Chapter

4. Colonialism and Slavery in Education: The Dutch Caribbean and Indonesia

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

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

History Education in Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire

Kenny Meyers and Luc Alofs[1]

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

Primary Education

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

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 Some schools use the now outdated book *Chispa di tempo* [Spark of Time] (1998), which mainly highlights Aruba's Indigenous history.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

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

General Secondary Education

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Surinamization of History Education in Suriname

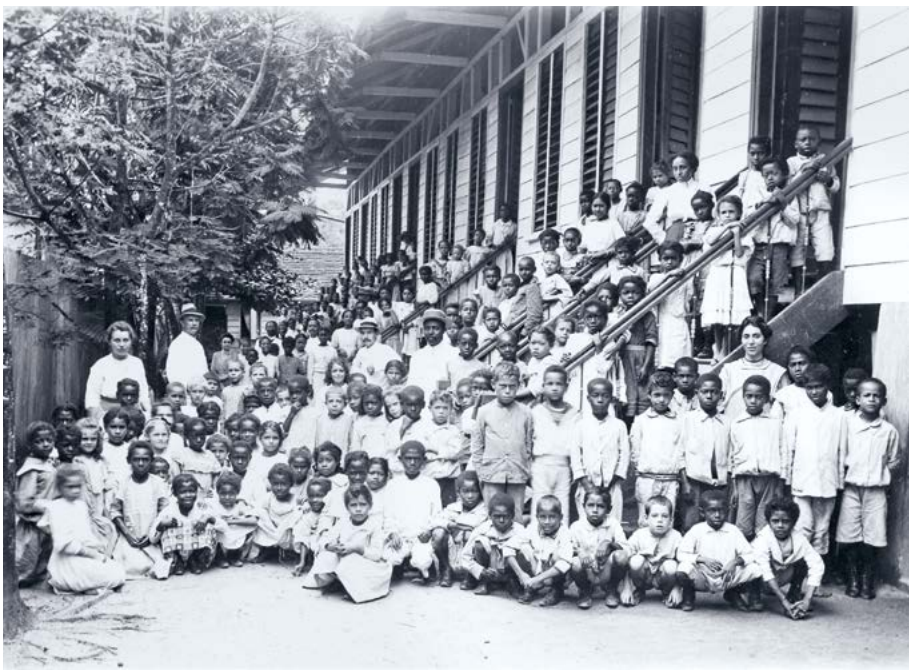
Elviera Sandie

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

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

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

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



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

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

Slavery in Indonesian Education

Edu Dumasy

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

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

a. The phase of greed (*keserakahan*) or trade tyranny (*kezaliman kongsi dagang*). Attention is paid to the role of the VOC—which used forced laborers to build forts, and to load and unload ships—and the genocide perpetrated by J.P. Coen in Banda.
b. The phase of colonial dominance. Topics discussed include:

- Economy-related slavery, which includes both slavery (*perbudakan*) and forced labor (*kerja paksa*). The introduction of these types of slavery tends to be dated to the period of interim rule by Herman Willem Daendels (1807–1810) and Thomas Stamford Raffles (1811–1816). This was the time when the Post Road in Java was constructed at the cost of thousands of Indonesian lives.
- The nineteenth-century Cultivation System (*Tanam Paksa*) under Governor General Johannes van den Bosch, which required forced laborers to produce goods for export, greatly benefiting the colonial government.
- The plantation economy (*Sistem usaha swasta*), in which private companies profited from their investments in coffee, tea, and rubber in Sumatra (The Deli Miracle) and elsewhere.
- Notably, Multatuli is mentioned as a critic of forced labor, but the role of Indigenous rulers is omitted.[8] Heroes like Pattimura, Diponegoro, and Bonjol, who rebelled against forced labor, are featured.

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

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

Notes

1 With the assistance of Arthur Sealy and Roman Sillé.

2 MAVO, HAVO and VWO are three types of stratified secondary education. MAVO is "mid-level" general secondary education, HAVO is "higher" general secondary education, and VWO is pre-university secondary education.

3 Bart Zuidervaart, "Bonaire wil zijn eigen geschiedenis kunnen vertellen: 'Nederland bepaalt nog steeds wat wij over onszelf weten'," Trouw, December 18, 2022. https://www.trouw.nl/excuses-slavernijverleden/bonaire-wil-zijn-eigen-geschiedenis-kunnen-vertellen-nederland-bepaalt-nog-steeds-wat-wij-over-onszelf-weten~b31a0d17/?referrer=https://www.google.com/.

4 In this chapter, the term "Leeward Islands" refers to the Dutch Antillean collective name for Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (*Benedenwindse eilanden*). The Dutch Antillean distinction between *Bovenwindse eilanden* and *Benedenwindse eilanden* is generally translated as Windward and Leeward Islands, but does not coincide with the English-language distinction that goes by the same name.

5 S. Gallant, "Dekolonisatie Surinaams onderwijs in alle rust," Gfcnieuws.com, August 22, 2022. https://www.gfcnieuws.com/dekolonisatie-surinaams-onderwijs-in-alle-rust/.

6 Eric Jagdew, ed., *Een Liber Amicorum voor Andre Loor*, (Paramaribo: Instituut voor de Opleiding van Leraren 2006), 179.

7 "De toekomst van het historisch bedrijf: een terugblik en perspectieven 1975-2020," Inaugural address by Maurits S. Hassankhan upon receiving an honorary doctorate from the Anton de Kom University in Suriname, March 6, 2019, https://www.lallarookh.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Redevoering-erepromotie-Hassankhan-6-maart-2019-definitief.pdf.

8 Eduard Douwes Dekker (1820–1887), better known by his pen name Multatuli, was a Dutch writer best known for his satirical novel *Max Havelaar*, which denounced the abuses of colonialism in the Dutch East Indies.

Myrthe Kraaijenoord and Eva Thielen

Interviews: Multiperspectivity in the Public Debate on Slavery

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

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

Society

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

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

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

Academia

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

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

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

Apologies

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

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

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

Note

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

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

Society

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

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

Academia

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

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

Apologies

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

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

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

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

Society

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

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

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

Academia

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

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

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

Apologies

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

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

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

Society

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

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

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

Academia

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

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

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

Apologies

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

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

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

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

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

Society

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

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

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

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

Academia

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

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

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

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

Apologies

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

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

Abstract

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

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