Dutch Colonial Slavery and Its Afterlives: Findings

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

In 1816, Johannes Rudolph van den Berg, his wife, Johanna Christina Umbgrove, and their three children traveled from Vught in the province of Brabant to the Dutch East Indies. Van den Berg had been appointed Resident of the island of Saparua in the Moluccas; he was sent there to restore Dutch colonial rule. He had barely settled in when the inhabitants of Saparua rose up in May 1817 against the Dutch administration in what became known as the Pattimura War. The rebels also attacked Van den Berg himself, leaving him, his wife, and two children dead. Only their six-year-old son, Jean Lubbert, survived. He was found and rescued by one of the enslaved people kept by the family. But the story does not end there. According to family legend, when Jean Lubbert was brought back to the Netherlands, the Dutch king offered to make him a lord. The boy is said to have declined, but asked instead for permission to include in his surname a reference to the island where his parents were murdered. Thus, Jean Lubbert acquired a double-barreled surname, which is still used by one of his descendants: Rudolph van den Berg van Saparoea, a retired banker in Hilversum. Rudolph's explanation for why he opts to use "Van den Berg" instead of the full double-barreled name is telling. "Van den Berg van Saparoea is quite a loaded name," he explains. "You'll see what I mean when you look at the list of names that my father's secretary once kept: Van den Berg van Ammehoela [kiss my ass], Van den Berg van Kamasutra. I didn't really feel like dealing with that all the time."[1]

The story of seventy-five-year-old Rudolph van den Berg van Saparoea is unique. As a descendant of the colonizers in the Dutch East Indies, he is probably one of the few people who ended up with a double-barreled name as a result of slavery. The descendants of the enslaved, by contrast, are still dealing with the effects of having been robbed of their own names and given slave names. The extent to which this affects them, even to this day, is poignantly expressed by the story of Auset Ank Re, who was born as Monique Zichterman. "For at least twenty years, I felt the need to change the name I inherited from my parents," she says. "Zichterman is a bastardization of Governor Sichtman of Suriname's name. My Indigenous great-grandmother married Sichtman in 1863. When he died four years later, she was enslaved. When I heard that story, it strengthened my desire to change my name. As a free, married woman, my great-grandmother should never have been enslaved."[2]

Handed-down family histories of enslaved individuals show how difficult it can be to get a clear picture of what happened and how this has continued to affect descendants. At the same time, the practice of naming also has to do with identity formation, which has undergone complex changes under the influence of slavery and colonialism. It is easier to identify "imposed" names than to determine what are "authentic" or "original" names. How descendants experience this naming issue demonstrates how loaded this link to the past is. Recently, the Dutch government decided that descendants of enslaved individuals could change their names at no cost. Previously, this procedure cost about 800 euros, and applicants had to submit a statement from a psychologist confirming that their name caused them distress. Such stories show how deeply ingrained slavery and colonialism are, both institutionally and in people's daily lives.

Slavery & the Dutch State responds to a dual need for knowledge. It provides insight into slavery's history and its effects, and the role and involvement of the Dutch state. The book consistently examines these aspects in relation to each other. It is clear that in order to properly understand the history of slavery, we need to study the actions of the Dutch state and other colonial authorities because their role was so formative and far-reaching. But we also need to be aware that politics, the economy, and society are so interwoven that a narrow perspective will not help anyone understand this book's subject matter. *Slavery & the Dutch State* therefore takes colonial slavery as a point of departure and examines it broadly, also exploring the

less obvious links between slavery and the history of Dutch colonialism. We scrutinize the state's involvement in slavery, but do so while taking into account the societies all over the world that got caught up in Dutch colonial slavery and how they were affected by this, both immediately and long-term.

This book shows how deliberate, systematic, extensive, and prolonged Dutch involvement in colonial slavery was. *Slavery & the Dutch State* looks beyond the historically delineated periods in which slavery and the slave trade were legally permitted and practiced. It demonstrates that they have shaped individuals and societies ever since. The history of colonial slavery has had an impact on countless lives in various ways. Obviously, the millions of African, Asian, Indigenous, and other enslaved people and their descendants have felt its effects, as have societies worldwide that intersected with this history. People's responses to this have varied widely, with diverse outcomes. The chapters in this book make clear that this history has left deep scars on the Netherlands and elsewhere, but also that there are many gaps in our knowledge that need to be filled to fully understand the precise mechanics and consequences of this legacy, and even the history of colonial slavery itself.

