

# Blinded by Memory

An analysis of collective memories concerning dark pages in Dutch history, how they are taught at school and how they have influence on contemporary debates.

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Word count: 25152  
(excl. notes, bibliography and contents)

Date: 01-07-2021

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## Introduction

In the last few years, more and more controversy has seemingly started to surround difficult moments in Dutch history. Especially the colonial rule of the Dutch in the Indies and the Americas continues to create more and more critique, with people asking for recognition and apologies for the transatlantic slave trade and slavery itself. Additionally, recently the Dutch government has been more and more apologetic about the Indonesian war for independence, even having the Dutch king declare official apologies to the Indonesian state for the excessive violence that was committed in the years following World War II. This did also spark discussion however: the Dutch government admitting their wrong during the so called *politioenele acties* is by some considered to be unfair towards the Dutch and KNIL soldiers who fought in that war, since it portrays them as war criminals even though the truth is far more nuanced.

These discussions have sparked doubt with myself. I have always considered myself to be an inclusive and understanding person, but I have never actually really considered the contemporary controversies as problematic when I first heard of the discussions. When I was at school, I learned that slavery was of course horrible, but I mainly learned that it was over, and that today each Dutch citizen is equal and all has been forgiven. And regarding the *politioenele acties* I barely learned a thing: I just learned that after WWII there was political instability in the Dutch Indies, and Dutch troops were sent there to maintain order. And once it became clear that the Indonesians wanted independence, the Dutch granted it quite easily due to the US supporting Indonesia in this discussion. And I did not even truly learn about the most recent of these black pages until I studied at the university: the fall of Srebrenica was not even mentioned in my history classes.

Initially, the history that I learned made me think that many racial struggles in the Netherlands today were exaggerations. I did not see why the blackface character of *Zwarte Piet* was hurtful for many Dutch citizens, nor did I really understand why the *politioenele acties* needed to be discussed so extensively: they were barely present in my history books at school, which meant that they surely were not *that* important. But when discussing and contemplating these matters further, I quickly came to realise that my interpretation of history was quite one-sided. I did not even *look* for racial inequalities in the Netherlands, because I thought that we had already passed that part of history.

This realisation lies at the basis of this thesis, which investigates the aforementioned black pages in Dutch history: The transatlantic slave trade, the *politioenele acties* and the fall of Srebrenica, which resulted in the largest European genocide since WWII. This research aims to display how the histories on these subjects that children learn at school can (incidentally) contribute to more misunderstanding in Dutch society due to what I have come to call 'blind spots' in the collective memory on these events. Primarily rooting itself in memory studies, this research discusses the government-endorsed histories on these subjects portrayed in one school curriculum and the 'Dutch Canon', a government-sponsored list of 50 of the most important events in Dutch history created to teach children more about Dutch history. These two sources create what I call an 'official' history: a state-endorsed version of history that displays how the Dutch

government wants history to be taught. Note that I have bracketed the word ‘official’ in this term. This is done to emphasize that history itself knows many different interpretations, and that even though this interpretation of history is used in school books, that does not mean that all experts agree with it.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter introduces the leading theories that will be used in the close reading of the sources. It shares the research perspective, and includes theories of collective memory, cultural heritage, and human rights discourse. The second chapter constitutes the bulk of this thesis: it discusses the sources, carefully portraying what is written, what is not written, and how that could be interpreted. The third chapter continues this idea: it discusses the impact that the ‘official’ history can have on contemporary debate, showing how it can actively hinder reconciliation and social stability due to a one-sided interpretation of history. The chapter then continues by looking at possible solutions to this problem: How can the collective memory be changed in such a way that more understanding is created within Dutch society? What tactics could be employed? This is done with the hope that in a few generations, the ‘official’ history is inclusive enough to finally facilitate reconciliation for some of the dark pages in Dutch history.

At the outset, it seems important to make a disclaimer. My thesis deals with some complicated, and politically loaded topics. While undertaking research for my thesis, I found that many people whom I approached for information or with whom I discussed the difficult subjects it treats often ‘hijacked’ the subjects for themselves. Frequently I was confronted by presumptions about what my thesis was doing, and why I was working on such a topic, based on their own political opinions on those topics. Some people would immediately start to defend themselves, while others told me that they were happy that I wrote a thesis highlighting the injustices of slavery. I have also caught myself doing the same while discussing my progress and findings. The difficulty with topics like these is that, because of their political nature, even neutral texts are often read through a political lens. But it is important to note that my thesis, even though it handles complicated subjects, is *not* about slavery in the strictest sense, nor is it trying to put blame on anybody. The subjects are mere examples. I am interested in the process of how a national ‘official’ history can create a collective memory that blinds people to certain inequalities, and how this might be overcome. I am *not* interested in saying what is right and what is wrong.

This demands caution: caution on my part, as I research, write, and discuss this thesis to mitigate against my own political bias, but also caution on the part of the reader, to self-critically ensure that what they read, and what they interpret, is not unintentionally being influenced by their own political lens. To be clear, this thesis is not written in judgement, or nor is its aim to make a strong political statement.

With that being said, I will continue with the first chapter of this thesis, which explores the leading theories that lie at the basis of my research.

## Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

This chapter will discuss the theories and methods that form the basis of this thesis. It can be divided in three parts. First, I will discuss important theories of cultural memory: What is cultural memory? How does it function? What are its ties to religion? Next, the chapter explores cultural heritage and its link to collective memory. How is heritage ‘selected’? How does this influence collective memory and ‘official’ history? Lastly, I will introduce theories on human rights discourse that help explain the focus of this research: How can history, much like the present, have a ‘blinding’ effect on perceptions of the self?

