in favour of slavery, and by this that any concerning criticism is unproductive, is to continue effacing the narrative of black people that tells the other side of slavery: the side of the oppressed' (Cardoso 2020). This reversal opens the perspective of the enslaved body in Spinoza's dream and advances, as such, the materialist struggle by which history becomes liberation. It is a crucial point of orientation to guide us through the inevitable confusion between dreams and reality. Finally, we will use Spinoza to unwrap his own racial 'dream with open eyes' for thought and action to join together more powerfully than ever, taking Spinoza beyond himself, escaping his lucid dream, and waking from sleepwalking. Indeed, the *Ethics* (1677), Spinoza's magnum opus, is a work about learning to wake up.[5]

Dreams of Slavery

The challenge is a delicate one. Surrendering to sleep and captivated by dreams, we are vulnerable following the hope or fear of strangers invading our intimacy. Correspondingly, besides merely constituting a meditation on the past, dreams may harbour judgement on a future event, prefiguring a wish or will. Although we can surely dream of a will and its outcome, can we freely will a determined and certain dream? Can we secretly open our eyes and, suspended between hope and fear, walk at will whilst sleeping? Should we aspire to join the dreamlike horizon of Spinoza's imagination to understand the figure of the Brazilian slave from a self-contained and 'higher' point of view? Ambiguity and lucidity are tantamount, so it seems. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza does not believe

> there is anyone who thinks that while he is dreaming he has a free power of suspending judgment concerning the things he dreams, and of bringing it about that he does not dream the things he dreams he sees. Nevertheless,

5 In this chapter, I will focus on the second and, by extension, third part of the *Ethics*. These were most probably the parts Spinoza was working on in the period of the letter to Balling (see Steenbakkers 2009).

> it happens that even in dreams we suspend judgment, viz. when we dream that we dream. (Spinoza 1985, E2p49s)

The dream functions here as a model for the will understood by Spinoza as 'the faculty by which the Mind affirms or denies something true or something false' (E2p48s). The will (*voluntas*) enacts or suspends a judgement without itself holding any truth, even if the judgement is judged on its turn. This is because the will, just like the dream, does not give us any certainty (*certitudo*) with regard to whatever judgement is made. Only the intellect (*intellectus*) can collect that which is necessary and supply the certainty that guarantees the truth of a judgement (E2p49c). In every judgement, the will brings in the abstract and the possible, whilst the intellect sustains the concrete and the necessary. If the will is to bring any positive understanding, it cannot exceed the intellect to be 'free', but it must indeed be determined by a cause, just like the ideas of the intellect (Spinoza 1985, E2p48).

In contrast, the idea of free will lacks intellect and certainty of nature as it supposedly frees itself from causality. It is a false idea corresponding to a denial of intellect and a ceaseless doubt – that is, the negation of the intelligible idea and the privation of the certainty that affirms thought, a positive thought process (Spinoza 1985, E2p49s). Since 'falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or mutilated and confused, ideas involve' (E2p35), the false idea of free will is an idea deprived of natural understanding of the world. It fails to advance a more adequate sense of the inadequate ideas of the imagination, for instance, that a dream is just a dream. When the imagination is dominated by false ideas, such as that of free will, the dreams that the imagination produces hold the prideful contention of being lucid and more than just dreams, turning all that is doubtful into certainty, and all that is weakness into virtue:

> When this imagination concerns the man himself who thinks more highly of himself than is just, it is called Pride, and is a species of Madness, because the man dreams, with open eyes, that he can do all those things which he achieves only in his imagination, and which he therefore regards as real and triumphs in. (E3p26s)

Similar to when one dreams 'with open eyes', the idea of free will is a prideful negation which, looking down on the matters of the body, averts us from understanding the necessary chain of natural causation. Only such understanding can wake us from sleepwalking before we trip, hurting oneself and others.

Yet, this is still too limited a description. The idea of free will is more than a tricky pitfall; it is also a hypnotising illusion. We often persist in the deception of our own dreams:

> But when we dream that we speak, we believe that we speak from a free decision of the Mind—and yet we do not speak, or, if we do, it is from a spontaneous motion of the Body. And we dream that we conceal certain things from men, and this by the same decision of the Mind by which, while we wake, we are silent about the things we know. We dream, finally, that, from a decision of the Mind, we do certain things we do not dare to do while we wake. (Spinoza 1985, E3p2s)

When we dream, it is *as if* we speak, conceal, or do certain things. Everything seems right, but eventually, nothing is 'real'. If this dream state of mind can, at times, be very convincing, this is because we falsely imagine the mind as prior to the body.[6] According to Spinoza, mind and body work distinctively, but always hand-in-hand and on equal footing (Jaquet [2004] 2018, 9–26). If we are deceived in thinking that the will of the mind is greater than the presence of the body, it is because we do not yet realise the complex structure (*fabrica*) of the human body; we do not know what a body can do (Spinoza 1985, E3p2s).

We could, by contrast, imagine the will to coincide with the natural determination of the body, that is, the structured way it strives following its appetite: 'When [our striving] is related to the Mind and Body together, it is called Appetite. This Appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man' (Spinoza 1985, E3p9s). Contrary to the Cartesian dream of the free will of the mind determining the body, natural appetite explores, through mind and body equally, a most adequate sense of reality, namely, the true causes of our power to think and to act. To deny the body an equal part in grasping reality is to consider facts as just completed thoughts and intentions already as future acts. It is to retreat into idleness and fantasy before of the determination of causality.

However, bodily experience is by nature varied and confused as the affections of the body are intrinsically entangled with external bodies that we cannot adequately know. These affections are never what they seem, incidentally leaving us more or rather less conscious of our appetite

6 Such a dream could be called 'Cartesianism', which separates mind and body and stresses their inequality. By contrast, we observe, with Spinoza, 'at the unthinkable extreme of Cartesian thought (…) "the corporeal soul" and the body that thinks' (Montag 2018, 154).

to participate in nature and embody reality. As a result, this appetite for power is meaningless when we hide in an absolute mind, a philosopher's dream. After all, 'those who believe that they either speak or are silent, or do anything from a free decision of the Mind, dream with open eyes' (Spinoza 1985, E3p2s).

Hence, as Spinoza scholar François Zourabichvili (2002) writes, 'the dream is at once the negation of the free will and its illusion' (251). By mixing prideful lucidity and hypnotising ambiguity, the open-eyed dreamer or sleepwalker passes over clear thought and powerful action. Acting whilst dreaming equals floating around in the heavens of teleology where the will is free to desire the Good and correspondingly to act 'rightly'. Intentions are chased all over, just like pride and guilt, as the know-it-all subject goes around isolating objects and representing them as good or evil: 'The illusion that consists in taking our affections for the things themselves, and on the other hand the illusion of free will, converge in the great lucid dream of a finalized universe' (Zourabichvili 2002, 254).

Indeed, the dreamer is a terrible figure that slashes the world into pieces and rearranges it blindly. This is how the imagination becomes contingent, and ghosts and spectres start to appear haunting reality, hunting down being (Spinoza 1985, E1p9). Spinoza's dream opens up and the Brazilian appears again, ever more spooky and threatening. 'The spectre is the transitional being *par excellence*: a body simultaneously affirmed and negated, so denegated, quasi-incorporeal, tending towards a pure spirit or towards a soul without body' (Zourabichvili 2002, 234). There is no real body in the contemptuous illusion of Spinoza's dream about a body that was displaced and replaced by a vague image of itself. The spectre is a 'non-bodily body' (Zourabichvili 2002, 235), a ghost as well as a zombie, a body without soul, half a human being. These are the characters of the Dutch colonial dream – a free will to rule and oppress.

Black and Scabby

In Spinoza's waking dream, the imagination wanders the 'visual field' and takes hold of the most visible body part of the Brazilian, namely, his skin. The black, scabby skin is the dark boundary controlled by Spinoza's self-centred gaze as it delineates the enslaved body and shapes the 'slave' on the periphery of thought. Through the association of black skin with leprosy,[7] the body is

7 For a historical contextualisation of this association by Spinoza, see Hund (2014).

expelled from familiarity and sent into a state of exception. The racialised body is a body that is marked by obscure properties and thereby excepted from natural interaction with other bodies.[8]

Such interaction is fundamental exposing the common ground by which closed and deceitful boundaries are turned into open and natural borders, and by which adequate ideas are gathered, increasing the power to think and act:

> If something is common to, and peculiar to, the human Body and certain external bodies by which the human Body is usually affected, and is equally in the part and in the whole of each of them, its idea will also be adequate in the Mind. (Spinoza 1985, E2p39)

However, racism denies all common ground between bodies by excepting some and by blocking the encounters that make life experience and the nature of our thinking. Because the racialised body is by its properties suspect and uncertain, it involves control and a fixation on negativity – that is, pre-emptive incarceration, discipline, and forced labour. Accordingly, colonial discourse sentences the racialised body to slavery, identifying the Brazilian with a slave's body that pertains to a master and not to itself. It is an alien body, alienated from what constitutes the nature of a body, which is its power to act: 'If we [our bodies] are to some extent cut off from that of which we are capable, this is because our power of action is immobilized, fixated, determined to engage itself in a passive affection' (Deleuze [1968] 1990, 231). When bodies are acted upon and cannot actively engage with what is happening to them, they are unable to embody their power to act.

Slavery, however, is much more comprehensive than bodily passivity. It is a state of being in which passive affects determine both body and mind to give up on affirming reality and acting upon it; it is a deep fall into what Spinoza (1985) calls 'sadness' (E3p11s). The slave lives by sad passions (Deleuze [1970] 1988, 25). This sadness is all-encompassing as it gives way to a mutilated and confused imagination that does not bear any positive understanding of life – i.e., a liveable life. As the body of the slave is put in exception and turned into a non-bodily body, the Brazilian is deprived of all knowledge of the world and sinks into depression. The gaze of the

8 The appeal to nature in relation to race, sex, or labour has been rightly criticised by multiple currents of critical theory. However, as Hasana Sharp (2011) writes, 'avowing humanity as part of nature entails understanding individuals as beings with complex histories, exposed to many diverse bodies and minds, and ever open to forming new compositions with ambient forces' (8). Joining Sharp, I wish to add to this critical alternative of a 'politics of renaturalisation'.

dreamer forces its imagination upon the body of the dreamed-of. However, can the dreamed-of resist the trauma of fixation? Can the dreamed-of find a counter-imagination to empower body and mind?

