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Remembrance, Commemorations and Apologies

The Dutch Context and Implications for Other European Nations

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ABSTRACT:

Viewed through the lens of public history as the conduit between academia (comprising research, scholarship, and higher education) and broader society (encompassing media, educational institutions, museums, and political discourse), the Dutch involvement in the Atlantic chattel slavery system emerges as a deeply contentious terrain. Central to this contention is the stark reality that, despite its pivotal role in the historical fabric of the Dutch state and identity, chattel slavery has long been relegated to the periphery of scholarly inquiry and public historical narratives, a phenomenon I will elaborate on. Suffice it to say, a critical focal point necessitates scrutiny: the nature and dissemination of knowledge within academia and its subsequent transmission to the public sphere. Despite enduring marginalization, mounting public pressure in recent times from various segments of Dutch society has prompted a reevaluation and revisitation of chattel slavery and its enduring repercussions. While these developments are distinctly Dutch, their resonance extends beyond national borders, resonating with counterparts across Europe. Chattel slavery transcended the confines of the Netherlands, constituting a broader European dilema. In this article I will discuss the implications of the Dutch transatlantic trade, characterised by colonisation, enslavement and systemic economic exploitation, in which several European powers competed for dominance.

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RESUMO:

Visto pela lente da história pública como um canal entre a academia (que inclui investigação, conhecimento e ensino superior) e a sociedade em geral (que engloba os meios de comunicação social, as instituições educativas, os museus e o discurso político), o estudo do envolvimento dos Países Baixos no sistema Atlântico de escravatura surge como um terreno profundamente controverso. No cerne desta afirmação está a dura realidade de que, apesar do seu papel fulcral no tecido histórico do Estado e da identidade holandeses, a escravatura foi, durante muito tempo, relegada para a periferia da investigação académica e das narrativas históricas públicas. Basta analisar um ponto focal crítico: a natureza e a disseminação do conhecimento no meio académico, e a sua subsequente transmissão à esfera pública. Apesar da marginalização persistente, a crescente pressão pública exercida nos últimos tempos por vários segmentos da sociedade holandesa levou a uma reavaliação e a uma revisitação da escravatura e das suas persistentes repercussões. Embora estes desenvolvimentos sejam, de facto, neerlandeses, a sua ressonância estende-se para além das fronteiras nacionais, repercutindo-se em interlocutores de toda a Europa, pois a escravatura transcendeu os limites dos Países Baixos, constituindo um dilema europeu mais vasto. Assim, neste artigo, falarei das implicações do tráfico transatlântico neerlandês, caracterizado pela colonização, escravização e exploração económica sistémicas, em que várias potências europeias disputavam pelo domínio.

KEYWORDS:

Atlantic chattel slavery; Dutch transatlantic trade; Black Europe; Commemorations

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

escravatura no Atlântico; comércio transatlântico holandês; Europa negra; comemorações

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1. Introduction

IF ONE CONSIDERS public history as a bridge between the academy (research, scholarship and teaching in higher education) and society at large (media, schools, museums and political discourse) then the Dutch involvement in the system of Atlantic chattel slavery is a highly problematic field. The most important reason for this is that although chattel slavery was an important constituent part of the historical formation of the Dutch state and nation, it remained deliberately confined to the margins of scholarship and public history for centuries, as I will explain below. For the moment, suffice it to say that a fundamental issue that requires interrogation is the nature and extent of knowledge that has been produced and disseminated in academia and how this knowledge has been transmitted to the public. Despite this marginalisation, intensified public demands in recent years from several sections of Dutch society have triggered examination and re-examination of chattel slavery and its legacies. A series of mobilizations, primarily led by Dutch Black communities, has pushed discussion of chattel slavery and its legacies into the public domain, has opened up debates that were previously stifled and have led to unprecedented exhibitions, museums transformation and political debate. This led to a public apology for slavery by the Dutch King at a public ceremony in Amsterdam in 2023. While these specific experiences are unique to the Netherlands, they have counterparts and implications for other nations in Europe too. That is because chattel slavery was not just a Dutch issue, but a European issue. It involved a European-wide system of colonization, enslavement and economic exploitation in which multiple European nations competed for supremacy.