### Memory Studies and its Link to the Religious

This thesis centres on an analysis of the ‘official’ narrative of Dutch history as presented to Dutch citizens. By looking at two different sources which I will later discuss in more detail, the self-representation of the Dutch state will be analysed, and with it, how the Dutch state seems to ‘remember’ its own past. That does raise an important question: How does a state ‘remember’? This cannot, of course, be a neurological form of remembering. Rather, the terms ‘remember’ and ‘memory’ are used in scholarship on cultural memory to underline that what is ‘remembered’ as history is in fact distinct from actual objective history. This distinction is one of the primary focusses of the field of Memory Studies. The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who is considered to have established the field of Memory Studies, differentiates history, which can be considered factual representation of the past,<sup>1</sup> from memory, which is at its very core an *interpretation* of the past. According to Halbwachs, both individuals and collectives imprint their own social frameworks and self-identification, which he calls ‘landmarks’, on their idea of the past, resulting in an image of history that is created for the present.<sup>2</sup> The study of collective memory is thus the study of contemporary reflections of and on the past, in all the different forms it can take.

In the Halbwachsian line of thought, history as taught at a school is thus in fact actually a collective memory. Due to the highlighting of certain aspects and the choice to not mention others the history is ‘clouded’ in a way. History lessons are not an actual factual representation of past events, but filter out many of the details to focus on those aspects that are considered to matter the most. The use of the word ‘history’ can thus sometimes be a misnomer, as it implies the factual representation of the past, but in practice often is actually a collective memory.

This thesis will employ terms that are similar in meaning: national narrative, cultural memory, collective memory, and ‘official’ history. Though these words have slightly different connotations, in general, in this study they will be used interchangeably. Of course, the broad category ‘cultural memory’ can be differentiated from an ‘official’ history approved by a state, but in this study my

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<sup>1</sup> Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*. Translated by Sara B. Young (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 17

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. Translated by Lewis A. Coser. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 173-178

interest focusses on where these two overlap. Moreover, a certain vagueness in the definition of terminology seems to be a recurring feature of the study of cultural memory. The memory scholar Astrid Erll draws attention to this problem in her book *Memory in Culture*,<sup>3</sup> stating that “Terminology is one of the most intricate issues in memory studies.”<sup>4</sup> In short, Erll argues that due to the broad, interdisciplinary nature of memory studies, the different terms that have been introduced over time have unclear boundaries.

One of the most prominent scholars in the study of collective memory is Pierre Nora. Nora’s theories have drawn the study of memory from obscurity to a more broadly known field.<sup>5</sup> Nora’s idea of public memory has quite a negative tone. Looking at French society, he states that globalisation and mass media have led to a shift away from a *milieu de mémoire*, (‘environment of memory’), a positive frame of memory that actually results in a national identity, towards *lieux de mémoire* (‘sites of memory’).<sup>6</sup> These ‘sites’ can be seen as ‘pieces’ on which people imprint their idea of memory. They can be material, like a monument or a physical space, but they can also take a more ritual form such as a memorial ceremony or something seen as tradition. Each individual then, has his or her own set of *lieux de mémoire*. Despite Nora’s negative view of this individualization of history, his idea of memories being linked to clearly definable sites has proven to be quite influential. Many scholars have adapted and built upon Nora’s ideas, like Willem Frijhoff. Frijhoff introduces Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* as a secular alternative to the connections that religions make to the past.<sup>7</sup> ‘Faiths’ use their rituals, practices and materiality as “instrumenten van de culturele continuïteit.”<sup>8</sup> (instruments of the cultural continuity) A ‘faith’ in Frijhoff’s idea of the word does not by definition entail a religion however. Frijhoff describes ‘faith’ more as a *belief*, as a point of reference that gives grip to the past, like an anchor. *Lieux de mémoire* function similar to that as well according to Frijhoff, all be it as a more flexible alternative to the religious alternative.

In a similar line of thought, Danièle Hervieu-Léger classifies in the sixth chapter of her book *Religion as a Chain of Memory*<sup>9</sup> how not only religions, but also politics, sports, ideologies and nationalism can be *religious*. She argues how the aspects of a religion that Frijhoff also mentions, like ritual, do indeed create a sense of continuity and connection to the past. But she identifies those aspects in secular society as well. Where Frijhoff focuses on a clear distinction between the religious and secular cultures, beliefs and rituals, Hervieu-Léger seems to do the opposite: she looks at “the religious in politics”.<sup>10</sup> A collective memory and

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<sup>3</sup> Erll, *Memory in Culture*

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 22

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”, in *Representations*, no. 26 (spring 1989): 7-24

<sup>7</sup> Willem Frijhoff, “Toe-eigening als vorm van culturele dynamiek”, in *Volkskunde* 104 (2003), 1-17.

<sup>8</sup> Frijhoff, “Toe-eigening als vorm van culturele dynamiek”, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*. Translated by Simon Lee. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 101-109

<sup>10</sup> Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, 119

culture can then in some ways be seen as a replacement for religions: monuments and national rituals take the place of their counterparts in the church or mosque, but still create the idea of continuity and a link to the past. The believer, whether in a religious group or secular, is placed in a larger story, a myth, and can through that still be described as *religious*. An ‘official’ history taught at schools does the same: it teaches children the ‘religious’ myth of the nation (and the world). It equips them with the knowledge to understand the national rituals such as a memorial day, and the ability to appreciate and honour the monuments placed throughout the nation. It teaches both continuity, myth, and practice.