The following questions were central in *Slavery & the Dutch State*:

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

Findings

One important insight that *Slavery & the Dutch State* has yielded is that the design, workings, and consequences of slavery and the slave trade were deeply intertwined with broader colonial structures through which the Dutch government exerted power in various parts of the world. Slavery was

one of several instruments of exploitation and control deployed by Dutch colonialism. Others include acts of aggression such as the conquest of forts and their environs, the suppression of local uprisings, forced cultivation and labor, and even mass displacements and depopulation. Power and control could also involve less visible forms of oppression and governance, such as re-education, religious conversion, restriction of movement, and explicit ethnic and racial discrimination against colonial subjects. All these instruments of power influenced the development of slavery and its afterlives. For example, conquests and depopulation paved the way for the slave trade and the establishment of the colonies where the enslaved were put to work. Governance, law, and racial discrimination shaped the development of colonial slavery. Conversely, slavery had a significant impact on other forms of forced labor and exploitation, such as corvée/cultivation systems, contract labor, and convict labor, all of which existed side by side. It is clear that slavery cannot be looked at in isolation from broader Dutch colonial history; much research is still needed to fully understand the many interconnections between the history of slavery, colonialism, and their afterlives.

Slavery & the Dutch State sheds light on the history of colonial slavery and its effects from various perspectives. It is impossible to summarize all the contributions of the authors here, but many arrived at similar conclusions that can help set the direction of further research and guide societal and political engagement with the history of colonial slavery and its afterlives. Exploring the history of colonial slavery is necessary for three reasons. The first of these is to understand the historical development of the Dutch colonial slave trade and slavery, and the state's complicity in these practices and their consequences. The second reason for this exploration is that this history, and the Dutch state's involvement in it, have had ongoing economic, social, cultural, and administrative repercussions—some of which lasted from the transition from legally permitted slavery and slave trading well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and others even up to the present day. Thirdly, this historical study is urgently needed because of how society currently engages with the history of colonial slavery, its long-term consequences, and its ongoing effects. Insights and developments in these three areas are closely interconnected, but do not always progress at the same pace. Therefore, we discuss these three findings separately.

1. Historical Development, Complicity in, and Consequences of Dutch Colonial Slavery

The Dutch state, its predecessors, and large—mostly private—segments of society were directly and deeply complicit in slavery through deliberate colonial policies.

With respect to the complicity of the Dutch government's predecessors in colonial expansion, slavery, and the slave trade, it can be concluded that this happened in a context of deeply intertwined (geo)political, economic, and private interests. Especially in the early modern period but also long after, the exercise of power by, and on behalf of, the national government was dispersed across a large number of political institutions, such as the States (provinces), stadtholders, cities, and admiralties. Executive power was in the hands of many different private and colonial organizations that operated in the Netherlands and abroad, such as the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the Dutch West India Company (WIC), MCC [Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie], various gentlemen's clubs and patronages, and the Netherlands Trading Society [Nederlandsche HandelsMaatschappij; NHM].

Dutch colonial power was exercised across many layers, by many different actors, and in many shapes. This complexity makes it hard for contemporary observers to pinpoint the locus of power. Colonial power could be exercised by different layers of the Dutch state but also delegated to colonial companies. Colonial power was sometimes exercised through direct colonial governance (sovereignty) and sometimes through indirect governance (suzerainty), for example by imposing coercive contracts on local states or by appointing local rulers. There was a diffuseness to the complicity of the Dutch state, its representatives and its subjects in colonial power, slavery, the slave trade, and their repercussions. Yet that complicity, despite its diffuse nature, was also undeniably strong. This close bond between slavery and the Dutch state consisted of four core elements:

— *Rights to use or operate* land, trade, production, or other activities in directly or indirectly colonized areas claimed by the Dutch state. It was no accident that the powers given to colonial companies and patronages were expressed in terms of exclusive property rights or licenses ("charters"). The traditional explanation in terms of "trade monopolies" is en-

lightening, but provides only a limited perspective on this history. After all, the use of land, mobilization of labor from local inhabitants (corvée labor), and other forms of usufruct were explicitly granted as exclusive rights to colonial organizations, such as the WIC and VOC, and even to individuals who were entrusted with colonial governance on a personal basis, such as Abraham van Pere (in the colony of Berbice) and Kiliaen van Rensselaer (in a colony on the Hudson River in New Netherland).

— *Delegated power* in areas claimed as colonial territory. This included the authority to act (semi-)independently in warfare and the use of force; to establish and maintain relations with states and populations with respect to war, peace, and diplomacy; and to provide colonial governance, administer justice, and levy taxes on colonized areas and populations. On behalf of the States General, the VOC acted as a local government in parts of South Africa, southwestern India, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and the Indonesian archipelago. Atlantic organizations such as the WIC, MCC, gentlemen's clubs and patronages were granted similar powers in Brazil, the Caribbean, Guyana, and North America. As colonial governments, they signed treaties with local rulers and exacted forced labor from local populations (corvée). The VOC even imposed "tribute obligations" on Asian states and rulers subordinate to the company. Both the Atlantic organizations and the VOC were actively involved in the administration of slavery and regulation of the slave trade. These colonial organizations even actively shaped colonial and local rules concerning "enslavement," which sometimes were evaluated and approved up to the level of the States General.