In the case of the Netherlands, in fact, it was only in 2006 that a commission recommended chattel slavery as one of the 50 windows on the canon of Dutch history (Canon 2006). This was the conundrum in which the Netherlands found itself at the turn of the 21st century as the Black community demanded that acknowledgement, information and discussion of Dutch slavery should be brought to the foreground in Dutch history and historiography. Thus, we find ourselves confronting a paradox, which is that the further we move away from the legal end of chattel slavery (1863 in the case of the Dutch Kingdom), the more the descendants of slavery want to know the facts both about the world their ancestors lived and experienced, and about the legacies of this experience. It is in this context that we should place a motion by Don Seder in the Dutch parliament on 8 July 2021. Don Seder is a Dutch member of parliament from the Christian Union political party, who initiated a motion in the parliament and requested the government to review the studies on the state of research on Dutch slavery and to recommend what more research has to be done. The idea behind the motion did not fall from the sky. This is all the more so since the initiator of the motion, Don Seder, is of a mixed Ghanaian and Surinamese parentage, and can be classified as Black, so his motion should be viewed as the mainstreaming of Black demands.

The motion was partly successful because at that point in time the Christian Union party was one of the four coalition parties that formed the government. This made it possible for Don Seder to gather 10 parliamentarians to sign on to the document before it went to the parliament for a vote. Of the 150 parliamentarians, 118

voted for the motion, while 32 voted against. The opponents of the motion were classified in the media as far-right or right-wing politicians or political groupings. At best, members of these far-right groupings consider any discussion of slavery, remembrance and commemoration as nonsense; and at worst, they consider those who make such demands as alien to the nature of Dutch people. They also believe that the Dutch state owes no apology to anyone for Dutch involvement in chattel slavery.

The motion was paradoxical at another level because it brought the following question to the foreground: what happened to centuries of research work on Dutch history and historiography? This question is worth posing because some of the important features and legacies of Dutch involvement in Atlantic chattel slavery are denial, silence and distortion. Similar omissions and distortions can be found in knowledge production in the academies of the other European nations that created chattel slavery (Small 2018; Small and Nimako 2012; Hine, Keaton and Small 2009). The Dutch right-wing parliamentarians who voted against the motion belong to that category.

Despite these absences, we should not lose sight of the fact that another vital aspect and legacy of chattel slavery is resistance, active agency, commemoration and the demand for accurate information about what transpired (Small and Nimako 2012). These two legacies find their expression at political, social, economic, cultural, educational, psychological, and religious levels, and Seder's motion is a reflection of these.

This article examines some of the tendencies in research and in public narratives of slavery in the Dutch orbit, namely, marginalization of topics in research, and varied approaches to public history such as anniversaries and apologies, museum heritage, remembrance and commemoration, and reparations. I argued that these processes have differential involvement of Black people in each of them in ways that have had important consequences. It is also important to note that the word 'slavery' is used in this article to refer to chattel slavery because the concept of slavery has been inflated in the twenty-first century; the concept of so-called modern slavery is one such inflation (Nimako 2015). The first section discusses the relation between commemoration and public history; it is then followed by issues that commemoration throws up in section two.

2. Ancestors, Remembrance and Commemoration

The official documents that were signed to end chattel slavery by the very nations that initiated, designed, constructed, and enforced chattel slavery refer to this abolition as Emancipation Declarations. But in the material real world, the legal abolition of slavery did not lead to real freedom or to the emancipation of the enslaved, because those legally freed where then forced to perform exploitative labour long after the date of formal abolition (Nimako 2023; Small and Hira 2014). They also remained politically dominated and socially subordinated.