This is not Spinoza's problem, at least not in his letter to Pieter Balling. There, after briefly writing about the Brazilian, Spinoza returns to the sighs of the sick son that Balling heard in his imagination:

> I say that the same thing which happened to me in my internal sense of vision happened to you in hearing. But since the cause was very different, your case, but not mine, was an omen. You will understand this clearly from what follows. (Spinoza 1985, 353)

Spinoza then goes on to distinguish between an imagination determined by the constitution of the body or the mind. The first kind of imagination concerns the 'health' of a body (Spinoza's or indeed the Brazilian's body), implying mental and social well-being, a balanced existence. Correspondingly, when the body feels stable, one is in full capacity to be and to do well (Zourabichvili 2020, 214). The second kind of imagination concerns the way in which images and words are linked together, simulating the intellect or understanding of nature. In this sense, when nature is finally understood, it can be foreseen – or in the case of Balling, 'foreheard' – so that the imagination concerned is considered knowledgeable of the future, an omen. Because, according to Spinoza (1985), love increases the understanding of one's nature and the power to act accordingly (E3p13s), a strong union of love, as between parent and child (Balling and his son), causes one to participate in the 'ideal essence' of the loved one and reciprocally. Essence, or nature, then anticipates the power (*potentia*) of a common understanding and determination towards the future. Yet, racism and slavery, differently but the same, prevent any chance of commonality arising, foreclosing all imagination of an intrinsic liberatory nature, a necessary will to freedom.[9]

To conceive of such will, we must return to Spinoza's dream and the kind of imagination he and many of his commentators overlooked too easily: bodily imagination. In the letter, we read a denial of common nature between Spinoza and the Brazilian, but why stick to the perspective of the dreamer? Can the open-eyed dreams of slavery be transfigured from the

9 Spinoza scholar Katja Diefenbach (2019) appropriately points out: 'Long before Friedrich Nietzsche, Spinoza imagined a vitalism that not only incorporated conflict and destruction into life but also attributed the transformation of life to the joyous forces of existence because they can suspend that which wants to burden it with an external, higher, judging meaning' (170).

side of the enslaved body, affirming a proper imagination as counterpower? The question arises from what is kept silent and hidden, made to be an exception, and alienated from politics. The question is posed in the most intimate site of knowledge and power: the body.

Bodily Questioning

As Deleuze (1988) pointed out, 'Spinoza proposes to philosophy a new model: the body' (17). Spinoza (1985) understands the 'body' as a 'mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God's essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing [*res extensa*]' (E2d1). This is the first definition stated by Spinoza in the second part of the *Ethics*. Only if the body is given, can the mind be explained, namely as the idea of the body, a thinking thing (E2d3, E2p11, E2p19). The mind knows the body by ideas of what is happening to the body, thus perceiving its affections (E2p12). Affections, in turn, are bodily images or effects that involve the encounter with external bodies. Such encounters happen always more or less confusedly, as the external body cannot be adequately known and is therefore always subject to the imagination of the mind (E2p26–28). Accordingly, the imagination of affection implies a negativity constraining the perception of the affection. The affection equals the perception, which is limited in its positive reach, like the encountered external body. Extended or thinking things are, after all, finite as their existence is determined by other finite things, other bodies, or other ideas, respectively (E1p28). Nevertheless, if we want to question the authority of a mental imagination by reasoning from the body, a finite thing, we must interpret and explain the whole order of things precisely through the world of bodies, or as Spinoza states:

> So long as things are considered as modes of thinking, we must [*debemus*] explain the order of the whole of nature, *or* the connection of causes, through the attribute of Thought alone. And insofar as they are considered as modes of Extension, the order of the whole of nature must [*debet*] be explained through the attribute of Extension alone. (E2p7s)

The inevitably divided or confusing space where we seek to explain natural causation and adequately understand reality is thus two-sided.[10] However,

10 Idealism consists in limiting the process of explanation and understanding to one side. This is a flawed reduction of reality to a single attribute, as noted by Spinoza scholar Nastassja

from the perspective of the oppressed, namely, the dreamed-of Brazilian reduced to a non-bodily body, we have no choice but to imagine a necessary affection to act from all that is hardly left to us, hence advancing a bodily imagination. This imagination concerns a will to freedom and to escape from that waking dream, the historical liberation of the body.

Spinoza (1985) characterises knowledge that is disconnected and weakly determined by random experience or memory as imagination (E2p40s2). Correspondingly, bodily imagination certainly involves knowledge and expresses power, though inevitably in a limited way:

> The human Body, being limited, is capable [*capax*] of forming distinctly only a certain number of images at the same time [...] If that number is exceeded, the images will begin to be confused, and if the number of images the Body is capable of forming distinctly in itself at once is greatly exceeded, they will all be completely confused with one another. (E2p40s1)

The imaginative capacity of a given body is limited exactly as the body itself is determined by external bodies. Without first having to construct an idea of the possible, each body imagines its determinations as necessary consequences of the encounter with other bodies: 'The imagination of the body consists of the effects, in that body, of modifications that can be caused either by itself or by another body' (Pugliese 2017, 176). These bodily effects are indeed bodily images, namely the affections that increase or decrease the body's power to act (*potentia agendi*; Spinoza 1985, E3d3). On the one hand, the body is acted upon and malleable following its sensibility to other bodies. Yet, on the other hand, it has the ability to act independently according to the singular disposition of its senses.

Corresponding to this reality and activity of the body, variability and autonomy evolve in complementary ways. In this process, the mind takes an equal part by elaborating a certain logic of perception through the communication of ideas that are adequate and promote reason. Accordingly, the autonomy of adequate ideas and reason develops along the variability of thought, and thus the sensibility of matter as bodies explore common ground whilst interacting with each other: 'The Mind is the

Pugliese (2017). In her doctoral dissertation, Pugliese (2016) understands imagination – the workshop for carrying out the process concerned – as an 'activity that belongs to both attributes and that is expressed separately but simultaneously in each of them' (127). I would only add that the imagination 'equally' takes place through body and mind, implying an irreducible dynamic between and thus beyond the two sides – i.e., the infinite production of multiplicity.

more capable [*aptior*] of perceiving many things adequately as its Body has many things in common with other bodies' (Spinoza 1985, E2p39c). Reason structures these bodily encounters and advances their adequate understanding – the knowledge and power related to the natural interest in affirming reality – that is, the orientation of a body's individual essence within common existence. After all, 'in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable [*aptior*] of understanding distinctly' (Spinoza 1985, E2p13s).

So, while the body is capable (*capax*) of imagining reality in terms of necessity, only the mind is capable or apt (*aptior*) of adequately understanding the perspective of the enslaved body by affirming its reality, criticising dreams of slavery. The body, for its part, does not claim to be right and remains silent whilst exercising its imagination of affection. This practice of sensibility and the senses enhances the imagination of a necessary will to freedom, stimulating the perception of an opening, an escape.[11] Hence, bodily imagination at most effectuates a kind of negation of negativity: 'Our force of suffering *asserts* nothing, because it *expresses* nothing at all: it "involves" only our impotence, that is to say, the limitation of our power of action' (Deleuze 1990, 204; emphases in original). Even though this force concerns impotence and slavery, it remains a force. It is the force of imagining new bodily experiences by which we are encouraged to persevere and eventually encounter those particular bodies we can join in our striving towards active affections.

Thus, bodily imagination is a virtual power of experiment and resistance. It relies on the abstract capacities of the body, which include the warning that without adequately realising the unity of body and mind, knowledge and power will fail to affirm reality, namely, the infinite certainty of immanent being. The warning implies that the body needs to become something other than a capacity to act, i.e., a desire to deploy its disposition and enact its natural abilities and aptitudes. As Jacques-Louis Lantoine (2019) writes:

> The aptitudes, while being enacted, correspond to dispositions; while in reserve or in power, they are representations of the imagination. The use of this concept allows Spinoza to carry out the transition between what's possible and what's real and actual in a better way than the concept of capacity would do. (132)

11 We might think here, for instance, of enslaved Afro-Brazilians practicing their *capoeira* art as they prepare to flee to one of the Maroon communities known as *mocambos* or *quilombos*.

When aptitude is merely interpreted in terms of capacity, its dynamic function is lost. Instead, the concept of aptitude appeals to an imagination of the possible whilst affirming reality in terms of necessary action (Lantoine 2019, 218). It welcomes bodily imagination as the first step in an ontological strategy that transforms all virtual power into a real power to act. Aptitude is a concept that actively integrates the imagination (Lantoine 2019, 231) and, in doing so, also incorporates its most crude, bodily forms.

Whilst 'capacity' relies on an abstract and solely mental conception of the body, 'aptitude' realises the body as a set of causes and not merely a reservoir of effects – a random collection of symptoms. Hence, a body is in good 'health' when its parts and the whole function conform to its structure of aptitudes – it is then a joyful body (Zourabichvili 2020). Health is a notion that the body imagines whilst enacting its individual nature or essence within common existence. To strive for a healthy body is to understand it by its causes rather than its effects, to study physiology rather than anatomy, and to focus on functionality (Zourabichvili 2020). It is the 'temperament' (*ingenium*) of a body that determines the focus or desire by which each body learns to function in a singular way, as it is disposed by nature: 'What counts is the temperament of a body: what it can do by virtue of its structure, and the particular affectivity that follows from this' (Zourabichvili 2020, 215).

The enslaved body, too, has a singular temperament, corresponding to a more or less healthy regime of affections and thoughts, an art of living.[12] Yet, slavery abuses the body by denying it any health. Slavery renders the bodily aptitudes of life empty and senseless, as it imposes fantasies of sovereign rule and dreams of oppression. Finally, slavery impedes even the most elementary knowledge: bodily imagination. This is why the Brazilian, who resists and questions the world around, cries out:

Oh My Body!

'The Body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its Mind wonders at' (Spinoza 1985, E3p2s). The body is a complex structure, a set of relations, from which power tends to overflow. Even though bodily imagination is limited in extent, its creations are boundless.

12 Following Spinoza (1985), such health therefore involves 'to refresh and restore [oneself] in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another' (E4p45s).