— Direct and indirect *support from the Dutch authorities* for colonial organizations. Sometimes, these were supported from their inception with money (in the form of loans, for instance), with subsidies for warfare, or by the direct supply of weapons, soldiers, or other resources. The Dutch authorities and the stadtholder also supported colonial organizations involved in slavery by maintaining diplomatic relations with slave-exporting states.

— *Control over and (co)ownership of* colonial organizations by the Dutch authorities. Cities and provinces were offered seats on the board of companies and other colonial administrative organizations. The stadtholder was also invited to sit on the board of the VOC, WIC, and other organizations. All colonial organizations were accountable to the States General and often to city or other authorities as well.

The contributions in this book point to the very close ties that manifested themselves in various ways between the Dutch state and colonial administrative organizations. This leads to several important conclusions. The interconnectedness between administrative and colonial institutions was not limited to formal political relationships and responsibilities—such as the States General's responsibility for colonial policy—but was also actively driven by the consolidation of private power and resources of a relatively small group of extremely wealthy merchant and regent families. They exerted their influence not solely in the governance of colonial organizations but also in city governments, provinces, admiralties, and the States General. Their private enterprises were usually directly or indirectly linked to colonial slavery and expansion, through the trade in weapons and colonial goods, for instance, or via investments in plantations. Thus, they shaped colonial expansion and slavery in multiple ways. Dutch involvement in slavery and the slave trade was therefore not a "historical accident" or "unfortunate coincidence" but part of an active and deliberate policy of the regent and merchant elite who shaped the Netherlands and its place in the world during colonialism.

Dutch slavery and colonialism had a significant impact on societies worldwide.

The Dutch history of slavery is inseparable from Dutch colonialism, and Dutch activities in that arena greatly affected societies across the globe. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, Europeans took and transported more than 12 million enslaved people from Africa across the Atlantic. Dutch traders were directly responsible for the trade of at least 600,000 enslaved persons. The arrival of European colonial powers also caused explosive growth in the slave trade around the Indian Ocean and the Indonesian archipelago, likely involving millions of enslaved individuals. Limited research in these regions makes it difficult to provide a precise

reconstruction of the numbers involved. It is estimated that 660,000 to 1.1 million enslaved individuals were transported to areas ruled by the VOC.

Colonial slavery caused widespread social, economic, and cultural transformations worldwide, often beginning with outright violence and devastation. A notorious example is the violence perpetrated by the Dutch in the Moluccas. The history of colonial slavery and forced labor began there long before the Banda Islands were fully subjugated in 1621. After the conquest of the Asian principality of Ternate in 1607, the Dutch imposed a treaty on its inhabitants, forcing them to recognize the States General as their "protector," obligating them to build forts, reimburse war costs, and exclusively supply cloves. The peoples and islands formerly under Ternate's rule were now deemed "vassals" of the States General. As early as 1615, the entire population of the island of Siau was deported by the VOC to work forcibly on a conquered island in the Banda archipelago. These lesser-known histories shed light on the systematic nature of colonial conquest, dispossession, and exploitation.

In Brazil, the arrival of the Dutch resulted in a complex and bloody guerrilla war, while in North America and other places, it sparked large-scale conflicts with Indigenous populations. In Banda, it led to the depopulation under the leadership of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, during which an estimated 15,000 Bandanese were murdered. This laid the foundation for the establishment of a plantation society. The VOC allocated conquered land to European "planters" and imported enslaved Asians from areas in present-day India, Myanmar, and parts of Indonesia.

What followed was even more devastating: the unleashing of Dutch colonialism and participation in slavery worldwide—from West Africa to Brazil, from Taiwan and Mauritius to Sri Lanka and South Africa, and from North America to the Caribbean, Berbice, and Suriname. In almost all these geographic regions, slavery was introduced practically from the beginning, as was the export or import of enslaved humans. This was often accompanied by large-scale land appropriation, the subjugation of local populations, and the imposition of other coercive systems, such as corvée labor and precursors to the Cultivation System. Several chapters in this book, primarily in Section 3, show that slavery formed the basis of many colonized societies in both the Atlantic world and the Indian Ocean. These contributions also make clear that colonial slavery usually was just one of many ways in which colonial power was exerted and that those ways existed side by side. For example, in South Africa, the VOC established a slave society with European

settlers and enslaved individuals from Madagascar, East Africa, India, and the Indonesian archipelago; at the same time, it slowly displaced and subjugated the local population over centuries of colonial expansion.

Dutch colonial administrations did not use slavery and other forms of forced labor (such as corvée, convict, and contract labor) in the Atlantic world and Asia as independent systems, but as complementary elements of a single, comprehensive colonial system.