Viewed in this context, remembrance and commemoration go beyond abolition; they are also part of honouring the ancestors and the descendants of the enslaved. Equally important to note is that the social movements that campaign for the public

remembrance and commemoration are predominantly led by Black people who seek explicit and public acknowledgement of chattel slavery and its legacies, including emphasis on the humanity of the victims of slavery (Small and Nimako 2012).

To this effect, remembrance and commemorations on behalf of ancestors find their expression in different forms in Black organizations, community groups and churches; examples can also be found in the realm of culture, such as music like reggae, the protest movement of Rastafari, as well as in art, theatre, literature and performance.

In the Dutch context, 1993 can be considered as an important reference point of commemorations because as I have argued, it set in motion the engagement of commemorators with the state. However, in Suriname and the Antilles, the descendants of enslavement remembered and commemorated slavery, resistance and resilience had been part of the public narrative from the very end of the official legal abolition of slavery. But it was only 130 years later that the issue of Atlantic chattel slavery was brought to Dutch public attention. Specifically, on 1 July 1993, Black people of Surinamese and Antillean descent – predominantly women – publicly commemorated the abolition of Dutch Atlantic chattel slavery in Amsterdam. This was followed by their formal request to the government to erect a monument for annual commemoration of Dutch Atlantic slavery. Through their activism and lobbying, the monument became a reality, and was erected and unveiled at the Oosterpark in Amsterdam on 1 July 2002. As demanded by the Black lobby groups, this was followed by permission to establish an Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee) in 2003 (Nimako and Willemsen 2011).

The reader should be aware that very few mainstream Dutch historians, intellectuals, and public intellectuals supported or encouraged the social movements that campaigned and lobbied for the construction or erection of the monument and the establishment of NiNsee. Those who became involved did so because the government asked them for advice. And in some cases, they expressed their objections to such a project, especially behind the scenes (Nimako, Abdou and Willemsen 2014).

Thus, demands by Black communities led to the establishment of the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and Heritage (known as NINsee), which was built on five pillars, namely, commemoration, research, education, documentation, and a museum. In 2003 NiNsee requested funding for a museum, but this request was rejected, and instead NiNsee received funding for an exhibition. Initially NiNsee also received funding for research, but eight years later the government cut back funds, so NiNsee lost its research and education activities, and its exhibition was dismantled. This is how Artwell Cain, the former director of NiNsee, reflected on these developments in an article published in 2016:

> In 2011, Prime Minister Mark Rutte and his government decided to terminate the subsidy of NiNsee. For the first time in nine years, no government representative participated in the annual July 1 commemorations in 2011. I [Cain] was the director of NiNsee from 2009 to 2012, and I criticized the withdrawal of funding in news media interviews. In 2012, an election year, Prime Minister Mark Rutte participated again in the annual commemorations. The state was represented in those events again in 2013 with the presence of King Willem Alexander, Queen Maxima, and deputy Prime Minister Asscher. Paradoxically,

> they witnessed in 2013 the 150th anniversary of [the] Dutch abolition of slavery in the Caribbean, but also the termination of NiNsee's funding. Members of the Afro-Surinamese community and others were under the impression that some of their demands for proper commemorations had been met by the government. Yet, the government showed that its commitment to funding support for NiNsee had waned after 10 years. Efforts to combat the silence around slavery gained momentum in the 1990s and were advanced further by NiNsee from 2003 to 2013. However, those decades of efforts were answered with the withdrawal of government support. (Cain 2016, 235)

Since that time, NINsee has become a skeleton and only organizes commemoration activities. Nevertheless, due to the work of NiNsee, remembrance and commemoration of Dutch chattel slavery has become a recurrent event on 1 July at the Oosterpark in Amsterdam, where thousands of people attend a formal ceremony to commemorate the memory of the enslaved, to acknowledge the abolition of slavery, and to call for consideration of its legacies. Black commemorators also use this and other occasions to symbolically remind the public that their ancestors did not accept their conditions without a fight. Some resisted passively, others collectively and actively. Where possible, some left the plantations to form their own maroon communities and, in the process, developed their own languages as medium of communities.