We continue to not know what a body can do. These are the coordinates of a slave's body in a philosopher's dream – i.e., the need to resist history by imagining the body as a necessary will to freedom. When bodies are caught in colonial discourse, and racism and slavery block all access to reality, anything is more useful than suspending judgement whilst dreaming. 'Active, strategic adaptation is the effective means of our perseverance' (Bove [1996] 2023, 46). The 'black, scabby Brazilian' of whom Spinoza dreams has nothing to lose by exploring the bodily imagination. On the contrary, it is how the oppressed explore their force through resistance, affirming reality following 'the strategy of the conatus' (Bove 2023). 'Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives [*conatur*] to persevere in its being' (Spinoza 1985, E3p6). The conatus is both force and resistance (Casarino 2018): pure affirmation. It is the dynamic striving that incorporates the mind in the appetite to explore aptitudes and become desire (Spinoza 1985, E3p9s), namely, the desire to know and enact what a body can do. Along the progressive complexity of conatus-appetite-desire, the enslaved body's essence finds a liberatory orientation within its existence in the history of slavery. This is the strategy by which the Brazilian initiates a dissent from colonial discourse, liberating reality. Indeed, the materialist strategy of the conatus persistently pushes reality as far as it can, starting from the body.

The transformations of the conatus realise an embodied desire that powerfully wills freedom – the navigator of all life willing itself. Such desire leads the way into the ontological plane on which an enslaved body resists being a 'slave' and finds, in bodily imagination, sufficient power for an initial dissent in the process of affirming reality. The order of things must be questioned, starting from the singularly striving body that resists and imagines other ways of being. The imagination forms how things are by what they can be. Accordingly, the silence of questioning welcomes a prayer of immanence of a body liberating itself being a body. Finally, the sentence is uttered: 'Oh my body, always make me a man who questions!'

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16. Human-ing Out Loud: Ontologies of Disorder in a Musically Exemplified Trans-Caribbean Option

Charissa Granger and Francio Guadeloupe

Abstract: Jouvay presents an ongoing conversation about how to human in singular-multiple ways, instructing daaancers (Stines 2021) on how to live differently – that is, sensitive to relations between species, spirits, saints, mythical characters, and devils. Another ecosystem, disenchanted by difference, is imagined and temporarily created in music and daaance. This is a space and a short-offered time where how we play, sound out, and daaance allow for different futures to be imagined and new forms of *human-ing* that embrace relations with non-human animals and ecosystems to be practiced. It is a refusal of exclusion and a move towards making inequity inexact. Trans-Caribbeaning is to daaance flesh to flesh, to be undone by the non-human, the epitome of which is sound. It is to think, act, and feel with a community of minds firmly in the flesh of the world, contra liberal individualism and self-interest, racial nationhood, and Man's dominion over the earth. Its premise is that one cannot tackle racisms, economic dependency, animal/land exploitation, and the Anthropocene without interrogating humanocentrism and its degradation of the environment. What would it mean to think our historical subjectivities as different yet connected? And to think our belonging in terms of entangled histories?

Keywords: Trans-Caribbean thought; neerlandophone; humanocentrism; music; human-ing; relationality

On any given night, even with history against you in any hardscrabble place, beauty walks in. The ruin of history visited on a people does not wipe out the

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> steadfastness of beauty [...] Beauty, it seems, is constantly made. For some, to find beauty is to search through ruins. For some of us beauty must be made over and over again out of the sometimes fragile, the sometimes dangerous.
> (Brand 2002, 193)

Introduction

Cowbells/campana; chapi – the metal part of a garden hoe, a plantation tool; agan; triangle; wiri; the metal tines of a caha di orgel that are plucked by hammered nails; iron, the brake drum of a car wheel; güira/scratcher, tin hammered by hand with a nail to create over 5000 ripples that are scratched with a steel afro-pick – the comb that scrapes the güira. Cymbals; steelpans, repurposed oil barrels. Steel-weighted sledgehammers struck against a flat-head steel nail, creating grooves to isolate pitches. Handmade manipulated tin, steel, iron, often brought to fire to burn the chapi and the steelpan to produce the requisite sound, to create beauty, to enable a different way of human-ing: of playing human.[1]

Indeed, in playing human – that is, in practicing human-ing – works of beauty were created by peoples in the Caribbean, doing so not in opposition to, but rather in *apposition* to, the overrepresentation of Man (Wynter 2003). Describing several musics, instruments, and popular cultural practices of musicking, which includes dancing (Small 1998) – that is, doing life together – I-and-I consider apparitions that refuse non-relational philosophies of identity. This chapter thus foregrounds multiple ways of human-ing, which is again performing humanity in concord with other expressions of life, performing their performances.

In doing so, this chapter argues for a trans-Caribbean option: an epistemology and methodology based on an 'ontology of disorder', a processual poly-rhythmic paratactic ontology expressed from the neerlandophone world. This world animated by relations offers other possibilities of co-creating Caribbean becomings with the blackened in the region: Afro, Indo, Sino, Indigeno, and yes, Euro, and those with Mediterranean and Near-Eastern extraction too. Negative discrimination belongs to the world of Man who never missed the opportunity to blacken – and thereby to profit and extract.

I-and-I, as Rastafari say in lieu of 'we' who are always other to, othered, and are – in our practice of human-ing – more than that grammatical

1 This chapter invites the reader to listen to the referenced songs offered via the links provided.

imposition, play here with Sylvia Wynter, who extends on Frantz Fanon's thoughts that there is an urgent

> need to initiate the exploration of the new reconceptualized form of knowledge that would be called for by Fanon's redefinition of being human as that of skins (phylogeny / ontogeny) *and* masks (sociogeny). Therefore, *bios* and *mythoi*. And notice! One major implication here: *humanness* is no longer a *noun*. *Being human is a praxis*. (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 23, emphasis in original)

So, yes, playing, performing, practicing! I-and-I bid farewell to the analytical category of *the human*, which is a conception of a thing-being in the world, fabricated by those who sought to thingify or rather blacken people outside of Europe. Instead, I-and-I claim, embrace, and write about

> an irremediable homelessness common to the colonized, the enslaved, and the enclosed. This is to say that what is claimed in the name of blackness is an undercommon disorder that has always been there, that is retrospectively and retroactively located there, that is embraced by the ones who stay there while living somewhere else. Some people relish being a problem. (Moten 2008, 187)

It is better to be a problem practicing 'an ontology of disorder, an ontology of dehiscence, a para-ontology' (Moten 2008, 187), whilst living in the clutches of the elsewhere of the epistemic-ontological hegemony of Man and its race-full fabrication of humanity.

Those in the social sciences who are drunk with empirical logic may say 'but the people you speak about don't talk that way'. No, they do not! Rather, they sound it out in their laughter, joy, movement, banter, food preparation, commensality, gestures, *onomatopoeia*, *poiesis* in material culture, and, yes, in music. Ontology in such creative practice is always already disordered, its dismantling always already part of the imagination.

Today, I-and-I do so with carnival and other fêtes with big trucks that carry high-voltage speakers, sound systems, and these instruments on their flatbeds to sound out the music made with the instruments mentioned above – Soca, Bouyon, Jab, Dancehall, Calypso, Cadense, Gwo ka, Reggeaton, Kompa, Tambú, Tumba, and Roadfire, to name but a few. Most of the blackened in the Caribbean theorise and critique in their doing, and their art, which is always critical, supplements what they say.

The register of writing is the preferred and privileged medium of truth in the hegemonic order of meaning ruled by Man, whilst the soundings heretofore mentioned are expressive of an ontology of disorder that troubles, tries, and transposes textuality and language. This text is what happens when I-and-I remain faithful to that social fact. Here is a move to a disorder that undoes itself. This is a reach for the paraontological, a play that is not tethered to ownership or fixity. No acontextuality please!

When posed the question 'what will be the cure to our affliction in these times – what is the cure?' – Sylvia Wynter offers language (Wynter and Alagraa 2021). And thus, some may think, 'you see that Caribbean recognises too that there is no outside to the text, so let us remain wedded to literature'. However, Toni Morrison (2021) tells us that 'language really cannot do it all, it just can't […] and what is beyond it or next to it, or behind it.' Performing beyond and alongside language is sound and working the sonic produces music. Perhaps this is implicit in Wynter's words if we take that for her, movement (dance) and humanly produced sound (music) are essential.

For our time I-and-I experience the importance of music and dance in virtual performances that are giving an account of what is at stake in doing humanity (ethically), pointing to what we need in order to allow us to persist in certain ways – through the missings, the warnings not to take music-making, dancing together, and gathering for granted, through the sorrow, the woefulness, distanced performances from balconies throughout Italian neighbourhoods and virtual performances of carnival and steelpan that performed arrangements of Bob Marley's *One Love* and Lennon's *Imagine*. Such performances instruct in a viscerally performative way how to get through it whilst evoking an aesthetic of world-making, implicitly encouraging transformation and possibilities. Such virtual pan performances in this time, within the pandemic, reach for collectivity, and in doing so move to 'enact a transformation of the whole entire society' (Wynter and Alagraa 2021), which Wynter tells us is crucial. In a time when so much gathering was surveilled, virtual music events offered unsurveilled gathering – a possibility to gather otherwise, a reimagining of what collectivity can be, and how I-and-I might think and experience it even whilst in isolation – individually. The virtual space makes for 'another imagining of relation'. It 'tells us something about how we can and do and might live the world differently' (McKittrick 2022, 10).

It is from the sounding and dancing that I-and-I draw inspiration to speak about human-ing as processual multiple-singular becoming in line with the perpetual movement termed life – appearances and disappearances all

the way down. Just as there is rain-ing, there is human-ing; and as there is human-ing, there is dog-ing. Nouns are abstractions in a verbal overstanding.

For those who care to care, that is, for those who listen, human-ing is in the musicking, in the melodies sung, the rhythms played, in the daaance,[2] and in the poetry of poets such as Kamau Brathwaite (1984):

> Over in the New World, the Americans [...] tried to bridge or to break the pentameter through a cosmic movement, a large movement of sound [...] the hurricane does not roar in pentameters. And that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm which approximates the *natural* experience, the *environmental* experience? (10, emphasis in original)

Trans-Caribbean thought, which is best conceived as an option next to other progressive ways of undoing colonial habits of action, entails attending to apparitions. I-and-I overstand acknowledging the continuing absence-presence of spectres that haunt and disturb the common-sense understandings of Caribbean becoming. In UN, NGO, and academic speak, these apparitions are reduced in varied ways to the names of the 'indigenous', 'enslaved', 'indentured', 'Maroon', 'Black', 'white', conquistador, and 'coloniser'. Some who are placed in those categories are rendered dead and long gone in the works of positivist historians (such as many indigenous peoples). They are politically emplotted in the reparations discourse of liberal nationalists from the Caribbean region, or they are rendered contemporary in the we-talk or 'reference-we' (Wynter and McKittrick 2015) of ethno-racial absolutists who present themselves as still being enslaved and Indians.