Dutch colonial slavery not only stretched across the globe; its development in different parts of the world was also interconnected. A side-by-side comparison of different histories of Dutch colonial slavery would reveal many interactions that have hardly been researched and are therefore little known. Such a comparison would also yield new perspectives. Slavery affected different regions in different ways. In some areas, enslaved individuals were deported by slave traders. Such places of enslavement and deportation in West Africa, East Africa, Madagascar, parts of South Asia, and the Indonesian archipelago were often subjected to relatively little colonial authority, but still, the Dutch involvement in the slave trade had a significant impact. And then there were the heavily colonized regions that enslaved individuals were transported to. These places where enslaved people were used to produce goods for the metropole were located in North and South America, South Africa, Java, Banda, and other former VOC territories. And finally, there were regions like the home country, where slavery was virtually non-existent, but where slavery was organized and where the profits of slavery and colonialism set in motion great changes.

A side-by-side comparison will also show how colonialism, slavery, and the slave trade strengthened the links between these regions. This is glaringly obvious when it comes to the large-scale transportation of people under the banner of colonial slave trading. But overwhelming evidence of this interconnectedness and (economic) interdependence between the colonies can also be found in the fact that the revenues of the Cultivation System in Java from 1830 to 1870 were used to financially compensate plantation owners in the Caribbean when "their" enslaved people were emancipated.

Dutch colonial administrations did not use slavery, the Cultivation System, and its precursors, and convict and contract labor in the Caribbean and in Asia as stand-alone methods. Rather, these types of labor were used

as complementary elements in a single, comprehensive colonial system. The abolition of the slave trade, and later of slavery, increased the use of other forms of (forced) mobility and labor, such as the Cultivation System in the Dutch East Indies and the relocation of contract laborers to Suriname, allowing the Dutch state and colonial entrepreneurs to continue meeting the demand for new workers on plantations after the abolition of slavery in 1863. Such links were facilitated by the close exchange between colonial administrations in the Caribbean and Asian parts of the Dutch colonial empire. Governors-General such as Johannes van den Bosch (1780–1844) and Johan Kielstra (1878–1951) had experience with the colonies in both regions. Various parts of the colonial empire and even the Netherlands were subjected to administrative experiments, often with far-reaching consequences for local populations. These forms of colonial social engineering are mentioned in current historiography and the biographies of colonial administrators but warrant more systematic research. Worldwide, colonial slavery left a profound mark on the structure of societies, on social and cultural relations, and on economic development. Likewise, the Netherlands was deeply and structurally influenced by slavery and broader colonialism. Much more research needs to be done on the early effects and emergence of Dutch complicity in slavery and colonialism—and particularly on the mutual effects of slavery on the Netherlands and societies worldwide.

2. Afterlives and Adaptations

Slavery and the subsequent use of other forms of forced labor led to socio-economic and societal reorganizations worldwide that underlie modern inequalities.

The profound effect of Dutch colonial slavery on society, the economy, and governance persisted even after the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. During the transition from legally permitted slave trading and slavery to other nineteenth-, twentieth-, and ultimately twenty-first-century orders, the Dutch state's complicity in colonial slavery continued to resonate socially, culturally, economically, and administratively.

It is not a coincidence that many colonized societies evolved into suppliers of agricultural products and ores for the global economy. Slavery and colonialism laid the groundwork for the unequal development of the mod-

ern world economy through the lopsided development and even underdevelopment of colonized societies, and through the infusion of colonial profits into the Netherlands and other parts of Europe. This book shows that the abolition of the slave trade and slavery did not end colonialism, but merely transformed it. Abolition led colonial entrepreneurs and the Dutch colonial state to replace slavery with other forms of forced labor, such as corvée, convict, and contract labor, which had been commonly used colonial instruments from the beginning but were now employed on an even larger scale and in new ways.

The Netherlands was also influenced socioeconomically by slavery and other forms of forced labor. New industries emerged, such as sugar and coffee processing, and glass and textile production. Shipbuilding, insurance, banking, and overseas and intra-European trade flourished. In a broader context, colonial profits, including those from the Cultivation System, paid for much of the infrastructure of the Netherlands, helping to strengthen the country's position as a transportation and service economy. Colonial profits were used to finance the national Dutch railways in the mid-nineteenth century, the New Waterway for the port of Rotterdam, and the North Sea Canal for the port of Amsterdam. This goes to show that Dutch colonial slavery not only contributed to large-scale global changes but also had a significant impact on the transformation of the Netherlands itself. It laid the foundation for the tremendous collective prosperity in this country. Conversely, it also facilitated the prolonged concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a small number of merchant and regent families, and therefore may also have had a hand in the inequalities which persist in Dutch society to this day.

The social hierarchies created and reinforced by slavery and colonialism have caused persistent inequalities in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and in many other societies across the globe.