In other words, Black migration, settlement, and social mobilization in the metropolises of the United Kingdom, Netherlands and France are the primary reasons for the increased public attention to slavery and its legacies at the present time. It is therefore not surprising that active borrowing of information, ideologies, and institutions from across the Diaspora, by Black groups in these nations, has been a key tactic for achieving these results (Nimako 2014; Small and Nimako 2018).

Commemorations get extra push during anniversaries (for example, those of the legal abolition of the slave trade and of slavery) which in turn give rise to calls for apologies from governments, and for the establishment of museums, and reparations to honour their ancestors, a topic to which we now turn.

3. Anniversaries, Apologies and Reparations

It is during anniversaries that many people join commemoration activities, and that calls on governments to *say something* become louder. One such moment was in 1963, when, on the one-hundredth anniversary of the legal abolition of Dutch slavery, people of Afro-Surinamese descent – predominantly students – paraded through the streets of Amsterdam to draw public attention to the event. But not many people took notice. However, as we have noted above, thirty years later, in 1993, during the 130th anniversary of the abolition of Dutch slavery, Black people of Surinamese and Antillean descent – predominantly women – again publicly commemorated the abolition of Dutch slavery in Amsterdam again. This time, far more people took notice, because the commemorators took their case to the Mayor of Amsterdam to request both a monument to reflect public and official acknowledgement of anniversaries associated with chattel slavery, and apologies from government, religious organizations and other prominent groups that were involved in, or profited from, slavery and slave trading.

In response to Black demands, governments have reluctantly participated in anniversaries. After 1993, the Amsterdam City Council became the most active participant and was the most responsive to demands among official circles. However, since the city council does not have the authority to decide on certain issues such as monuments, it tends to refer proposals for monuments to the national government.

With regard to apologies, it was the churches that took the first steps to apologize for their involvement in slavery. In 2013, on the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery, the Dutch Council of Churches offered its apology for the role of churches in slavery. On behalf of the churches, the Secretary General of the Council, Klaas van der Kamp, issued a statement of apology, of which the first part reads as follows:

> We as churches in the Netherlands, united in the Council of Churches, are committed to expressing the following to the churches and the descendants of the people who were once traded as slaves and had to work as slaves; descendants live in various countries, including Suriname, Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, the Caribbean Netherlands and the Netherlands.

The statement went on further to state that:

> We know from the Bible that all people are created in God's image, but we have not done justice to people as image bearers; they have not been treated as would be desirable in accordance with the later formulated Charter of Human Rights. We acknowledge our past involvement of individual church members and church associations in maintaining and legitimizing the slave trade; Slavery took place under the Dutch flag for centuries until 1863.

The statement also stated the obvious in the following words:

> There was no or insufficient respect for Biblical and human values. Hundreds of thousands of people were taken from their homes and had to spend a lifetime in captivity, were exploited, and were not given the opportunity to live their lives in freedom of religion, expression and work. Many died during transport. Millions of people were held as slaves. As churches we know our share of this guilty past and we must conclude that theology has been misused in certain circumstances to justify slavery.

It also appears that the Secretary General had *reparations* in mind when they included the following statement in the text:

> As churches we mention this involvement and we want to help do justice to the descendants of those who have sometimes been enslaved and exploited for generations, whereby we as churches realize that churches at the time differed in terms of possibilities and that there were also different voices within various churches [that] were heard.

This brings us back to remembrance, commemoration, and public history:

> Who can forgive the debt and offer forgiveness for people who can no longer speak words and who have had to spend the end of their lives in slavery? We realize that we have spoken too late, have not had the right insights at the right time

> and have allowed ourselves to be guided by misplaced pursuit of profit and abuse of power. It is a form of injustice that continues into the current generation, where part of our society is built on the abuse of others and where discrimination is not sufficiently eradicated.
>
> There are many things that we can no longer change. We acknowledge to descendants of the slaves that we have caused a lot of suffering. We express the wish to work with them and with all those who want to serve justice and peace to seek a society in which dignified life, freedom, responsibility, solidarity and respect are basic values.