Scholars of memory often discuss the illusion of continuity. Religions, both secular and not, often tell a myth of continuity, where this continuity is often fabricated. This idea finds its roots with the historian Eric Hobsbawm, who states that often, traditions, especially rituals, are invented and just carry the *idea* of continuation with the past, which in many cases can be fabricated or re-introduced after a period of discontinuation<sup>11</sup>. A ritual or tradition that is then seen as something that has always been present, for example the Dutch blackface figure of *Zwarte Piet*, or even the traditional white dress worn during a wedding, is often just the product of a few generations. The illusion of continuation changes the perception of the past and the larger narrative in which people place themselves, resulting in the ‘forgetting’ of how such a tradition did not exist in the past. This is why fictional films set in the medieval period also portray every bride with a white dress, and is also why many Dutch people do not see the link between a friendly blackface character and its problematic past.

Finally, mention should be made of the work of Aleida and Jan Assmann who introduced the term idea of ‘cultural memory’ in opposition to communicative memory (note that the Assmanns did not invent the term of cultural memory, but did provide it the following definition). The Assmanns take Halbwachs’ idea of collective memory, and seem to divide it up in the aforementioned two categories. On the one hand, communicative memory can be described as the memory of history that still has witnesses to describe it. It is based off the recollections of the past by those who have lived through that past, together with their interpretations of the past events.<sup>12</sup> This means that this form of memory is limited to the lifespan of eyewitnesses. Thus, the Assmanns say that the communicative memory can only go back about eighty to one hundred years. Cultural memory on the other hand,<sup>13</sup> can be described as a more mythical representation of the past. It entails the stories that are often seen as foundations for a social group, and brings with it a legitimization and explanation of the contemporary situations. Cultural memory is still a ‘memory’ in the Halbwachsian sense that it is created in the present, for the present, and as such is not fixed. It is, however, seen by the Assmanns as a far more fundamental part of society, as cultural memory entails the mythical origins of a group. Examples of memories in the cultural memory of the Netherlands

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<sup>11</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions” in *The Invention of Tradition*. ed. Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.)

<sup>12</sup> Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 28-33

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

could be the Roman period, the Eighty-Years War, the *Gouden Eeuw* (Golden Age; the seventeenth century) or the Napoleonic conquest of Europe. All these different parts of history are seen as important, defining moments for the Netherlands, with which a mythical continuity is drawn much like in the theories mentioned above.

### Critical Heritage Studies

Since this thesis investigates the Dutch ‘official’ history, it is important to examine exactly how an ‘official’ history comes into existence. Understanding such a process, in which parts of history are chosen and framed to create a collective national memory can be done by including the critical study of cultural heritage into the theoretical framework. Heritage is, similar to the trend in memory studies, quite difficult to define. Often it is associated with dusty museums or old castles. In this thesis however, I will not define heritage as such, but will follow in an important shift that has taken place in scholarship on heritage in the last two decades. Critical heritage studies approaches heritage more and more as a discourse rather than as ‘fixed’ objects<sup>14</sup> or practices. In other words, what is seen as ‘heritage’, is only seen as such because the heritage discourse, or order of knowledge, defines heritage in such a way. This discourse functions in such a way that it trusts ‘experts’, such as historians, archaeologists, or anthropologists, to define what is and what is not heritage. Laurajane Smith describes this process as the ‘Authorized Heritage Discourse’ or AHD for short.<sup>15</sup> With the definition of heritage as a discourse, she critiques the whole idea of heritage in the West, claiming that it is too dominated by Western ideals about both the classification as the preservation of heritage. In a similar line of thought, with respect to British Heritage Stuart Hall has argued that:

[w]e should think of The Heritage as a discursive practice. It is one of the ways in which the nation slowly constructs for itself a sort of collective social memory. Just as individuals and families construct their identities by ‘storying’ the various random incidents and contingent turning points of their lives into a single, coherent, narrative, so nations construct identities by selectively binding their chosen high points and memorable achievements into an unfolding ‘national story’.<sup>16</sup>

Though Hall does not refer to heritage as an AHD, like Smith, he does see heritage as a discursive practice, resulting in a collective social memory.

Following Smith and Hall, in this study, heritage will be understood as the discourse that identifies those aspects of history (both the aspects that are considered ‘dead’ as those that are still in use) that are considered important for

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<sup>14</sup> Laurajane Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 44-113

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Stuart Hall, “Whose Heritage? Un-Settling ‘The Heritage’, Re-imagining Post-Nation,” in *The Heritage Reader*, eds. Graham Fairclough et al. (London: Routledge, 2008), 23



the national/cultural/global story, and that thereby create a collective memory. This results in the formation of a national story and identity around this collective memory, as the collective memory is effectively the ‘history’ that is learned by most people of the selected cultural group. Heritage is the discourse that results in a collective memory and identity, or what at a school might be taught as *history*.

If heritage is a discourse, especially if it is an AHD, it is defined by the experts creating it. These experts’ lines of thinking result from the collective memory that they are taught, which in itself is a product of the discourse on heritage, and so on. Leaving out certain parts of history from a cultural memory by experts, for whatever reason, thus results in the ‘forgetting’ of those parts not only by the non-experts, but also by the experts-to-be: it is far harder to recollect a forgotten history due to the general unawareness of the collective forgetting, much as a person is not aware of what he has forgotten until something or someone else confronts them with their own forgetfulness.