One of the most prominent sociocultural legacies of colonial slavery and the slave trade is "racialization." Slavery is inextricably linked to the development of a high-productivity growth economy based on labor intensification. The labor provided by enslaved people played a crucial role in this. To justify enslavement and its regulation, the colonial ruler had to determine which individuals could be enslaved—and used the term "enslaveability" for that purpose. This justification was founded on notions of

a presumed superiority of the colonizer and inferiority of the inhabitants of the colonized regions. Thus, colonial racism created perceived differences between people based on race and was used to underpin a growth economy based on oppression and segregation. Colonial rule further entrenched this social order by legitimizing it, codifying agreements and arrangements in trade treaties, notarial deeds, charters, etc. Thus, the colonial legal system did not merely reflect but also validated colonial practices. Slavery was embedded in more comprehensive structures of labor mobilization, exploitation, and racism, which allows us to draw a connection between colonial rule, capitalism, and discrimination. These cannot be seen separately and have continued to intersect in various ways since the slave trade and slavery were formally abolished.

Dutch colonial law provided the legal underpinnings for the inequality imposed in colonial contexts. In the colonies, distinctions between the free and the enslaved were translated into categories constructed around "national character." Thus, persistent hierarchies were created during slavery, under which everyone was classified into a "racial" category: either "Dutch" or "Eurasian" (mixed Indonesian-European), or a "non-European" category, such as "Indian" or "Bush Negro" in Suriname, or "Foreign Oriental" or "Native" in the Dutch East Indies. As late as 1936, Suriname's colonial-era "population register" still referred to formerly enslaved individuals and their descendants as "natives." In the Dutch East Indies, this systematic oppression persisted until Indonesian independence in August 1945. The racial constructs which the Dutch used to justify social inequality shaped reality profoundly. For example, while universal suffrage was introduced in the Netherlands in 1919, this did not apply to the colonies. It took until the 1930s for the first forms of suffrage to be established there, and even then, the majority of the population was excluded. In Suriname, universal suffrage was not implemented until 1963. In the Netherlands, policy discourse continued to distinguish between "eastern" and "western" Dutch citizens (the former term referring to people from the former Dutch East Indies and the latter from Suriname and the Caribbean). Until very recently, Dutch policy distinguished between *allochtonen* ["immigrants"] and *autochtonen* ["native Dutch" inhabitants] as well as between "western" and "non-western" immigrants. All of this goes to show that the inequalities created by the colonial administrative apparatus have continued to affect the subjects of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for a very long time.

Slavery and colonialism have profoundly influenced how people related to each other and have continued to affect people's lives in terms of social relations, education, language, and health.

One of the most alienating aspects of life under colonial rule must have been that Dutch colonizers and the colonized were supposed to maintain a distance even though they often found themselves in close proximity. Jan Brandes (1743–1808), a Dutchman who traveled to the Dutch East Indies in the service of the VOC, painted a watercolor of a domestic scene that shows his young son playing with a girl, the daughter of one of his enslaved servants. At some point, these two toddlers' proximity and familiarity would have to give way to distance to satisfy the requirements of colonial slavery. Dutch colonizers grew terrified at the thought of one of their own "going native," of "Indonesianization" or "Africanization," as it was called. Going native was seen as lowering oneself to the level of the "natives." Friendly relations, let alone intimate relationships, between the colonizers and the colonized threatened the former's social status and prestige. Yet, as strict as these distinctions might have been on paper, in practice they proved to be porous and boundaries were crossed in a variety of ways. Since very few Dutch women traveled to the colonies, intimate relationships between colonizers and the colonized or enslaved usually involved Dutch men and Indonesian or Caribbean women. Because of the colonial context in which these relationships originated, they were inevitably marked by structural inequality, even if the love and friendship were sincere. We must seriously take into account the fact that coercion, abuse, and sexual exploitation were common. Children born from such a relationship occupied a space between colonizer and colonized and, depending on the situation, might rise to a higher position in the colonial system, with more freedoms or privileges than the colonized or enslaved parent.

Social stratification in slave and colonial societies was complex and the strata were subject to vastly different conditions. Slavery was one of the most extreme forms of restriction: regulations determined whether the enslaved were allowed to wear shoes and hats, and where they were allowed to walk. Owners decided how the enslaved were to be punished, where they lived, and what work they did. It was up to the owners whether they recognized the children whom they fathered with enslaved women, and whether the enslaved were sold off or allowed to stay with their loved ones, children, or parents. Even after abolition, almost every move one made in colonial

societies was coded according to colonial criteria: whom you could associate with, which language you spoke in which context, whether you could go to school, whether you could practice your religion, which professions or positions were open to you, and whether you had access to buildings and associations, transportation, and healthcare. This led to a preoccupation with determining one's position on this uneven playing field and, for the colonized, with improving that position if possible. One way to climb the colonial social ladder was through a relationship or marriage with someone higher in the colonial pecking order. Another was to receive an education at a Dutch school and to speak Dutch. In a colonial setting, this enabled Indonesians and Surinamese to "improve" their position. In Curaçao, mastering the Dutch language became important after Shell opened an oil refinery on the island in 1918. These and similar developments had a potential downside: adopting Dutch behavior and customs (at least outwardly) could lead the enslaved and colonized to start abandoning or undervaluing their own customs and traditions.