This requires public history. "We hope for a joint commitment to society, because we realize that even today equality of people is by no means self-evident and will have to be discovered, acquired and defended again and again".

To understand the historical ties between the state and Church in maintaining slavery, let us recall that it was the Church that was called upon by the Dutch state to bring the Dutch Emancipation Declaration to the attention to the enslaved in August 1862. The Dutch missionary, Mr. Jansa, responsible for transmitting the emancipation message to the enslaved narrated his experience to an American newspaper as follows:

> The intelligence of the speedy emancipation of the negroes naturally awakens in me, who have so long laboured in this Colony, the most heartfelt joy. Having been requested by several planters to make known to their slaves the Proclamation of the Governor and the Emancipation law, I (Jansa) did so. They assembled, neatly dressed, in the church, and I tried to explain everything to them, getting them to repeat aloud all that I said, so that there might be no misunderstanding. The joy and the praise of the poor Negroes were touching. They had previously heard, but refused to believe the news, saying: "The whites have deceived us so often!" But now that I made known truth and told them, it is really so, our Saviour has influenced the King and his counsellors to set you free on the first of July 1863**,** they doubted no longer. Big tears of joy rolled down their black cheeks, and with jubilee joy they exclaimed: Our dear teacher tells us; we believe it; we will be free! What our mothers heard of before we were born, that is now to come pass, that we will see! Thanks, thanks unto God (The CIRCULAR, Aug. 27, 1863, no. 26, Vol. XII, p.104; in Willemsen 2006, 160).

It should be noted that in July 1862 the government presented its abolition proposal as a package to the Dutch Parliament with four components: first, lifting of slavery in the Dutch West Indies colonies; second, compensation for the enslavers; third, state control to continue for ten years over the enslaved who would be freed (i.e. 1863-1873); and fourth, the government to commit to arranging immigration for indentured labourers from British-controlled India for a decade, to fill the vaccum of enslaved labour.

It is also worth mentioning that what is not in the above statement is the fact that, while the official proclamation of the abolition of slavery contained information on the compensation for the emancipation to the enslavers, this information was, however, omitted in the Surinamese language version, *Sranan Tongo*, which was communicated to the enslaved (Willemsen, *ibid*). It demonstrates that both the Church and state had drawn their moral boundaries, and people of African descent fell outside those boundaries (Nimako and Willemsen 2011).

Equally important to note is that in the above quote, like in other colonial historical narratives, the missionary Jansa refers to the enslavers as 'planters'; but in the material real world, the enslavers planted nothing: it was the enslaved who chopped, planted, and harvested, who carried, cooked, served, washed and cleaned, so that the enslavers on the plantations could pursue their non-menial activities, such as reading, writing, sporting and other leisure activities (Nimako and Willemsen 2011).

For the moment, suffice it to say that the apology of the Dutch Council of Churches was followed by a series of apologies in the years that followed. To prepare the grounds for apology, in 2019, the Amsterdam City Council commissioned a study to determine the role of the City Council in slavery. Other cities, such as The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht, followed the Amsterdam City Council's example. In a public speech during the commemoration on 1 July 2021, the Mayor of Amsterdam, Femke Halsema, presented an apology on behalf of the Amsterdam City. This was followed by Rotterdam in December 2021, Utrecht in February 2022, and The Hague in November 2022. The President of the Netherlands Central Bank also gave an apology on behalf of the Bank on 1 July 2022 during the commemoration at the Oosterpark in Amsterdam. The Dutch government also commissioned studies in 2020 and 2021 and followed these with an apology by the Prime Minister Mark Rutte on behalf of the Dutch government in December 2022 (Jouwe 2023).