How can I-and-I attend to apparitions without claiming truth or rootedness? Nowhere in mainstream academia are these returning-again-haunting-jumbies[3] engaged as unknown-knowns radically disrupting the either-or

2 Dr L'Antoinette Stines distinguishes dance from Daaance. At the 2021 Philip Sherlock Lecture, Dr Stines explains that to start from her own lived experience, dance had to change to make space for her overstanding of African retentions in thinking through dance, which was becoming a problem. To do so, dance had to become daaance. The three 'aaa' are needed to encompass movement, singing, drumming, reverence, language, food, sacrifice, ritual, politics, politricks, and passion. 'Daaance haal is revolution of the body [...] If I was looking at daaance, I had to look it through the eyes of the dance and I had to become naked [...] I had to start from scratch [...] therefore if I become naked and yuh have zsight from my lived experience, resulting in my overstanding of Jamaica and the African retentions, the word dance was then becoming a problem. And so it became daaance with the 3 a's so nobody a say dem a go a one dance hall, nobody say dem goin to the dance, you hear the people dem say me a go a one daaance.' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2jxHS8jR28.

3 Jumbie, a folk spirit.

logic of past or present, as they are in mystical Rastafari renditions of time, or in the poetics of calypsonians such as Shadow, Black Stalin, Calypso Rose, and Sparrow. Such calypsonians travel with us on Dutch Caribbean soca[4] lovers' busses from London to Berlin to borders between the Netherlands and Belgium during festivals such as Hoogstraten Antilliaanse Feesten. Such hauntings, together with the jumbies and zumbi that animate and propel them, move to disrupt the landscape of rootedness, any referent-we, and any ontological blackness I-and-I are clutching onto for life. In so doing, another geography is initiated that relates the neerlandophone world to Calypso[5] sung in Dutch,[6] or Dutch soca vs. Dancehall parties.

Calypsonian Shadow offers a poetics of unknown-knowns that undoes coloniality and attends to those apparitions that make up and enable Caribbean liveability whilst acknowledging hauntings – hauntology (which is futurity). Shadow's music in lyric and sound attends to the ghostly matter. It renders the jumbie sonically, rhythmically,[7] lyrically,[8] to suggest an existence that is bound up with multiplicity, with the imaginary. Here a jumbie riddim as an event that takes hold of participants, takes hold of place, and takes place to make multiplicity possible. The jumbies populate the taken place as a sonic litany. The bounce of the beat and the steady groove is the presence of the jumbie in bodies that are in musical performance. The groove playfully penetrates the body, so that all present can enact a jumbie – can be inhabited by jumbies. The riddim clambers bodies as the metal sound of the iron and scratchers, the skins of the drums and the percussion comes together. The sound of the jumbie riddim scrambles the senses and ruffles the self. The 'we' and the 'I' are disrupted to become something different that moves outside pronouns and thus beyond language. The defined coordinates of being human and organised neerlandophone identities also become scrambled as I-and-I listen, feel, and move through Rotterdam and Notting Hill, through Aruba and St. Maarten. Daaancing bodies propelled by such a scramble and such a mounting of music are adorned with new forms of being. The submergence with the jumbie, with other beings in relation, with music and multiple selves,

4 Popular Caribbean music predominantly associated with carnival.

5 Lyrical music that contributes to social commentary.

6 Slinger Francisco, 'Dutch Romance,' 23 January 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ilE7aa0bq8. See also Reinier Mulder, with the sobriquet Macamba King, 'Huppelen,' 4 February 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rvyz-WzMpb8).

7 Winston Bailey, 'Jumbie Rhythm,' 23 September 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD7Myfqj21Y.

8 Winston Bailey, 'Jumbies,' 20 August 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bjHNOmsFbo.

makes it such that the above can never be felt as objects, can never be experienced as separate, existing apart from each other. The distinction between subject and object, between self and other, ceases to operate in isolation. The individual 'I' is suspended and so is 'we'. Human-ing then operates in a scope of multiplicity and nonlinear continuity in which any limitation (be it temporal, spatial, geographic, languaging, gods, and self and other) becomes obscure. Borders become indefinite and can be given up for something else – for a doing, for a practice, for making the world otherwise. This jumbie is part of the Carnival Scenery[9] where lyrically, Shadow describes the scene of carnival:

> The sweetest thing in this world is Bacchanal
> Just take the scenery on jouvay mornin'
> Who wailin' wailin'
> Who winin' winin'
> When everybody come out with fêttin' feelin'
> Who drinkin' drinkin'
> Who thinkin' thinkin'

The lyrics that describe jouvay are sung over an unrelenting and persistent repetitive riddim that consists of the iron bell pattern and the steady conga Calypso beat that drives it all.[10] We listen to Shadow narrating a short jouvay scene using call and response – a chorus. The riddim breaks through accented interjections by the horns above the underlying riddim, making space for those practicing being human to find themselves:

> And when that big band symphony
> start to jam that melody, they just drinkin' and carryin' on
> and when that crazy vibration start to rock your abdomen, they just drinkin' and carryin' on.
> People drinkin rum
> People beatin' drum
> People dancin' nice
> People takin' chance
> When a band passin' bacchanal in the place
> Them woman winin' like if they have engine in they waist

9 Winston Bailey, 'Carnival Scenery,' 19 August 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CZDQ-jeUN4.

10 Jouvay is an early morning procession that ushers in Carnival Monday.

A lyrical scene that accounts and encourages human-ing and sonically through repetition, rhyming, riddim embraces human-ing. The groove grows, then stops for the riddim breaks to offer a poetics of 'everybody is somebody',[11] which was ironically recorded on the same album, titled *Dreadnes'*. Disappearances daaance with appearances in the Calypso known as life, meaning-making and world-making occurring through a collective act of bacchanal in jouvay. Not only jouvay, jumbie riddims, and carnival do this, but feel Afrobeat and amapiano doing this, feel diasporic creative cultural practices doing this as well. What does music, positioned as an apparition – that is, as a practice that acknowledges the continuing absence-presence of spectres that haunt and disturb the common-sense understandings of Caribbean becomings – equip us with as listeners, thinker/feelers? What kind of trans-Caribbeaning thought and intellectual legacy does music provide?

In listening and learning from Shadow, I-and-I can hear and feel Shadow positioning deadness, meaning the disappearance of that which we cherish, and dreadness as a vital part of the Caribbean becomings. Shadow's entire aesthetic praxis in tune with dying as a dance in which everything changes, teaches the dreadness of life and how to wholly embrace, mingle with, and transpose such anxiety and boredom, creating another arrangement of existential dwelling that includes obeah,[12] jumbies, multiple devils, and unknown-known things that live inside of us and that we must invite out to play.

How do we invite the unknown-knowns out to play whilst acknowledging dread inside a practice creates and imagines? What does this play inaugurate? What does it mean to invite that which is rendered dead under categories of indigenous, enslaved, indentured, and conquistador? And how does this dreadness, which embraces the unknown-knowns, disrupt the stark distinction between past and present? Can time, as rendered through the poetics of the unknown-knowns and in an embrace of dreadfulness, offer other possibilities for living and Caribbean becomings? What proceeds from such an experience of time? These are questions to grapple with whilst I-and-I daaance it out.[13]

Such creative apparitions are already undoing and unthinking the man-world dichotomy and rather choose the option of practicing human-ing.

11 Winston Bailey, 'Everybody is somebody,' 19 August 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u90OjdPA45Q.

12 Obeah is an Afro-Caribbean diasporic practice of healing, cleansing, fulfilling desires, and readings.

13 Winston Bailey, 'Doctor Say,' 23 January 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMATt3s-kFs.

However, following Dionne Brand (2018), I-and-I acknowledge that 'when the living conditions that art evinces haven't changed, one must always make more imaginaries for one to live in'. A trans-Caribbean option offers such another imaginary. Sylvia Wynter too avers that practices of art are sites where a re-enchanted way of human-ing can be realised,[14] thereby undoing the overrepresentation of Man – I-and-I have felt re-enchantment in panyards, dance and concert halls, and jouvays throughout the Caribbean diaspora, I-and-I take it with me – an embodied knowledge, comprised of joy, love, a knowing of pleasure.

This feeling is an invitation to question the place of art, music, and performance practice in discussions of human-ing, climate change, identitarian politics, Black nationalism, the exploitation of life and its impact on liveability, the extraction of natural resources, and the effects of all the above on liveability. Anthony Bogues (2012) reminds us that 'the work of the imagination operates as critical thought. It imagines and breaks the boundaries/horizons of the status quo of the everyday [...] produces new thought and desires' (45). Bound up with music is a practice of imaging. In musicality, there is critique: What is Shadow's bouncy bass doing? What is music doing when moved to, when daaanced? The repetition, the antiphony, the jam section. What can music and movement offer discussions of human-ing? Can they reveal something anew about the overrepresentation of Man? There is knowledge in this music practice and aesthetic use of bodies in concert, an embodied knowledge that emerges from feeling, from sensing each other as part of ourselves.

Studying and performing Caribbean diasporic music, thereby dancing, offers so much to how I-and-I think about livingness, human-ing, different ways of being in the world, freedom practices, and sovereignty. Multiple philosophies of love, music, and movement beckon us to think anew such ongoing discussions and held-fast ontologies in the humanities. Music is a site where our livingness is practiced and where the knowledge of this livingness, often achieved through dance, this human-ing, takes place.

Hilary Beckles's (1990) pioneering essay on the Irish indentured in the Caribbean is a welcome reminder that what I-and-I seek to convey in this essay should not be understood as Afro or African alone. The Irish indentured and their descendants 'experienced servitude as an oppressive labour system in which their condition was nearer slavery than freedom' (Beckles 1990, 511). They musicked and danced too in the midst of tyranny.[15] Like all West

14 See for example Sylvia Wynter (1970).

15 See 'Celtic in the Caribbean,' https://celticlifeintl.com/celtic-in-the-caribbean/.

Indians, they too preferred to be a problem rather than accepting their lowly station in the hegemony ontology dictated by the whims of Man. A problem, for as the historian Hilary Beckles (1990) explained, '[m]asters complained about their unwillingness to work according to the terms of their contracts and about their hostile reactions to demands of overseers and managers. They were stereotyped as disobedient, lazy, and aggressive' (511).