Studies that critically examine the legacies of slavery and colonialism show that an orientation toward Dutch culture did not automatically mean total acceptance or assimilation. More research is needed on the afterlives of these social and cultural legacies, as well as on the tension between the culture of the colonized and the culture imposed by colonialism, on the likely influence that this had on family structures, psychology, and even physical well-being, and on the perpetuation of cultural marginalization and restrictive (self-)images.

3. Contemporary Responses

The attitudes and racial structures instigated during slavery and colonialism have also had delayed effects and caused enduring tension, both of which influence present-day societies in the Kingdom of the Netherlands (particularly in Aruba, Curaçao, Saint Martin, Bonaire, Saint Eustatius, and Saba) and the Netherlands' relationships with former colonized territories (Suriname, Indonesia, and other countries).

Racialized discrimination in the colonies was long-lasting and systemic. It was not until December 6, 1942, that Queen Wilhelmina questioned the "difference in treatment based on race or nationality." She said this dur-

ing World War II, while in exile and under pressure from the Americans. At the time, the Dutch kingdom faced the imminent loss of its colonies, precipitated by Indonesian and Surinamese nationalist movements that began in the early twentieth century and by the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies. The queen questioned a practice that, until then, had been an unshakable foundation of her kingdom and Dutch colonialism. Indeed, even after the war, things did not exactly change quickly. The former overseas territories were promised autonomy, but only after a 25-year-long constitutional transition period. However, Indonesian nationalists were not prepared to wait that long. Two days after the Japanese surrender on August 17, 1945, Sukarno and Muhammad Hatta unilaterally declared the independent Republic of Indonesia. The Netherlands refused to recognize Indonesian independence and a protracted war followed, which the former colonial power ultimately lost. On December 27, 1949, the Netherlands formally transferred sovereignty to Indonesia (with the exception of West Papua). Four years earlier, after the Japanese surrender, Dutch nationals were repatriated and Eurasians, Moluccans, Papuans, and Chinese left Indonesia and migrated to the Netherlands. These "relocations" continued until 1962 when the Netherlands also left West Papua.

After the bloody loss of Indonesia, and eager not to suffer a similarly traumatic experience in Suriname, the Netherlands meticulously prepared for that country's independence. This was done in close consultation with political leaders in Suriname, which had formally become an autonomous state within the Kingdom of the Netherlands under the 1954 Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands. On November 25, 1975, Suriname officially became an independent republic. The "Territory of Curaçao," renamed the "Netherlands Antilles" in 1948, remained within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 1986, Aruba obtained *status aparte* (separate status) and was recognized as an autonomous member of the kingdom. On October 10, 2010, the entity known as the Netherlands Antilles was dissolved. Just like Aruba, the islands of Curaçao and Saint Martin became autonomous countries within the Kingdom. Bonaire, Saint Eustatius, and Saba became special Dutch municipalities. The current relationship between the Netherlands and Aruba, Curaçao, Saint Martin, Bonaire, Saint Eustatius, and Saba is an uneasy one, characterized by frequent disappointment. While the Netherlands consistently emphasizes transparent governance and anti-corruption programs, the governments on the islands perceive this as unwanted, neocolonial interference in their internal political affairs and

feel discriminated against compared to the Netherlands when it comes to the introduction and application of laws and regulations. The more the islands feel the Netherlands' economic power, while they find themselves struggling economically, the stronger this sense of inequality and the accusation of neocolonialism grows. This means that the islands are constantly navigating between the notion of political independence as part of their emancipation process, and an understanding shared by the various islands that their status as small island nations makes them economically, financially, and politically vulnerable in the larger transnational world.

Greater and more detailed knowledge of the history of slavery and colonialism will enrich our understanding of the historical roots of contemporary social relations in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and relations between the Netherlands and the areas which it once colonized.

Various conceptual and interpretive frameworks through which we understand the history of slavery and colonialism are currently in the midst of a long-overdue renewal. It is primarily a shift away from perspectives shaped by colonial and nationalist histories, which enabled the Netherlands to continue seeing itself as a "minor" and "moderate" colonizer, whose involvement in slavery was only "marginal." The histories of colonialism and slavery were kept separate from the portrayal of the Netherlands as a "tolerant" country, where democracy was embraced early and a "modern" free market economy took shape. It was only by rigidly separating these two aspects of history that the many contradictions between them could remain obscured.