All these developments recently culminated in an apology by the King, Willem Alexander, on behalf of himself, the government, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands at the commemoration on 1 July 2023. The King offered apology and asked for forgiveness. It was the last aspect that surprised many people, especially in the Black community. The Black community expected a formal apology, but not a personal plea for forgiveness. The fact that the King acknowledged the link between racism and slavery in his speech symbolized a triumph for the Black community, and a meltdown for mainstream academia.

Upon closer examination one can imagine why mainstream Dutch scholarship ignores or downplays the place of remembrance and commemoration in the slavery narrative, and for that matter, in public history. Apparently, they have been preoccupied with the reproduction of the maritime archives of the Dutch West Indies Company (WIC) and counting of the number of African captives the WIC transported to the America. Flowing from this, they tend to argue that the Dutch share of the blame was small compared to that of Britain, France, and Portugal. Also, using mainly the Dutch West Indies Company (WIC) records, Dutch scholars insist the WIC did not make profits from the slave trade and slavery, and even made loses. The evidence they attempt to provide is unconvincing. But to add salt to the wounds – and insult to injury – some mainstream Dutch scholars even insist that slavery was mild because some gentle master-enslavers fell in love with enslaved women. We have argued elsewhere that the idea of mildness has no analytical value and has been invented merely as propaganda and to assuage Dutch guilt (Essed and Nimako 2006; Small and Nimako 2012; Cain 2016).

These processes and experiences have also given rise to divergent forms of commemoration. Clearly those who were allegedly 'freed' as a result of the 'emancipation'

proclamation have different sources of data as reference points for commemoration of slavery. This is why we should study and review the evidence.

The point here is that due to the work of NiNsee, remembrance and commemoration of Dutch chattel slavery has become a recurrent event on 1 July at the Oosterpark in Amsterdam. It is important to recall that, although in 2003 NiNsee requested funding for a museum, this request was rejected and instead it received funding for an exhibition (Nimako 2023).

In all these developments, museums remain one of the important sites of public history and the Netherlands boast hundreds of them. Predominantly elite and white-led, the museum infrastructure involves exhibits, galleries, monuments, and related buildings. Historically, and until the 21st century, in the few instances in which these institutions addressed slavery, it has almost always been without the enslaved, and until very recently, these institutions ignored, downplayed, or marginalized explicit discussion of slavery and its legacy, and focused mainly on material culture, rather than humans. In fact, the Netherlands had colonial museums, called 'Tropical Museum' or 'Africa Museum', that were designed to tell the story of where Dutch colonizers had been. They were also intended to 'bring home' the colonial world in the form of objects, artifacts, art, and physical infrastructure; and to show the image in such a way that it would uplift the self-worth of the colonizer.

If we take knowledge production on slavery and its legacies seriously, then we should not expect a slavery museum to be the same as a colonial museum, due to what I call 'parallel lives and intertwined belongings' (Nimako 2011). These are patterns and factors that can be identified and analysed in different epochs and spaces. By parallel lives and intertwined belongings, I mean people who shared the same space, but had different trajectories arriving in, and departing from, that space. In this case, I mean that the Dutch enslavers occupied different positions of power and control than did those enslaved, in the castles and dungeons on the Africa coast, in the ships that transported Africans into slavery, and on the plantation labour regimes where Africans were put to work. Put bluntly, African captives were forced to work without contract or consent. Later, the formal abolition of slavery made citizenship (as opposed to common spaces) an *intertwined belonging;* and *parallel lives* which in turn gave rise to different understanding and notions of freedom and emancipation.

It is also in this context that we should ponder why Black communities reject colonial museums and demand museums that reflect their history and existence. It is because the museums Black people are demanding are not the same as the colonial museums that the Dutch established. The content, substance and goals are very different. The Dutch have been far more likely to highlight material culture, ships and shipping, trade routes, economic successes and architecture and describe the layout of plantations. But Black people demand information on the violence and brutality of capture and transportation of Africans, of labour regimes, of family and culture, resistance and rebellion.