Given the scope of this edited volume, I-and-I attend to the Afro-Caribbeans as a specific category of the blackened, recognising, however, as Stuart Hall (1990) argued, that all *présences* – or rather, cultural hauntings of the colonial project in the Caribbean, whether it be from Africa, Europe, Asia, or America – contain each other. An example of this is how creolisation was at work amongst the Irish and Africans toiling in the Caribbean: 'Ibo men playing bodhrans and fiddles and Kerrymen learning to play jubi drums, set dances becoming syncopated to African rhythms, Saturday night ceili dances turning into full-blown voodoo rituals' (Sloan 1982, 52). This is not solely a mixing amongst the down-pressed. Man, in other words, is in every Caribbean person too. It is the 'somewhere else they live', to follow Fred Moten (2008), even as they do the appositive work; it is the latter that inspires this offering. In other words, the enumerated music practices with which I-and-I began this chapter evoke an ever-creolising Caribbean sonospoetics that belongs to all: even if in this piece the work of the descendants of Africans as creators is foregrounded, this work, this practice of human-ing, nevertheless transgresses any points and locations of emergence.

I-and-I seek to think through how such practices play outside the logic of dissent, resistance, and narrow categories of doing humanity, by performing modes of human-ing that are not dictated by enslavement, its accompanied trauma, and pain. This is thus a critique of the manner in which Black subjectivity seems to be assigned to, and inscribed with, enslavement and its continued dissent, often accepted as the totality of Black being and internalised as such. Approaching and shaping Black subjectivity as such presupposes a particular future of violence where what black subjectivity wants, is access to what the other has, leaving the infrastructure of what is to be had intact, untroubled.

Human-ing in its very practice troubles. Its starting point envisions and embraces a reconfiguration of what is to be had. Human-ing extemporises with Glissant, whose

> theorisation of opacity and relation does not dwell on black objecthood; instead, he draws attention to how the living memory of colonialism and

> plantation slavery generated ways to hold on to and claim an unintelligibility that is conditioned by our interhuman intimacies and encounters. (McKittrick 2022, 7)

During carnival, characters blend, mash up, and rub up on each other in a space where everybody is somebody,[16] and everything is part of that in a practice that topples the thingified hierarchies of human, plant, animal, gender, and class. The surreal and magical, twisted with realism, takes hold in jouvays across the diaspora as devils, iguanas, cows, and burros animate and penetrate the whole in a 'something got a hold of me' style.[17] The play of drama in the streets, the people that make the space lived, the ticket vendor – tickets, tickets, tickets! The lady with coconut drops, the patties and festival dumplings of Notting Hill, the *pastechi* and johnny cakes of Rotterdam's Zomercarnaval, the insurance salesman jammin' with unhoused persons – real characters who play out human-ing together with the buzz of the bass, the charge of the rhythm, libations, and all the spirits, making other worlds possible. Such a theorisation based on visceral participation during such moments of freedom is *sans humanité* – without mercy in the way it seeks to break with identitarian politics and to play human in all ways outside, inside, and at the edge of its conscripts. This is the character of a trans-Caribbean poetics of being.

By embracing a Glissantian relationality and an ontology of disorder, an attempt is made to appreciate how Caribbean popular cultural practices critique that inscription of enslavement and assignment of single beings, allowing the peoples in the basin to live outside of these descriptive statements, even if structures of domination frantically work to keep them in check. Still, in the moments of freedom during carnival, a fête, barbequing on the beach, or cracking jokes, they inhabit, co-create, and relish in the way Caribbean cultural practices offer gathering, making, imagining and imagination, creativity, and beauty in their poetics. Thus, the aim is to attend to how black liveability eludes that inscription and herein I-and-I offer their translations in what is termed a trans-Caribbean thought/feeling or option.

Black liveability ought not to be construed as a new essence, but rather as a way of becoming against static notions of identity that fully acknowledges what Glissant termed the *entour* – that is, 'the whole environment comprising

16 Winston Bailey, 'Everybody is somebody,' 19 August 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u90OjdPA45Q.

17 Claudette Peters, 'Something got a hold of me,' 25 September 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w43iTExVh_c.

the poem, human and non-human animals, vegetation, rocks, lavas, and "nature" and "culture." The latter terms lose meaning since they exist in a continuum, not in a system of opposition' (Loichot 2020, 28). Again, black liveability is not about a specific genre of the human, but rather about a way of human-ing by peoples labelled infrahuman.

In *Black Metamorphosis*, Sylvia Wynter (n.d.) describes the tin oil drums (and plantation tools) as the rejects of the 'white economy' that the blackened in the Caribbean human-ed with as instruments on which to play music – a reconfiguration of what enslavement and coloniality tries. Wynter asks: 'what is the imperative that demands a once more human world in which to see reflected the power of creativity?' Interested in this metal sound which is another apparition, the ideas that encapsulate this sound and thinking about the conditions that produced a situation that demanded such Caribbean sounds, that necessitated this way of world-making for which the rhythm, the beat was to become the 'underlying principle' (Wynter n.d.), I-and-I ask: What might a project of human-ing be? And how might it take shape to bring about a trans-Caribbean theorising?

The loud voices, the labour and innovation that made and continue to make them possible not only reveal dissent, but also open possibilities to think anew and again pose the questions: What is *human*? And what would it mean to unravel the notion of human? Process, relation, disorder, yes! I-and-I offer a practice of human-ing that points towards the multiple embodied relations between actual and virtual becomings. Human-ing is a practice that recognises the multiple parts of selves and moves across this multiplicity, which is both shared and common. Musicked spaces that make gathering and daaance possible are our guides for examining other ways of thinking, being, and practicing in the world, inviting, ushering in, and initiating other ways of doing humanity.

Following Wynter, the current Euro-American understanding and experience of what it means to be human is the blanket general version. However, what happens when many deemed lesser in the ex-colonial world fall outside that conception of human? Then there is a failure to forward a humanism that recognises human-ing. Wynter teaches the history of how elites in Europe modified, revised, and synthesised their own forms of social life and positioned that as the only valid and legitimate way. Given this history that continues in modified form, the logic of the black subject as slavery becomes the only logic to which all in the wake of slavery become subject, and through which they are understood.

This is not a call to merely expand the post-Enlightenment notion of the human, or to think alternative humanities. Rather, it is a practice that

already recognises multiplicities. Without such an undoing of Man's human or alternatives critically grafted thereupon, land exploitation, resource extraction, animal cruelty, and extinction will continue uninhibited, invested in and sustained by the capitalist project.

Music is a practice that articulates and summons listeners, practitioners, and dancers to think about how new forms of sociality, and liveability herein, materialise. I-and-I speak from experiences of being part of that articulation work in an embodied fashion. Music and performance summon, or rather invite, participation in the emergence of other ways of thinking, being, and knowing – in short, engaging in a practice of human-ing, the work of world-making, giving an example of living together otherwise.

I-and-I submit that in musicking, corporeal authority and authorship take place in communion, making space and giving permission for multiple existences and multiple ways of existing. Human-ing refuses individualism and self-interest. 'Glissant's work does not centre individualism: his writing relies heavily on relation and encounters and intimacies and connections that are joyful and painful and contradictory' (McKittrick 2022, 7). A deep engagement with the music, instruments, and with daaance enables an undoing of the concept and Man's institutionalisation of 'human' radically. It undoes humanocentrism, making space for doing human-ing ethically in relation to other beings and environments.

I-and-I contend that Caribbean music and larger Caribbean diasporic practices such as jouvay help to unwork Man's notion of the human. Jouvay teaches a relation ontology, here the devil; jab jab is embodied and entangled; and according to the Grenadian artist Skinny Banton, the jab jab cooks salt fish, heating it up on firewood in a coal pot. This is about being in the outdoors, transacting without exploiting. In Jouvay people become ethically with all living – past and future – using discarded repurposed material to evoke expressions and apparitions such as devil, baby doll, jab. Some conceal the visible part of their human becoming by drenching in motor oil, donning chains and whips to be pre- and past-industrial in critical ways. Some use paint, mud, and powder for the concealment of the pressures to be an individual; to be a one in a power hierarchy of ones. Such practices, which move through the diaspora, embrace a relational ontology that makes knowledge and different theories of being possible for those who refuse to deny the multiple parts of themselves within and without their bodies, for those who refuse any monolithic idea of the human. A trans-Caribbean option is implicated in unravelling humanocentrism, which involves domination of the category of human, as well as control, money, and maintaining extractive capitalism in order, of a type of meaning and being that Mignolo

(2005, 153) positions as a synchronous process. A trans-Caribbean option, thinking through music, jouvay, carnival, parading, instrument building, sonospoetics, fashion, design, and other practices of liveability, is concerned with analysing, and therein working against, humanocentrism.

The few ways of sounding out those who human hear and feel undermine this exploitative and extractive capitalist way of being, especially in the instrument's material reconfiguration and repurposing, pointing them to other ways of being in the world. Caribbean music offers us much to think about sustainability in the way in which materials have been and continue to be repurposed for sound work. Another way is offered, as music extends another imagined possibility that ought to be attended to. To return to jouvay, for example, jouvay costumes are made from discarded or soon to be discarded materials and clothes. Old potties and chamber pots become rum vessels, baby bottles and pacifiers become part of the street theatre. Oil cans and biscuit tins are used for making riddim. The sound of the music and the accompanying performance is one of sustainability – recycle, repurpose, remake, and reinvention. A sound of reinvention like the chapi, a garden hoe, turned plantation tool, turned music instrument. An instrument that loudly proclaims human-ing.

Music helped and continues to help make new forms of subjectivities, especially in the way in which resources were and continue to be used in making-music in the Caribbean, making selves that indirectly challenge anything that segregates – sexism, xenophobia, ageism, transphobia, anti-blackness, nationalism, the nation state, neatness of borders – opening up to acknowledging human-ing. Yes, the Man is in Afro-Caribbean people, but that bull is not there alone. There is often – unbeknownst to the speech-acts of Afro-Caribbeans that support theses of black inferiority complexes and conservatism, sociopsychological reflexes that seek communion – that longing for that feeling during a good fête where hierarchical distinctions do not matter.