What is problematic here is that the distinction between history and memory is often not seen by the general public. I have already established that that what is taught as *history* actually better fits the definition of *memory*. However, due to the fact that the term ‘history’ is still used, the students at schools, as well as their teachers, get the idea that they get taught a history in the Halbwachsian (factual) sense,<sup>17</sup> instead of a memory produced from a discourse. This idea of history being an factual representation finds its origins with Leopold von Ranke, who famously has stated that history should be taught “*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*”<sup>18</sup> (how it actually was): History should describe factual data without providing too many moral lessons. The difficulty lies with the fact that objectivity in such a sense is almost impossible to achieve in a history text-book. The factual data might be correct, but still choices are made in what is and what is not discussed for example. In addition to that, the conveying of factual data still can be done through the use of *framing*: the words that are used and the emphases that are made can still change the interpretation of factual data. In the next chapter I will for example discuss history of the transatlantic slave trade, where a strong difference could be found between stating ‘Europeans bought African slaves at the African coasts’ or ‘Europeans bought slaves from Africans, for whom keeping slaves was normal’. Both statements convey the same factual information: Europeans went to Africa to buy slaves from Africans, who apparently also kept slaves themselves. The second statement however does frame the fact in a way that soothes the pain a bit: it was normal for the Africans, so the Europeans just followed in their traditions.

This kind of framing often happens unintentionally. History writers, at least in the Netherlands, do probably not intentionally soothe the pains of the past in such

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<sup>17</sup> See: Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, chapter 3; and: Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 13-18

<sup>18</sup>Enne Koops. “Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) – Geestelijke vader van het historisme.”

Historiek. Last modified 02-12-2019. <https://historiek.net/leopold-von-ranke-1795-1886-biografie/64726/>

For Ranke’s primary work see: Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der Romanischen und Germanischen Völker, Von 1494 Bis 1514* (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1874).

a way. However, that does not change the fact that through writing history in such a way, the frame remains quite focused on the positive, which results in the next generation of historians and heritage experts to be taught history through that particular lens, resulting in them confirming those particular interpretations of heritage and history. The created collective memory does thus eventually almost inevitably influence its own persistence through the fact that future experts are raised with that particular collective memory. Regarding 'official' history endorsed by the state: due to the selection of certain aspects of history and what constitutes 'heritage' by experts, combined with a form of framing that unintentionally can be added into history writing, an official history can quickly get 'stuck' in a certain way of interpreting the past as if it is the only right way to do so. The 'official' history is in fact 'just' a collective memory that has been accepted to be seen as an objective truth.

### Human Rights Theories

To end this chapter, my framework will be rooted in a theory that is not initially linked to history or memory itself, even though I will argue that it can be applied in such a way. My framework and focus will draw on the works of the anthropologists Talal Asad and Lila Abu-Lughod, and the philosopher Judith Butler. The former authors have written multiple influential articles and books that aim to show how discourses around human rights, specifically as listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>19</sup>, have been used to justify the breaking of the articles in that same declaration. Asad famously calls human rights "floating signifiers that can be attached to or detached from various subjects and classes constituted by the market principle and designated by the most powerful nation-states."<sup>20</sup> Abu-Lughod describes in her article *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving*<sup>21</sup> how narratives around cultural ideas and ideals on the concept of freedom are used to justify excessive violence to spread said 'freedom', even though those who are 'saved' do themselves not agree with the 'saving' and can even feel as if they are harmed more than rescued. In short: discourses on human rights can be misleading, making people feel as if they do 'good', while the truth is far more nuanced. In the light of memory studies, it could be said that the cultural memory as defined by the Assmanns<sup>22</sup> on human rights, which takes a mythical moral position in many Western narratives, can sometimes distract from its own message. The cultural memory would thus, be in the way of actual contemporary history: there is more focus on the spreading and praising of 'our' ideals than there is with critically examining our own actions in light of those ideas.

The moral philosopher Judith Butler writes in a similar line of thought. In her bundle of essays<sup>23</sup> Butler investigates how exactly sometimes the loss of life after

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<sup>19</sup> "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." United Nations. Accessed 30-06-2021.

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>20</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 158.

<sup>21</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others." *American Anthropologist* 104, no.3 (2002): 783-790.

<sup>22</sup> Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 28.

<sup>23</sup> Judith Butler. *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

a war is grieved, and sometimes it is not. She describes in her second chapter how framing (both literal framing in a photograph and framing in a story) can be used to over-dramatize, ridicule, or de-humanize certain people(s) for example, giving examples from the US war in Afghanistan. A collective memory can through framing easily be 'warped', if the right tools are used. The public opinion on certain subjects in the news, argues Butler, can easily be shifted.