This divergent approach is also reflected in the content, substance and goals of Black music, art and sculpture, in dance, theatre and performance, as well as in photographs, video and film. It is in this realm of culture that we already find Black people's monuments and testimonies. And that is because Black people have always

had far more creative influence and control of community cultural productions. Black voices and visions of this kind can be heard and seen in narratives, biographies, songs, and religious and spiritual texts. In the case of the Netherlands, examples can be found at the wide range of activities that prevail during the Keti Koti festival (Break the Chains) each year – including dress and music and food during the commemoration on the first of July at the Oosterpark in Amsterdam. Many Black people wear badges that say '1873 not 1863', to remind participants of the ten-year apprenticeship that was called into being by the Dutch government in Suriname after the legal abolition of slavery in 1863. There are exhibitions and presentation that take place in the Black History Archives, which was established by Mitchel Esajas and Jessica de Abreu. And analysis and knowledge production of this kind have taken place every year in the Black Europe Summer School – a two-week programme in Amsterdam since 2008 (Small 2018).

A revealing example of the divergent priorities – and of the parallel lives and intertwined belongings – process can be found in the Transatlantic Slavery Gallery which began in Liverpool in 1994 and later became the International Slavery Museum in 2007 (Small 2023; 1994).

It is also at such locations that we can draw a distinction between 'multi-culture' and 'multiculturalism'. Apparently, 'multi-cultural' is used adjectivally, and describes the social characteristics and problems of governance posed by any society in which different cultural communities live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining something of their 'original' identity. By contrast, 'multiculturalism' is substantive and references the strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multicultural societies throw up. The above examples indicate how the Dutch state conceptualized multiculturalism in a way that focused on the exotic differences of immigrants, without addressing issues of racism, while black people and others use multiculturalism to challenge the dominant narrative and to bring in issues of inequality, race and racism in other to foster inclusion (Nimako 2024).

One of the most outstanding issues that cannot be resolved in the short term with apologies and the establishment of museums is *reparations*. This is all the more so since there are several layers involved in the narratives on reparations. Primarily Black-led, the reparations movement seeks financial payments to the descendants of the enslaved; the return of stolen artifacts and precious items held in museums; and significant revision of the historical record to tell a far more accurate and complete story of slavery and the 'slave trade'. Examples of these activities here include the work of Bernie Grant, MP, who in the late 1980s began the UK Reparations movement, and boycotted several museums that housed artifacts stolen from Africa – including the Benin Bronzes (Beckle 2013; Schalkwijk and Small 2012). In recent years, some physical objects or artifacts have been returned or repaired since the falsehoods that underpinned their acquisition have been exposed.

But reparations should not end with the return of artifacts; a significant revision of the historical record to tell more accurate and complete story of slavery and the slave trade is called for. For instance, the African in Africa was a free person before he or she was captured; remained a captive in Africa and during the transatlantic crossing; and only became enslaved when he or she reached the Americas. Yet

the idea of 'African slave trade' has persisted till the twenty-first century. This is a case of conceptual shadow boxing, presenting the writing of history as if it is neutral or objective when in fact it is biased.

Also, as we have noted above in the scholarly literature, enslavers are referred to as planters. In the material real world, however, they planted nothing; it was all done by enslaved labour. It is equally clear that the coordination and control of enslaved labour required active intervention in the social life of the enslaved, from the production process to reproduction and family life, and to matters of life and death. These interventions and the continual resistance to them still form a vital part of the memories of descendants of the enslaved (Small and Nimako 2012).

Equally important to note is that for European populations, the colonies provided far more freedom, mobility and access to land and wealth for Europeans. But expropriation of land and the establishment of systems of enslavement led to unfreedom and servitude for millions of Africans, and to similar experiences and far worse for Native American populations. Writing these developments in scholarly articles is one thing, but translating these challenges into public history is another matter.