Researchers are trying to shed this colonial, naive, and sometimes trivializing attitude toward Dutch history by considering new perspectives that are designed to provide a clearer view of that history and its current ramifications. *Slavery & the Dutch State* shows that the history of slavery is not just a footnote in worldwide Dutch colonialism, but one of its very foundations, upon which the Netherlands, its economy, society, and position in the world were built. This brings to light the fact that all Dutch people, regardless of their place of birth or residence, are to some extent bound up in the history of slavery and colonialism. This book illustrates how grave the consequences of that history continue to be. Not only can such insights lead to changes in the way that the Dutch see themselves and their place in the world, but they can also provide a basis for greater mutual

understanding of the past and the present in the entire Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The plurality of the history of Dutch colonial slavery has various meanings and repercussions that are part of a shared past and present, and that need to be further mapped out to facilitate dialogue, mutual understanding, and reconciliation.

Colonial slavery's significance in the present day is not the same to everyone. The history of slavery and its afterlives have affected different societies and groups of people in divergent ways, creating multiple perspectives on this history. This multiperspectivity is present in the multifaceted history of slavery and in the myriad ways that it is dealt with. In some places, the past has been explicitly processed and integrated into the collective consciousness of descendant communities and societies, such as in Suriname and South Africa. In other areas, this process has been much more implicit, such as in Indonesia, or is still going on, as in Curaçao and the Netherlands. At the same time, these histories of slavery are part of a shared past and share clear common threads, both in the historical workings and repercussions of slavery and in present-day events where the past comes to the surface.

One topic currently debated by the Dutch central government and municipalities in the (Caribbean) Netherlands clearly illustrates this multiplicity: how to shape the commemorations that memorialize slavery and celebrate its abolition. When the date of abolition—July 1, 1863—is mentioned, this implicitly refers to transatlantic slavery, the European-run enslavement and trade of Africans to North and South America and the Caribbean from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The problem is that Dutch colonial slavery was geographically much more extensive than this, so for some descendants of the enslaved, other historical dates may be more relevant. Curaçao deliberately opted not to celebrate the abolition of slavery on July 1 but to commemorate the major uprising of the enslaved led by Tula on August 17, 1795. This annual event takes place at the national monument, at the Rif in Willemstad. In Indonesian history, yet another date holds special meaning. On January 1, 1860, more than three years before the abolition of slavery in Suriname and the Caribbean, the Dutch Parliament passed a law abolishing slavery in the Dutch East Indies. Hence, this date is more significant for descendants of the enslaved from

Indonesia, who are showing a growing interest in the history of slavery in Asia.

Aside from such public debates, there are other, less visible aspects of colonial slavery and its afterlives. For instance, the municipality of Utrecht recently decided to allow residents to change their surnames if these were associated with slavery. Subsequently, the central government commissioned research to determine whether it would be a good idea to extend this policy to the entire kingdom.

These visible, and less obvious, examples are just a few of the many ways in which the repercussions of slavery affect people's lives today. They bring to light the interconnectedness between these repercussions and the history of colonialism. They also reveal how the afterlives of the past touch on concrete and pressing current issues, such as discrimination in the labor market based on people's names and backgrounds.

Commemorations, monuments, and legal regulations can be seen as the most public, yet mainly cultural, gestures by which society—and particularly politicians—attempt to deal with and acknowledge the history of slavery and its afterlives. In the government's apology on December 19, 2022, Prime Minister Rutte emphasized that it was about "placing a comma, not a period." The papers in this book show that the repercussions of colonial slavery, and hence the tasks that await us after the comma, not only pertain to culture, knowledge, and commemoration, but also compel us to deal with contemporary issues such as racism, marginalization, inequality of opportunity, and even inequality before the law.

The unequal distribution of knowledge, resources, and access to academia, debate, and policymaking within the Dutch kingdom necessitates a change in perspective and an equitable distribution.

This book makes clear that slavery and colonialism are at the root of cultural, social, economic, and political inequalities that have only been exacerbated by their afterlives. It also asserts that much more research is needed to gain a better understanding of the precise workings and effects of these afterlives. It is obvious that the unequal distribution of knowledge, resources, and access to academia, debate, and policymaking has concrete consequences. The differences within the Dutch kingdom are significant. The Caribbean part of the kingdom, for example, lacks a solid infrastructure, financial resources, and institutions to conduct island-focused research on

the history of slavery. Local researchers often depend on external funding. However, the grantors of subsidies have their own objectives and are not always interested in issues relevant to the Caribbean population or context.

Without a doubt, these mechanisms influence knowledge production, as we personally experienced in the making of this publication. We aimed to compile a volume featuring a wide diversity of authors including a large percentage of contributors with current or past connections to the Caribbean parts of the Netherlands, Suriname, and Indonesia either by origin, residence, or employment. The fact that we did not achieve as much as we had hoped for in this regard is related to the unequal distribution of knowledge, resources, and access. Sometimes, it was impossible for an author to write a paper within the timeframe that we set because not enough information was available on the topic due to unequal knowledge production. There were also authors who we approached—some of whom had been more or less denied access to academia for a long time—who declined to contribute to a project commissioned by the Dutch government and entrusted to four established knowledge institutions. These matters merit our attention. It is important to acknowledge that various mechanisms in the academic community lead to inaccessibility and even the exclusion of certain individuals and perspectives. Those who have an established position in academia and governance must be urged to take responsibility for breaking down these barriers, because showing openness to everyone who contributes to knowledge formation can bring about an exchange of interpretations and yield more balanced narratives based on multivocality and new perspectives and insights.