These theories that are focused on what I would describe as 'contemporary history' (events that have just stopped or are still unfolding at the moment of writing). However, I argue that they can be valuable assets in examining collective memory and 'official' history as well. Regarding Butler, I have already explored how framing comes into play when writing history and creating collective memory above, so I see no need to discuss that further. Asad and Abu-Lughod's theories do need some exploring. The scholars describe how moral standards for a cultural 'us' can be used as a justification to judge a cultural 'them'. In the case of these contemporary histories, these projections can be used as an incentive for violent action. But cannot the same happen when looking at the past? I have already established that history is written through existing authorized discourses. The language surrounding human rights functions as a similar discourse: 'experts' (politicians for example) decide when and when not a military action is considered a violation of human rights. The moral judgment of 'our' own violation of human rights are almost entirely ignored, resulting in a narrative that heavily lays a focus on what 'they' do wrong and 'we' do right. Doesn't the same happens when looking at history? Isn't the moral judgement of the past also shifting the attention in such a manner? Let's take the example of the transatlantic slave trade once again. If the focus of the 'official' history lies mainly on how 'they' (the slavers from the past) were morally wrong, but eventually came to see that 'our' (the contemporary Dutch) moral standards were better, wouldn't that distract from 'our' wrongs (like systemic societal inequality) in a similar way that Asad describes? In both cases, focus is put on the moral transgressions of a 'they', which are combatted by an 'us' (either a physical 'us' in contemporary history, or a more metaphorical 'us' found in similar ethical ideas). In both cases, the focus of this 'doing good' distracts the collective memory on the matter from transgressions of the 'us': in Abu-Lughod's case 'we' are saving the Muslim women,<sup>24</sup> and the damages are a means to an end. In the case of slavery, 'we' have abolished slavery, as a result of 'our' coming to see that every person should have equal rights. Ergo: Everybody has been equal since. Where in contemporary conflicts the focus lies on sharing 'our' morals with a cultural 'them', in history this process happens through a cultural change: a historical 'them' is changed to be more like the contemporary 'us'.

Asad and Abu-Lughod have given the basis to show that, like events of the present, the past can be framed in such a way that it distracts from other viewpoints in stories, and how a focus can easily be shifted towards what 'they' are doing (or did) 'wrong' instead of focussing on *all* that is going wrong. Combined with the aforementioned theories on collective memory and the

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<sup>24</sup> Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others."

‘selection’ of history through AHD, it becomes clear that the representation of the past can very easily have a distracting effect regarding the present. By creating *lieux de mémoire*, that are rooted more in the positives of history than the negatives (or the other way around of course), combined with an ‘official’ history that can never entirely portray history ‘as it actually was’ but *is* seen in such a way, a warped idea comes to exist not only of the past, but also of the present self.

This chapter has created a framework from which I will continue to explore my primary data in the next chapter through a close reading. The aforementioned theories will lie at the grounds of my understanding and interpretation of this data.

## Chapter 2: ‘Official’ Dutch Histories

This chapter is concerned with the analysis of the ‘official’ histories regarding several ‘black pages’ in Dutch history. For our purposes, we will focus on two examples of ‘official’ histories: a contemporary widely-used Dutch school textbook on history, and the *Canon van Nederland*, or the Dutch Canon. First, I briefly explain the sources and their place in Dutch society. Next, I identify and analyse the relevant texts found in both sources for three different ‘parts’ of Dutch history that have proven to be controversial or difficult to discuss: the Dutch trade in enslaved Africans through the WIC; the Dutch colonial war in Indonesia; and the lesser-known fall of Srebrenica, which might not have had as a direct influence on the Netherlands as the other examples, but still remains a difficult topic in narratives of Dutch recent history. Each subject will be briefly introduced with some historical context which is limited to the provision of necessary factual details, after which I will analyse the texts. The chapter will take on a repeating structure: in each subsection I will first discuss the subject of the investigated texts to provide some context, after which I will do a close reading of what is written in the Dutch Canon, followed by a similar description of what is written in the chosen school curriculum. First, however, I will provide some information on the Dutch Canon, the school curriculum, and their places in society.

### On Dutch school textbooks and ‘de Canon van Nederland’

There are two principal state-controlled ways by which Dutch children come to learn Dutch history: school curricula, and the knowledge of the Canon of the Netherlands. History is a mandatory subject in Dutch primary schools (ages 4-12), as well as in the first half of a student’s time on Dutch high schools (ages 12-16, 17 or 18 depending on the chosen kind of education). These history lessons provide basic knowledge of relevant (Dutch) history from the prehistoric era until roughly the European migration crisis. Most school students do not have to pass any form of government-regulated history exam to end their high school, since choosing history as subject for the second half of high school is optional. This means that at an educational level, the Dutch ministry for education only dictates the historical knowledge for a select amount of students, about 40% on the *VWO*, through examinations.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it could be argued that even those students who do sit final examinations in history do not have to exhibit a breadth of historical knowledge, since the Dutch final exam criteria value depth and a knowledge of ‘historical methods’ over a broad base of knowledge. The historical knowledge that is required<sup>26</sup> consists of four specific periods in history: the Republic of Seven United Netherlands (or the Dutch Golden Century); Germany

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<sup>25</sup> The actual percentage will be a bit higher. Due to a lack of reliable data I had to base this percentage on the choice of high school profiles. For the source see: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap. “Profielen in het VO” Onderwijs in Cijfers. Accessed 28-06-2020. <https://www.onderwijsincijfers.nl/kengetallen/vo/leerlingen-vo/vakken--profielen-profielen-vo>

<sup>26</sup> Asked on the national exam in history for students who followed *VWO*, the most theoretical form of *middelbare school* education, which prepares students for university. About 18% of high school students attend the *VWO*.

from 1871-1945; the Cold War from 1945-1991; and the Enlightenment and Revolutions from 1650-1848.

In practice, this means that Dutch students in high school often focus on the specific points listed in the respective criteria set for their examination, often listed as a checklist.<sup>27</sup> All the other aspects of history can be considered optional by teachers and students alike, and it is often left up to the teachers to decide on what to focus. As a consequence, the focus differs from school to school. Christian schools often also discuss biblical history for example, whereas my teacher when I was 12 years old taught my class a very extensive history of Judaism with a syllabus that he had made himself, even though our school was not religious at all.