4. Conclusion

Slavery in the Kingdom of the Netherlands lasted for several hundred years; the Dutch were active in the transportation of Africans from African into enslavement, and they also employed the cooperation of the Spanish to enable such transportation. The Dutch instituted slavery labor regimes in Brazil, in New York, in what became Suriname, and in several islands in the West Indies. The types of slavery that developed, how long they lasted and what forms they took, depended on historical circumstances and on competition – and often fighting and war – between the Netherlands and other nations involved in slavery, such as Portugal, Britain, France and Spain. Africans enslaved by the Dutch did not accept their subordination and exploitation willingly. They resisted at every point, and despite being outpowered, they developed cultural practices of resistance in family, religion, language and music; and they organized individual and collective resistance (including rebellions) to end chattel slavery.

The struggle to end chattel slavery in the Dutch Kingdom was immediately followed by a struggle to document and explain slavery and its legacies in the academy; and to publicly remember and collectively represent the nature of slavery and its legacies in society more generally. It was also accompanied by efforts to distort, suppress or symbolically annihilate public memory of slavery. Dutch museums played an important role in this process, being one of the main arenas in which the dominant Dutch narrative was presented and disseminated, including the marginalization of the systems of brutality, violence and exploitation that were central to Dutch slavery. In other words, divergent experiences characterized by asymmetrical power during slavery, gave rise to divergent narratives and priorities in researching slavery and in presentations of public history.

For these reasons, I conceptualized the notion of *parallel lives and intertwined belongings*, by which I mean people who shared the same space but did so in conditions of unequal positions resulting from different trajectories in the fullness of the processes. Experiences which in turn gave rise to divergent experiences and memories. Public history develops out of the research undertaken in the academy and is shaped by the priorities of the nation state, including its systems of education and learning. In this article I have demonstrated that the Dutch involvement in the system of Atlantic chattel slavery is a highly problematic field. Dutch scholars and politicians historically have kept key aspects of chattel slavery and its legacies at the margins of research, teaching and public history. But the descendants of the enslaved – in Suriname, the Antilles and in the Netherlands itself – have refused to accept this. And their intensified public demands – including protests and campaigns – have led in recent years to a re-examination of chattel slavery and its legacies. There is now far more research on a much wider range of topics than ever before, more exhibitions and public history on slavery and its legacies, and even public apologies from a range of institutions and high-ranking people, including the Dutch Prime Minister and the Dutch King.

In this article I have mainly focused on examples and developments in the Netherlands. But these processes and the unfolding of parallel lives and intertwined belongings have counterparts in other nations across Europe. Slavery was developed in unique ways in individual nations, but those nations shared many things in common, even as they engaged in competition and conflict over colonization. Considering the experiences of the Portuguese, the Spanish, the British, and France, it is clear that each nation engaged in invasion of African territories, and in the capture, forced transportation and enslavement of Africans across the Americas. In the scholarly literature of each of these nations they marginalized analysis of slavery and its legacies, and kept the focus on trade, shipping, economics and what they called 'national accomplishments'; while restricting analysis of brutality, violence and exploitation. When chattel slavery was legally abolished by these nations, the enslavers got compensation and the enslaved got nothing; they did not even get real freedom, because slavery was simply replaced with other systems of political domination and economic exploitation (Draper 2007). Similar patterns have developed for other nations in Europe that primarily directed their colonial ventures to Africa, for example, Italy, Germany and Belgium (Hawthorne 2022). It is also evident that the further each nation got from slavery, the more the descendants of the enslaved have demanded research and public history on the topics marginalized (Small 2020). The more they have demanded that the experiences of the enslaved be brought to the foreground. And that artefacts acquired during colonialism be repatriated and reparations for the descendants of the enslaved be paid. Across Western Europe, we are in a period of rapid transformation. And the outcome is not yet clear.

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