Music connects, practices such as jouvay connect, beckoning you to become multiple. Sylvia Wynter (n.d.) suggests that ordinary 'people listening or dancing participate in the experience of the music, each separate, yet linked by the collective physiological experience of the beat, linked across societal inscription, boundaries, linked in an experience of the social'. Music creates possibility in spaces of enclosure, possibilities to think anew[18] our relation to I-and-I, and climate and environment as part of I-and-I, and

18 What can music offer discussions of climate change and its effects? Can it reveal something anew? Can it help us to think climate change anew?

the possibility to feel and thus be otherwise in relation to it. Music is a site where our livingness is practiced and where the knowledge of this livingness takes place – knowledge that is bound up with pleasure, and engaging with nature as part of ourselves. I-and-I recognise that trans-Caribbean thought emerges from a practice of daaancing flesh to flesh, human intellectual rhyming being enriched and thus undone by the non-human, the epitome of which is sound. 'In the beginning was the sound and they all knew what that sound sounded like' (Morrison 259). Iron-sound, metal-sound, sea-sound, river-sound, pond-sound, earth-sound, air-sound, plant-sound, animal-sound, all re-educating in their own ways human-sound, instructing on different ways of embodied being, whilst baptised in motor oil, mud, and paint, clouded in a dust of powder during jouvay.

Wynter (n.d.) makes clear that 'one must *participate* in knowing. Knowledge is not an accumulation of fixed and permanent truths' (emphasis in original). Further, Wynter continues, black music ignites 'enthusiasm and exaltation', indicating an uncolonised flow of desire that expresses liberation from existing normative knowledge systems. Musicking and various carnival practices, religious and sacred rituals, make this possible across the Dutch Caribbean islands. In the act of gathering and making, and the practice of human-ing supported herein, there is a reinvention of liveability, of life anew through an opening up of multiple selves that is not aimed at forgetting selfness, but rather underscores the impossibility of a single self.

What I-and-I draw from listening and daaancing to some of the sounds of the Caribbean is that there is no separation between human and non-human. Musicking offers a possibility to rethink and radically reconstruct the human in relation to the environment, approaching what is seemingly outward as part of one's multiple selves. What emerges from this relational way of thinking is a trans-Caribbean thought, the basic premise of which is that one cannot tackle racisms, economic dependency, animal extinction and exploitation, and the Anthropocene without a serious interrogation of humanocentrism.

Conclusion: A Call for Continuous Interrogation of Humanocentrism

Gathering, assembling; metal, sonic, and compositional experimenting to inaugurate a new music and riddim to daaance to; and a new daaance to practice liveability – this is human-ing, a summoning and a practice to live together otherwise. The above creative art practice can be imagined as a

performance through which an interrogation of humanocentrism might occur. Jouvay can be imagined as a time, performance, and daaance where this interrogation of humanocentrism might occur. The early morning or late evening holds many forms of imaginings. Imagining alternative ways of living, unsettlings that are performed in darkness, its colourful and dirty residue only revealed at daybreak. Working with repurposed materials to make instruments that enable those multiple parts of oneself to resonate, or to make a costume or an evocative character, whether to instil fear or to alure, and entice during jouvay, there is a refusal of capital consumerism, a call to construct something different, making it a generative artistic space to think though humanocentrism. Moreover, in such relational practices a different organising system is made possible by moving, shouting, sounding out, daaancing, and revelling where individualism and self-interest are eluded. An ongoing act of building the communal is offered and sustained, even after the musicking event is concluded. This is a temporary space and a short-offered time of love, joy, and embracing the erotic that is embodied well after the event has ended, where how collectives daaance in jouvay, make instruments and sound out, allows for different futures to be imagined and new forms of human-ing that embrace a relation with the environment, other animals, and ecosystems and refuse exclusion, making inequity inexact.

In jouvay and musicking, there is an ongoing conversation about how to human in singular-multiple ways as it instructs daaancers, makers, and practitioners how to live otherwise. It is an offering of how to live differently with each other, sensitive to relations between species, spirits, saints, mythical characters, and various devils. A whole other ecosystem, disenchanted by difference, is imagined and temporarily created in daaance, making liberation possible. This is where artmaking and imagining are the cure, according to Sylvia Wynter (2021): in unworking humanocentrism, not to erase doing humanity, but to radically interrogate how we do it. It invites us to human in accord with life processes. The importance of trans-Caribbeaning is unworking, disaggregating humanocentrism. Living in a deeply relational way, caught up in the sound of the riddim, you forget yourself and tune into all the other selves that materialise in the act of slowly bending a tree branch to make a benta,[19] or hollowing out a tree trunk to make a drum, gaging the moon so that the necessary roots might be dug up, or at 4 a.m. under the strong buzz of the high-voltage bass, the network of characters moving through the temporary time, space, and place, whilst feeling ungoverned and ungovernable joy that cannot be easily co-opted by

19 Curaçaoan music instrument. A mouth bow.

corporatism or capitalism. Small eruptions of freedom, to imagine, create, and be, are embodied and carried out of that in-tune and attuned space and time. It is generative, germinating love, eluding the politics of difference. It is embodied in our very way of doing humanity, notwithstanding location, genre, or cultural praxis. I-and-I, studying with collectives in the Caribbean and the Diaspora through music, stand in relation to life as a multitude of expressions. This is trans-Caribbeaning.

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17. Epilogue: Histories of Imagination and the Making of Cultural Archives

Susan Legêne

Abstract: An epilogue is an afterthought, a reflection on what has just happened or was written. This epilogue focuses on four approaches to histories of cultural imagination and the making of cultural archives. First, it argues that imaginations of slavery and its interaction with historiography develop across languages and change in the course of time. Experiences, memories, written narratives from within the neerlandophone space: time and again they are re-invoked, and resurface in ever newer forms and imaginative formats across language boundaries. Trends in the historiography are then discussed, as well as the major societal and historiographical discussion in the Netherlands on the framing of a comparative approach to Dutch slavery and abolition in the East Asian Indian Ocean next to transatlantic slavery. The current role of museums and theatre in the development of new, multi-vocal approaches to the slavery past is briefly mentioned, and the epilogue then ends with how oceans, the waters that have been so crucial in the lived experiences of enslavement, reappear in imaginations of the slavery past and its afterlives.

Keywords: historiography; historical framing; orbit; space; oceans; multilingualism

The cultural imagination of slavery in the neerlandophone space is the challenging theme of this volume. The term 'neerlandophone space' refers to language, a linguistic space. This epilogue intends to position that space in the context of Dutch historiography and its intersection with imaginative museal and theatre initiatives addressing the slavery past. Anno 2025, Dutch is one of twenty-four official European languages. However, people in the neerlandophone space speak and write in many languages, and in the past

Paijmans, Marrigje, and Karwan Fatah-Black, eds. *Slavery in the Cultural Imagination: Debates, Silences, and Dissent in the Neerlandophone Space*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2025. DOI 10.5117/9789463728799_CH17

even more so, including the Neolatin of Hugo Grotius's *Mare liberum* (1608), or the Sranantongo of Johannes King in *Skrekiboekoe* (1882–1888) (de Beets 1995). Even King Willem-Alexander, acknowledging the multilingual characteristics and long-lasting memories he addressed in making apologies for the colonial past, chose, in 2023, to conclude his speech with words in Sranantongo:

> *Ten kon drai*
> *Den keti koti, brada, sisa*
> *Ten kon drai*
> *Den keti koti, fu tru!* [1]

This volume shows that it can be rewarding to focus on the neerlandophone space, implying a focus on the Netherlands as a 'mother-tongue country' – the 'mother land' in colonial times; or, in other metaphors, the 'fatherland'; or, according to Afrikaner settlers, the *stamverwante* ('kindred') nation. To me, neerlandophone also invokes an imaginary or metaphorical world of drained and reclaimed land behind dykes, with post-1945 ever changing laws that regulate who are entitled to enter and become Dutch citizens, or settle as labour migrants or refugees, and with an emerging ethno-nationalist myth of a primordial homogenous nation state that intuitively knows or can decide who belongs and who should always be aware that they belong only partly because they arrived 'later' (Jones 2024; Siebers 2015).

Imaginations of Slavery: Across Language and Times

While I return to those dykes and borders below, this volume first asks us – and rightly so – to open up our minds, imagination, and understanding to a re-interpretation of archival sources and thus also rethink the making, afterlives, and aftereffects of the slavery past. The introduction to this volume (page 19) points, in this respect, to a disciplinary conundrum:

> It turns out that, even if the notion of the neerlandophone space has its limitations, it accurately expresses the conundrum in which Dutch literary studies presently finds itself: being based on a national language, whilst acknowledging the need to engage in multilingual collaborations.

1 'Times have changed / The chains have been broken, brothers and sisters / Times have changed / The chains have been broken, honestly!' See https://www.koninklijkhuis.nl/documenten/toespraken/2023/07/01/toespraak-van-koning-willem-alexander-tijdens-de-nationale-herdenking-slavernijverleden-2023.

From my perspective as a historian of slavery, colonialism, and decolonisation, I would argue that the focus on the neerlandophone and the weakness of a comparative frame that introduces concepts and approaches from other scholarly contexts can also be traced in the historiography of, and public debate on, the Dutch slavery past. Echoes of this are also evident in current critique in Dutch academia and politics that those who address anti-Black racism in society and the need for decolonisation in many societal domains, including academic research and teaching, are importing foreign, alien academic approaches to the aftereffects of that past.