The same applies for the difficult subjects at the centre of this study. Subjects such as slavery,<sup>28</sup> Indonesia and Srebrenica are not mentioned at all in the official criteria for state examinations for the VWO, which leaves the task of explaining those difficult subjects up to the teacher and the chosen history book. There are three large and a handful of smaller publishers in the Netherlands who provide different curricula for use in the classroom, and a teacher can of course spend more attention on the subjects that he or she has more affinity with, and less time on subjects that he or she finds controversial or difficult. Schools themselves can choose which curricula they buy. This thesis discusses only one school curriculum, due to the scope of this research. So it must be noted that even though the data will provide a good general impression of a history curriculum in the Netherlands, it is not a representation of *all* history curricula and lessons.

In 2005, as the result of a report that fewer and fewer young people in the Netherlands had a good knowledge of Dutch ‘canonical’ history,<sup>29</sup> the then government decided to create an additional way of teaching history. This led to the creation of an official Canon containing the fifty most important parts of Dutch history.<sup>30</sup> The choice to create a Canon was a direct result of the advice given by the report from 2005.<sup>31</sup> The Canon was originally intended for children aged between eight and fourteen years old and was intended to assist teachers in teaching history.<sup>32</sup> When in 2019 one of the parties in government suggested that every Dutch child should receive a book containing the Canon on their eighteenth

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<sup>27</sup> College voor Toetsen en Examens, *Geschiedenis VWO Syllabus Centraal Examen 2020*. Second version. (Utrecht: College voor Toetsen en Examens, 2018)

<sup>28</sup> The rise of abolitionism *is* mentioned, but I would argue that mentioning the abolition of slavery is quite different from mentioning slavery.

<sup>29</sup> Onderwijsraad, *De stand van educatief Nederland*. (Den Haag: Onderwijsraad, 2005)

<sup>30</sup> Commissie Herijking Canon van Nederland (From now on ‘Commissie Herijking’), “Over de Nederlandse Canon” Canon van Nederland (From now on ‘CvNL’). Accessed 23-06-2020. <https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/over>

<sup>31</sup> Commissie Ontwikkeling Nederlandse Canon, *entoen.nu De Canon van Nederland*. (Den Haag: Ministerie van OCW, 2006) 14-21

<sup>32</sup> “Wat is de Canon van Nederland” Rijksoverheid. Accessed 30-06-2021.

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/voortgezet-onderwijs/vraag-en-antwoord/wat-is-de-canon-van-nederland>

birthday,<sup>33</sup> it became a point of national debate. First, the Canon had been intended for a younger audience than eighteen-year-olds, and secondly: the Canon did not pay enough attention to the dark pages of Dutch history. In the wake of this debate, the Canon was revised, adapted and given a new look, complete with a marketing campaign that was intended for an older audience.<sup>34</sup> It was also decided that books would not be effective in communicating the Canon. Young people would prefer a digital product like short clips on YouTube over a written product.<sup>35</sup> In sum, it was chosen by the government to double down on the Canon as an instrument for the teaching of Dutch history through gaining the interest of older students in addition to the already significant reach it had through the use of the Canon by around 60% of teachers in high school.<sup>36</sup>

What is clear, is that the Dutch Canon is in its core far more directly influenced by the Dutch government than the school curricula. Of course, the history curricula employed for school teaching still have to follow a checklist that is greater and more extensive than just the criteria for the exams, but it does remain a checklist without much nuance<sup>37</sup>. The nuance is primarily for the teachers and publishers to add. The Canon, in contrast, has tighter connections to the Dutch government, and as such also reflects a history that has governmental approval better; high school students who follow history have to learn more specific knowledge about the aforementioned points, but the Canon contains the fifty points that are considered to be the most important in Dutch history by the ‘experts’ who advised the government on the matter. Though these points were not hand-picked by the government but by a special committee, they were approved and discussed by government. The fifty points were chosen by importance for the contemporary Dutch situation, but also needed to show a chronological story, so they also include prehistoric aspects that help in the creation of a chronology, even though they might have less influence on the Netherlands as it is now than other ‘windows’. This means that the selected points should not be considered as ‘equals’: they are meant to tell a story, to create a national narrative, an ‘official’ history. The revised version of the Canon also supposedly is more nuanced with regard to the aforementioned ‘dark pages’ in Dutch history, even though the Canon does not provide an overview of how its

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<sup>33</sup> “Voor 18-jarigen geen gratis ‘Canon’-boekje, maar video over Nederlandse geschiedenis.” NOS Nieuws. Last modified 13-22-2019. <https://nos.nl/artikel/2310357-voor-18-jarigen-geen-gratis-canon-boekje-maar-video-over-nederlandse-geschiedenis#:~:text=Jongeren%20van%2018%20jaar%20krijgen,zij%20aan%20de%20Tweede%20Kamer>.

<sup>34</sup> This can for example be seen when looking at the YouTube-page of the Dutch Canon. For the first time in eight years it has uploaded new video’s, which are shorter clips that seem to be more about interesting a somewhat older audience, than explaining history to a younger audience. <https://www.youtube.com/c/CanonvanNederlandNL/videos> (accessed 23-6-2021)

<sup>35</sup> NOS Nieuws, “Voor 18-jarigen geen gratis ‘Canon’-boekje, maar video over Nederlandse geschiedenis.”