In Conclusion

Slavery & the Dutch State offers several insights and recommendations regarding the history of slavery, its afterlives, and the role of the Dutch state. First and foremost, we conclude that the state has been slow to take active measures to counteract the adverse societal effects of the legacies of slavery and colonialism. Now that governments and other institutions are finally developing an awareness of the history of colonial slavery, its repercussions, and their own complicity in it, we emphasize that redress is about more than gestures in the realms of culture, knowledge, and commemoration. Redress requires the Dutch government to act more consciously and decisively to eliminate contemporary social, economic,

and societal inequalities stemming from the afterlives of colonial slavery. Recognition and redress require a multifaceted, "kingdom-wide" dialogue, involving various communities, descendants, and governments, and a similar "global-scale" dialogue involving other formerly colonized areas affected by Dutch colonial slavery. The specter of fragmentation looms in this process because it entails a multitude of initiatives and projects addressing a variety of histories and repercussions, for diverse audiences and descendant communities. However, fragmentation, be it substantive, geographical, or otherwise, should be prevented as much as possible. An integrated approach would help counteract potential one-upmanship in a "hierarchy of suffering." A coherent approach would address a variety of aspects of Dutch slavery and its repercussions, the relationship between slavery and colonialism, and thus also the links between (descendant) communities.

This book also advocates for a more inclusive approach to knowledge production. To this end, we must make room for a change in perspectives, learn to listen to underrepresented voices, and redistribute resources to enable thorough research on various issues related to slavery and colonialism. We must also take a critical look at the mechanisms through which research funding is allocated within the Dutch kingdom. It would be easy to remove certain obstacles to the submission of research proposals in the Netherlands and between the Netherlands and the Caribbean part of the kingdom. These include requirements related to applicants' formal research affiliations and qualifications (i.e., tenured PhDs employed at a research institution) and the evaluation of their work experience (now mainly based on the number of peer-reviewed publications). Validating knowledge based on the societal impact of research or having relevant networks within certain communities could also be valid selection criteria. In the Netherlands, hiring policies at universities and research institutes also need to be revised to structurally change the composition of teaching staff and researchers. In addition, there are practical obstacles between the Netherlands and the Caribbean islands—such as procedures for obtaining travel grants, visas, and accommodation—which could be addressed by appointing officials who can provide support in these matters, for instance. After all, such obstacles can also be seen as part of a persistent and unwanted legacy of colonial slavery.

Understanding the history of slavery in all its diversity can provide starting points for better understanding the comprehensiveness and pervasiveness of colonial slavery's legacy. A depth and diversity of perspectives can create a fertile ground for dialogue and mutual understanding. In *Slavery & the Dutch State*, the authors call for research based on a close collaboration between universities and other research and knowledge institutions, archives, museums, heritage institutions, and descendants' organizations. As a follow-up to *Slavery & the Dutch State*, a research agenda has been published to coordinate future research.[3] An ambitious research plan can only be established by working in a less fragmented and ad hoc manner. Cooperation is key to raise consciousness, share knowledge, and generate new fundamental academic research. Long-term research is needed in various fields and from various disciplines. Important topics include the intergenerational, social, cultural, somatic, psychological, and institutional afterlives of slavery; the present-day effects of apologies and restoration; the history of Dutch-Asian slave trade and slavery; various social and cultural aspects of Dutch slavery worldwide (family formation, mobility, sense-making, religion); the history of colonial policy, interests, and impact of slavery; the ties and circulation between Europe and the Atlantic and Asian colonies and colonial empires; and the effects of Dutch colonial slavery on (formerly) colonized societies.

Notes

1 Laura van Baars, "Iedereen op Saparoea kent het gruwelijke verhaal van de moord op de resident en zijn gezin," *Trouw*, April 5, 2023, https://www.trouw.nl/binnenland/iedereen-op-saparoea-kent-het-gruwelijke-verhaal-van-de-moord-op-de-resident-en-zijn-gezin~b60f1053/.

2 Tonny van der Mee, "Nazaten tot slaaf gemaakten kunnen naam gratis veranderen: 'Draait om zelfbeschikking'," *Het Parool*, December 20, 2022, https://www.parool.nl/excuses-slavernijverleden/nazaten-tot-slaaf-gemaakten-kunnen-naam-gratis-veranderen-draait-om-zelfbeschikking~b4e30b7b/.

3 Dutch Colonial Slavery and its Afterlives, 2025-2035 Research Agenda, https://www.staatenslavernij.nl/assets/files/pu-kitlv-kennisagenda-slavernijverleden-en-def2.pdf.