A key target of this critique are the critical race studies. One of the disagreements here is that critical race studies originated in, and was developed within (and is therefore still supposed to specifically deal with), the context of the United States of America – specifically American anti-Black racism and the Civil Rights movement. Hans Siebers (2015), a social scientist on inequality in work settings and education, argued that '[i]n Dutch public discourses, any use of the term "race" is inevitably understood as a justification of racism and triggers Holocaust associations' (371). He made a distinction between etic (outsider) and emic (insider) analytical positions, and argued that

> CR [Critical Race] authors deny the Dutch the right to develop their own contextual and emic understanding of racism stemming from the Holocaust trauma, and subsequently accuse the Dutch of denying racism as defined in an etic and assumedly universal way by the authors themselves. (Siebers 2015, 375)

Siebers's use of emic and etic in connection to the scholars he criticises runs the risk of declaring those scholars outsiders, despite the fact that they live, work, and were born in what we here call the neerlandophone space. 'Their' own contextual understanding of racism is as emic and Dutch as that of 'the Dutch' to whom he refers.[2]

Of course, it is correct that any anti-Black racism does operate historically in specific forms. However, these are not separate worlds, not silos, neither

2 I thank Artwell Cain for our email discussion about Siebers's complex argumentation; see also Cain and Wijdenbosch (2017). In his Evelien Gans Lecture in De Balie, Amsterdam, on 15 May 2024, with the title 'Antisemitism, Racism and Anti-Racism: A History', David Feldman explained how antislavery and anti-Jewish discourse around 1840 were part of the same equal rights movement, how they later separated in Europe after equal rights had been secured for Jews, although antisemitism continued and got its name, and how today the two – anti-Black racism and antisemitism – have again become part of the same discourse. See also Feldman (2024).

spatially, nor in terms of discipline, nor linguistically. The chapters presented in this volume explicitly focus on the context of Dutch history and explore structures of thinking in the Dutch language. However, specificities only exist in a comparative frame, and as outcomes of specific interactions. A literal example of such an American/Dutch exchange is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. When Harriet Beecher Stowe published the book in 1853, it was immediately translated into Dutch. That same year Julien Wolbers (1853), reframing the American story in a Surinamese context, wrote a treatise on slavery in Suriname, with the subtitle 'the same horror of slavery, narrated in "Uncle Tom's Cabin", exists in our West Indies colonies as well' (see also Haarnack 2020). Wolbers partly relied on, and quoted from, previous authors such as the French philosopher Voltaire in *Candide* (1775), the Scottish soldier Stedman with his *Narrative* (1796), and the English judge of the Anglo-Dutch mixed commission Court for the abolition of the slave trade in Suriname, C. E. Lefroy, and his novel *Outalissi* (1826; Legêne 1998, passim). In its turn, Wolbers's work would be followed by other works: novels, political treatises, histories of enslavement, slavery, plantation life and resistance, up to and beyond Cynthia McLeod's *Hoe duur was de suiker* ('The Cost of Sugar', 1999). Through a process of constant iteration, stories based on events in an ever-changing imperial sphere were told, retold, performed, visualized, and included in historiography.

Tide-like, the neerlandophone space experienced ebb and flow. This ebb and flow was seen recently in the Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KoZP) movement. In its argument that Zwarte Piet ('Black Pete') was racism, KoZP referred both to continental European and specifically Dutch folklore as well as to American racist blackface traditions, an oppressive racist connotation that (other than in the reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the 1850s) had remained unknown to many in the Netherlands. Another recent expansion of the neerlandophone space was the initiative of Dutch institutions in New York to address histories of the Dutch slavery past in what was then called the 'New World' for American audiences. Similarly, but for a Dutch audience, the Amsterdam Museum hosted an exhibition called *Manahahtáanung or Nieuw Amsterdam? The Indigenous Story behind New York* telling a history of dispossession, land grabbing, and expulsion from the perspective of the Lenape people.[3] These are all expressions of the ebb and flow of cultural imaginations of slavery, which over the course of time has formed layers of

3 For two examples, see: https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/digital-exhibitions/slavery-exhibit and https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/en/exhibition/manahahtaanung-of-nieuw-amsterdam/89642.

information in what is regarded as a cultural archive. These are movements across language boundaries or territorial space, which time and again create new entry points to also access the tangible forms of that otherwise intangible archive. In this volume, we can see that such renewals happen in historical moments of intense national or international debate or struggle, such as the movement for the prohibition of the slave trade, antislavery movements, the struggle for independence, the 1930s solidarity movement with the Scottsboro nine, the reckoning with the apartheid past in South Africa, or the Black Lives Matter movement – to mention just a few key moments. In the Netherlands today, this renewal is part of the intense discussion throughout (Western) Europe concerning its reckoning with the slavery past and anti-Black racism as a crucial aspect of understanding the aftermath of empire in society.

While not only academics but some politicians, too, critique the 'importing' of academic debates such as those concerning critical race studies,[4] others criticise the delay with which academic debates and works of fiction abroad that deal with the slavery past and their afterlives have entered Dutch academic research and school and university curricula. One explanation is that Europe's shared involvement in imperial history became fragmented and 'nationalised' in the wake of early twentieth-century responses to nationalist movements in the colonized world. Such history writing was instrumental in the construction of what Ananya Kabir (2024) aptly describes as 'the siloed afterlives of once-entangled empires' (43), turning European history into a sum total of national histories. Language has been an important element in the development of these siloes. In his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) Edward Said analysed the indispensable role of culture in the emergence of the European and American dominance of the imperial world. Analysing mostly French and English literatures, music and visual arts, he concluded:

4 Siebers (2015), for instance, but Dutch members of parliament have also criticised this, as in the example of the motion tabled by Joost Eerdmans (JA21; Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2022–2023, 36 284, nr. 15, 25-1-2023), with the request to stop using 'enslaved' (*tot slaaf gemaakten*) instead of 'slaves' (*slaven*), since enslaved is woke newspeak (*woke nieuwspraak*) and an ugly neologism, based on American 'critical race theory'. Another example is Parliamentary question no. 21 (p. 10) by the BBB party, asking whether the minister of Interior Affairs could guarantee that no critical race theories would be taught or shared in courses and other trainings in government institutions to sensitize civil servants with respect to diversity and antidiscrimination (Appendix 'Antwoord op Kamerstukken over de aanpak van discriminatie' by Minister de Jonge [Ministry of Interior Affairs, belonging to Kamerstuk Kamerbrief 25 June 2024. https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2024/06/25/antwoorden-op-kamervragen-over-aanpak-van-discriminatie]).

> At the heart of European culture during the many decades of imperial expansion lay what could be called an undeterred and unrelenting Eurocentrism. This accumulated experiences, territories, peoples, histories; it studied them, classified them, verified them; but above all, it subordinated them to the culture and indeed the very idea of white Christian Europe. (Said 1993, 221)

With the exception of Multatuli (Said 1993, 240) Raden Adjeng Kartini (Said 1993, 218), and Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (Said 1991, passim), Said did not include works from the neerlandophone sphere in his analysis. Yet that did not create a neerlandophone silo. More importantly, Dutch academics were slow in working with Said's arguments, or if they did, they rejected his argument as an insult to the Dutch academic linguistic and literary tradition of Oriental studies (*Oriëntalistiek*).[5] Only few welcomed what is regarded as his pivotal contribution to what today is postcolonial studies (van Hoogstraten 1999, 11) – among them were the members of the jury who awarded in 1999 Said the very first 'Spinozalens', named after this famous philosopher's skills in grounding optical lenses. It is Said's focus on culture and power that also informs our volume *Slavery in the Dutch Imagination*. His notion of 'cultural archive' invoked in the previous section and explained by Wekker (2016) recurs in many of our chapters. In this respect, neerlandophone space is an important element: the neerlandophone space offers a specific archival context, a specific multilingual and multilayered 'mother-country centrality' in constant interaction with the public sphere.

Systems and Humanities Approaches in Historiography

Of course, the many interactions, exchanges, and chains of intersubjective narratives that preceded and followed the reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was not a unique phenomenon. Works of fiction abroad, international narratives, histories, and debates on the slavery past have, sooner or later, trickled down in Dutch scholarship. An example in historiography is the edited volume *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Oostindie 1995). The title derives from Heinrich Heine's (apocryphal) dictum

5 I hold vivid memories of the indignation at Said's lecture about 'Retrospective Thoughts on Orientalism' (Nexus Lecture in Tilburg, 22 September 1994). In Legêne (1998, 440, footnote 29) I refer to the fierce criticism that the historian W. Otterspeer published in 1989 of Said's discussion of oriental studies or orientalism.

that if the world were to come to an end, he would go to the Netherlands since everything there happened fifty years later. In a comparative approach, *Fifty Years Later* looked for an explanation as to why the abolition of slavery in the Dutch Empire (between 1860 and 1873) happened decades later than in the British Empire (1833/1838), and later also than in France (1848). The book almost starts with a sigh – that 'it took remarkably long' before international debates entered Dutch historiography. As in the case of the late reception of Said, in this case, the delay referred to the reception of Emmanuel Wallerstein's socio-economic world systems approach, published in 1980. The metaphor of 'orbit' in the subtitle of *Fifty Years Later* is a reference to Wallerstein's approach, as it refers to a cosmology – to the mechanic movements of different celestial bodies, of slave-systems and antislavery movements. Our volume replaces *Dutch Orbit* with *Neerlandophone Space*, with space here referring not to the cosmos, but to more or less intangible linguistic complexities, albeit with tangible and practical consequences, as inspired by Edward Said's approach to the entanglement of culture and power, and the meaning of language and literature in such power dynamics.

Inspiration for the conceptual framework in our volume thus no longer starts from Wallerstein's global systems approach, but from critical thinkers and writers such as Hannah Arendt, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Édouard Glissant, Saidiyah Hartman, Sylvia Wynter, Walter Mignolo, Edward Said, and Gloria Wekker – as becomes clear from the reference lists for the different chapters. In historiography, in interdisciplinary research like literature studies, in art and heritage discourse and activities over the last decades, cultural or philosophical approaches to the slavery past and the wider colonial past became more successful than the (world) systems approach. This success grew from their ability to centre the human rather than (global) structures. It developed out of the urge for different perspectives on the slavery past and its entanglement with the rise of capitalism, for the acknowledgement of what makes us human. It grapples with understandings of dignity and respect as opposed to dehumanisation and 'thingification' (*chosification*, after Césaire 2004, 23) as key factors in early capitalism, its philosophical underpinning by Enlightenment thinkers, and its critique by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Black critical thinkers (Bogues 2003). Against the dominant colonial frame of history, the Indonesian artist Zico Albaiquni stated that with his work, he aimed to end the condition in which '[w]e are the object of the narrative and not the active subject that controls it' (Westerkamp 2024, 121).