<sup>36</sup> Marleen Kieft et al, *De Canon van Nederland, Vervolgonderzoek 2018/19*. (Utrecht: Oberon, 2015.) 45-46

<sup>37</sup> “Leerlijn Geschiedenis Inhouden” Stichting Leerplanontwikkeling. Accessed 23-06-2021. [https://leerplaninbeeld.slo.nl/havo\\_vwo\\_bovenbouw/maatschappijvakken/geschiedenis/geschiedenis-inhouden-po-havo-vwo/](https://leerplaninbeeld.slo.nl/havo_vwo_bovenbouw/maatschappijvakken/geschiedenis/geschiedenis-inhouden-po-havo-vwo/)

texts have changed. It could be expected that, given that the Canon is targeted towards an older audience, and devotes more attention towards difficult subjects, the Canon shows some more self-criticism. I will turn to this question later in this chapter.

The Dutch Canon, as described in this study, is found on its official website.<sup>38</sup> The webpage displays a line with fifty *vensters* (windows), all describing one of the fifty parts of the Dutch canon. Clicking on one of these windows transports the visitor to a webpage that provides information on that subject, as well as images and video fragments, the latter of which did not seem to function when I wanted to investigate them. Each page has an extensive list of additional literature, a compressed chronological timeline, tips for excursions, links to additional webpages, and references to school curricula so teachers can identify the relevant chapters. The Canon in general is more specialized than the school curriculum. It is created as an addition to the curriculum and to assist teachers. As of such, the Canon has a higher word count per subject. The Canon is also available in a multitude of languages besides Dutch: Arabic, German, English, French, Indonesian, Polish, Serbian and Turkish. This study only uses the Dutch version of the website, as translation can cloud some of the nuances made by the Dutch language. As stated before, the Canon is used incidentally by 60% of high school history teachers. I have no data on the statistics of the selected school curriculum, but I estimate that around 30% of history classes on the VWO uses this particular curriculum. Additionally, it must be mentioned that the school curricula are updated about every five years. From my correspondence with a representative for the chosen publisher I concluded that this specific curriculum will soon be updated, following changes made in the Canon.

It is, before I will start with the analysis, worth noting that the publisher of the history curriculum used for this study was initially somewhat reluctant to help me in my research by providing the requested texts. This reluctance was attributable to the complexity of the subject noted in the introduction. The political ideas of whomever reads this thesis will strongly influence their interpretation of it. The subjects that I deal with can spark controversy, especially when taken out of the academic context. The fear of a risk that that a particular publisher might garner some negative attention as a result of this analysis is understandable. The publisher eventually kindly agreed to assist me in my research by giving me access to some material, but did so on the condition that they would remain anonymous. While this is understandable, these doubts show the relevance of what this study, and provide further insight into the complexity of the subject even more. To preserve the publisher's anonymity direct quotations are limited in frequency and length, and will only be quoted as a translation. I focus instead on conveying the important narratives of course.

## 2.1 The Dutch history on the transatlantic slave trade

History is, as I have already proven in the first chapter of this thesis, a difficult thing. To start this part of the chapter, as well as the following parts, I will present

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<sup>38</sup> Commissie Herijking, "Canon van Nederland" CvNL. Accessed 30-06-2020. <https://www.canonvannederland.nl/>



some historical contexts before I start to analyse the Dutch canon and the selected school curriculum. I have decided to mainly base myself on an article on a website written by emeritus Prof. Piet Emmer,<sup>39</sup> who has written multiple pieces on the history of slavery.<sup>40</sup>

For more than two hundred years the Dutch traded in African slaves, from the first half of the seventeenth century until 1863, even though there was a transitional period still after that. These slaves were bought and/or captured on the African west coast, where the Dutch had established multiple forts, and were shipped by Dutch ships to the Dutch colonies in the Americas: Surinam, the Dutch Antilles, and, until it was captured by the Portuguese, Dutch Brazil. The general term employed in Dutch for the Dutch colonies in the Americas was *de West*, as opposed to *de Oost* which was the term used for the colonies in Asia. The enslaved Africans were sold for a considerable profit in these colonies, and were forced to work in miserable circumstances. The Dutch have contributed in the trade of about 600 000 slaves. It is hard to describe exactly how the slaves were treated, but it is certainly the case that slaves were exposed to torture, mutilation, violence, degradation, dehumanization, and rape.<sup>41</sup> Another important factor in the transatlantic slave trade is the fact that West-Europeans, according to Prof. Emmer, had seemingly lost their tradition of slavery in the years prior to the transatlantic slave trade. Slavery has historically been sighted all around the world, but was apparently abolished in Western Europe from an ideal that their ‘own kind’ should not enslave each other.<sup>42</sup> The transatlantic slave trade then was one based upon an idea of racial superiority: Western-Europeans did not enslave each other, but this resulted in the enslavement of other peoples on a racial basis.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Piet Emmer, “Waar haalden de Nederlanders hun slaven vandaan?” *Historiek*. Last modified 14-12-2019. <https://historiek.net/waar-haalden-nederlanders-hun-slaven-vandaan/90007/>

<sup>40</sup> See for example: Piet Emmer, *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Slavenhandel*. (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam, 2019.); and Piet Emmer, *Het Zwart-Witdenken Voorbij. Een Bijdrage aan de Discussie over Kolonialisme, Slavernij en Migratie* (Amsterdam: Nieuw-Amsterdam, 2018). It must be noted that Emmer did receive criticism as well: some claim that he downplays slavery too much. Examples can be read on the following websites: Joris van Casteren, and Peter Vermaas, “De Zwarte Holocaust” *De Groene Amsterdammer*. 13-05-2000. <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/de-zwarte-holocaust>

and Karwan Fatah-Black, “Transatlantische slavernij was bepaald geen luilekkerland.” *Trouw*. 24-04-2021. <https://www.trouw.nl/opinie/transatlantische-slavernij-was-bepaald-geen-luilekkerland~b96e223b/>

<sup>41</sup> On the historiographical problems around slavery, see: Henk den Heijer, “Dutch Carribean” in *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas*, eds. Mark M. Smith and Robert L. Paquette. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Kathleen Hilliard, “Finding Slave Voices” in *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas*, eds. Mark M. Smith and Robert L. Paquette. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Emmer, ‘Waar haalden de Nederlanders hun slaven vandaan?’: “De West-Europese cultuur verbood nu eenmaal dat de ‘eigen soort’ tot slaaf werd gemaakt.”