This critique of object/subject positions underlines a development in the neerlandophone space. A new and diverse generation of scholars, artists,

and public intellectuals refuses to look implicitly from the perspective of the colonialists, including abolitionists, and antislavery movements. Rather, as a starting point in their historical approaches to the history of enslavement, slavery, and colonialism, they instead embrace a critical approach to the colonial past, its sources, and its aftereffects that challenges the power of that dominant frame. Through their responsiveness to 'sensory memory', they introduce notions of durational time – a past that remains with us – into the conventional historical chronological approach to the colonial past (Kabir 2024, 33). They grapple with questions of present-past relationships: how all of us are 'implicated in and inheritors of slavery and colonialism', whose afterlives 'worked in systemic ways to serve some, while devastating others' (Flores and Modest 2024, 17, with reference to Hartman 2008; see also van Dis 2024). These are the historical processes of inclusion and exclusion, and their afterlives in historiography and in society that our volume approaches with a focus on imaginaries in a complex neerlandophone linguistic network.

Framing Dutch Slavery in the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean

One of the important historical and societal debates in the Netherlands today deals with the history of the transatlantic slave trade, enslavement, and the plantation system, and its relation to the Dutch Indian Ocean history of enslavement and slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, as well as to the systems of indentured labour, both in the Dutch East Indies and in Suriname, from 1853 onwards. The idea of the 'Dutch orbit' with its inter-imperial systems approach, and that of 'neerlandophone space' with its cultural approach that seeks to connect to different perspectives on slavery and enslavement, frame this debate in different ways.

This difference in approaches to, and perceptions of, the slave trade and enslavement in the transatlantic and Indian Ocean realms also has a history. The representation of slavery in the Indian Ocean under the Dutch East India Company (VOC) focuses on a more specific gendered aspect of the lives of enslaved in domestic spheres and, as such, is contrasted with transatlantic slavery and its connection to plantation economies. A historical example is Dirk van Hogendorp's Dutch-language theatre play *Kraspoekol, of de slaaverny* ('Kraspoekol, or Slavery') published in 1800, and based on a short story by his father, Willem van Hogendorp, written in 1780. In their respective prefaces, both in the first 1780 edition and in the 1800 adaptation as a theatre text, they compare slavery in 'the East' and 'the West'. Both authors, father

and son, claim that slavery in the orbit of the Dutch East Indies is gentler than in the West Indies, since the enslaved only serve in domestic settings, and so, the van Hogendorps argued, the only cruel treatment that enslaved in 'the East' could expect came from 'uneducated' European women. The theatre play was recently *hertaald* ('transposed') from the Dutch of the 1800s into today's language. When the play was performed in The Hague in 1801, colonial opponents regarded it as an insult and disrupted the performance. One wonders whether they were angry about the critique of the inhuman institution of slavery and the cruel treatment of domestic enslaved Asian men and women in Batavia, or about the implicit critique of the thousands of Black enslaved African men and women on their plantations in 'the West'. Karwan Fatah-Black (2021) investigated this slave-owner mentality, and how the slave-owner's perspective on slavery and the politics and economics of abolition influenced Dutch historiography on the slavery past. Yet, whatever the cause for their indignation in 1801: if *Kraspoekol* were to be performed again today, one might expect that its interpretation would not focus on the moralistic antislavery argument expressed by the benevolent Batavian white slave-owner in conversation with his cruel sister. Rather, the piece would be interpreted as a silencing of the history of its main protagonist, the *njai* – the ancestral Indonesian mother (*oermoeder*), whose name in many families is not known and whose dignity is restored for example in the writings by Reggie Baay published between 2005 and 2024, which are cited throughout our volume.

Imaginaries and Museums

Geographically, as our volume also discusses, these histories of enslavement around the Indian and Atlantic Oceans converge in South African histories of Dutch colonialism at the Cape. In terms of cultural initiatives today, the entangled histories in Southeast Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean will also be addressed in the concept for the new National Slavery Museum in Amsterdam. Scheduled to open in 2028, this museum-in-the-making does not propose to 'balance' the history of the deep roots of dehumanisation, anti-Black racism, and its afterlives, with slavery in the Indonesian context. It does, however, search for museal convergences. The intended focus of the museum on Dutch visitors and Dutch postcolonial society is important in this respect, and can build on a variety of current imaginaries that cover 'the East' and 'the West' without suggesting that their histories and afterlives with all their international entanglements

and afterlives are the same. An exploration of such an entanglement happened for instance in the theatre play by Orkater/Sir Duke in 2018 about the imaginary meeting, somewhere around 1930, between the law student and Indonesian independence activist Mohammed Hatta and Anton de Kom, author of *Wij slaven van Suriname* (1934), translated as *We Slaves of Suriname* (2022). The modest 'try-out' exhibition on Dutch abolitionists and resistance by the enslaved that was held in the Dutch Resistance Museum in Amsterdam in 2024 also visualises interactions within the neerlandophone space by presenting the (admittedly scarce) criticism and poor argumentation by Dutch sympathisers regarding both the transatlantic slave system and slavery in the Indonesian archipelago. Another example is the societal debate surrounding the 1898 imperial imagination of the Dutch Empire as displayed on the *Gouden Koets* (Golden Coach) that was used annually at royal ceremonial events in the Netherlands until recently. Instigated around 2010, the discussion (together with the coach itself) was addressed in an exhibition by the Amsterdam Museum. The semi-permanent exhibition entitled *Our Colonial Inheritance* at the Wereldmuseum in Amsterdam also captures the current moment. Both museums published imaginative books to accompany their exhibitions, featuring authors who also inspired my thinking in this epilogue (Brandon et al. 2024; Flores and Modest 2024). The design of both publications was appropriate for the subject, as is evident for example in the art work by Farida Sedoc made for and reproduced in Flores and Modest (2024), and two major disruptive interventions by Raul Balai a.k.a. el bastardo, in the case of Brandon et al. (2024).[6] The fact that both books have been published in English tells us something about the international scope of the imaginary of the slavery past in the same neerlandophone space.

Oceans and Dykes

Imaginary waters flow between 'Dutch orbit' and 'neerlandophone space'. Many authors on slave histories and colonial conditions, whether

6 Raul Balai and Ondergrond made the book design for Brandon et al. 2024. Balai decided to print pictures upside down and to number page numbers from right to left, encouraging readers to question their own reading conventions. He expressed the hope that 'the design makes this book a constant reminder to the reader of the change in structure we are trying to achieve' (Brandon et al. 2024, between page 13 and 14). See also: https://www.linkedin.com/in/raul-balai-073b2b215/. The cover of Flores and Modest (2024) was designed by Erik de Hart/Heavy Bones and Pascal van Hoorebeke, with visual artist Farida Sedoc. See also: https://faridasedoc.com/.

biographical or historical, invoke sea voyages. Derek Walcott opens his poem 'The Sea is History' with:

> Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
> Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
> In that grey vault. The sea. The sea
> Has locked them up. The sea is History.[7]

In an exhibition in the British Library, Dalia Al-Dujaili stressed that the role of the ocean in shaping culture cannot be underestimated, and she points to how historical links across the seas have tied together very different worlds, in contrast with the gradual processes of cultural exchange that took place on overland crossroads such as the silk road (Bradshaw 2024, 26). The slave trade, the inter-imperial exchange of control over overseas colonies that happened from as soon as Columbus landed on the shores of the Americas, the inter-imperial constructions of indentured labour, the circular migration of colonialists, and the migrations after decolonisation all imply the crossing of oceans: whether that be the Atlantic, the Pacific, or the Indian Ocean. In the aftermaths of world systems approaches, this is being researched with a focus on the organisation of the maritime order and global labour regimes, as seen in the work of Matthias van Rossum (2020), Karin Lurvink (2019), and others. However, oceans also are central in cultural studies approaches that encapsulate the neerlandophone space, for example in *Intimacies of Four Continents* (Lowe 2015) and *What the Oceans Remember* (Boon 2019).

Invoking the oceans implies an understanding of the different interacting layers and effects of time: the circular time of ocean currents and the movement of the earth in orbit around the sun; the durational time of sensory experiences of the past; the chronological time with its marked moments of the slave trade and its colonial, decolonial, and postcolonial histories (*cf.* Lorenz 2010, 68). In this regard, it is telling that the report on the intended National Slavery Museum in the Netherlands recommends that the museum should be located near a park as well as near flowing waters (*doorgaand water*): 'Water and plants refer to the history of slavery on all continents, being central to the spiritual traditions and rituals of the African diaspora. Think of water as a cleansing and healing element' (Nationaal Slavernijmuseum 2024, 58–60; translation SL).

7 First stanza of the poem 'The Sea is History', included in Bradshaw (2024, 24–25), from *Selected Poems* by Derek Walcott (2007).

With these waters, we return to my image of the post-1945 Netherlands behind its dykes, hesitant to open up to interactions with the imagination of slavery and enslavement across and beyond the neerlandophone space. Waters reappear in imaginations of the slavery past and its afterlives in ways fundamentally different from the nineteenth-century American legend of Hans Brinker, the Dutch boy saving the land from flood by putting his finger in a hole in the dyke (de Blécourt 2010, 362–364). History has no dykes, no reclaimed lands or borders, and it has no privileged owners. According to Albaiquni, 'only in the future can we know more about the past' (Westerkamp 2024, 117). He is right, as more future leads to more past, or even more pasts – plural – something of which we become all the more aware when new generations raise new questions of their (also our shared) past, and challenge the authority of historical frames and narratives, the institutions and even the book designs, to which they cannot themselves relate. Imagination is about past and future, embedded in a present in which many disturbing developments come together and all perspectives on its histories, causes, and effects are needed.

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With the rising tide of scholarly and societal interest in the history and legacy of colonialism and slavery, this collection offers a much-needed diachronic analysis of the cultural representations of the lives and afterlives of those subjected to slavery and indenture. It focuses on the history of the 'neerlandophone' space, defined as the complex linguistic space spanning former Dutch colonies. This collection gives a *longue durée* overview, with cases from the early modern period to the present day, revealing the deep roots of the colonial 'cultural archive'. Scholars from a wide variety of disciplines demonstrate how attention to the layered and polyphonic qualities of narratives can reveal silent and disruptive voices in colonial discourse, as well as collective emotions and imaginations that have hitherto remained unrecorded in historical sources. They discuss aesthetic, poetic, and storytelling practices across diverse genres and media including literature, philosophy, performance, photography, architecture, as well as archival and legal documents, formed both in the metropolis and by enslaved and indentured peoples in the colonies.

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