<sup>43</sup> Emmer, ‘Waar haalden de Nederlanders hun slaven vandaan?’: “Van begin af aan heeft het Europese racisme de slavenhandel met Afrika mogelijk gemaakt en is het niet zo dat de slavenhandel op den duur dat racisme in Europa heeft doen ontstaan.”

## The Dutch Canon

The website of the Dutch Canon<sup>44</sup> has four ‘windows’ that deal with the transatlantic slave trade in some regard. These windows are entitled: ‘*VOC en WIC*’, ‘*Michiel de Ruyter*’, ‘*Slavernij*’ and ‘*Het Caribisch Gebied*’. Each of these windows tackle a specific aspect of Dutch history, a specific focus. The *VOC en WIC* window tackles the two large Dutch trading companies and how they operated; *Michiel de Ruyter* deals with the heroized admiral of that same name; *Slavernij* deals with slavery; and *Het Caribisch Gebied* deals with *de West*, and its decolonization after WWII.

Of these four windows, only the one dealing with slavery as its subject goes into more depth than merely mention it.<sup>45</sup> The window on the VOC and WIC — the latter being the Dutch organization that participated in the transatlantic slave trade — in fact barely mentions the WIC.<sup>46</sup> This is probably due to the fact that the WIC had a smaller economic role for the Dutch. The WIC never succeeded to create a strong trade monopoly like the VOC.<sup>47</sup> The case for the window on the Dutch Antilles and Surinam is different.<sup>48</sup> At first glance the window does indeed barely mention slavery, but when the visitor clicks on an interactive image, they can find more information on how these countries find their cultural roots in resistance to slavery. These texts are quite positive in a sense: they praise the courage of the marrons in Surinam and tell the story of how they gained freedom 100 years before slavery was abolished in *de West*.<sup>49</sup> The texts also praise Tula, a Curaçaoan slave who led a revolt inspired by the French Revolution, and the marron revolution of Haiti. Tula and his revolt were repressed by the French-Dutch colonial rule, but his myth clearly lives on, according to the text. The page also mentions the discussion concerning equality that many of the Dutch people with roots in *de West* face. The text points out that “Zij vragen begrip voor en erkenning van de pijn en het onrecht dat hun in koloniale tijd is aangedaan.”<sup>50</sup> Interesting in this statement is that it discusses pain that is done to a contemporary ‘them’ in the past colonial time, as if the atrocities of the past were conducted against people living now. There follows a statement that this discussion

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<sup>44</sup> Commissie Herijking, “Canon van Nederland”

<sup>45</sup> Commissie Herijking, “Slavernij” CvNL. Accessed 30-06-2020.

<https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/slavernij> From now on referred to as ‘*Slavernij*’ in the footnotes.

<sup>46</sup> Commissie Herijking, “VOC en WIC” CvNL. Accessed 30-06-2020.

<https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/vocwic>

From now on referred to as ‘*VOCWIC*’ in the footnotes.

<sup>47</sup> *VOCWIC*: “Het lukt de WIC niet om net als de VOC een vergelijkbaar imperium op te bouwen. Omdat de afstanden over de Atlantische oceaan relatief klein zijn, lukt het concurrenten om de monopoliepositie van de WIC te doorbreken.”

<sup>48</sup> Commissie Herijking, “Het Caribisch Gebied” CvNL. Accessed 30-06-2020.

<https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/caribischgebied>

From now on referred to as ‘*Cariben*’ in the footnotes.

<sup>49</sup> *Cariben*, on the interactive *Vensterplaat*, part 3: “In 1760 – meer dan 100 jaar vóór de afschaffing van de slavernij in 1863 – sluit de eerste marrongroep vrede met de Nederlandse machthebbers. Vanaf dat moment zijn ze vrij en onafhankelijk.”

<sup>50</sup> *Cariben* on the *Vensterplaat*, part 9: translated as “They ask for understanding for and recognition of the pain and injustice that was done to them during the colonial era.”

regarding equality has sparked resistance to *Zwarte Piet*, a traditional Dutch blackface character.<sup>51</sup> The section ends on a positive note, noting that since 2009, the holiday of 'Keti Koti' is celebrated in Amsterdam, commemorating the end of slavery in *de West*. The fact that that even though Keti Koti is celebrated, it is not a recognized holiday in the Netherlands, is omitted.<sup>52</sup>

It is clear that the window on the Antilles and Surinam tries to focus more on the process of decolonization than any of the other windows. The resistance to slavery and colonial rule is framed as a strong myth of national origin, very much in lines with the Assmanns' definition of cultural memory.<sup>53</sup> This is done through a strong emphasis on the struggle for freedom. It is discussed how abolition is celebrated, and how the culture of Surinam developed from the abolition and the following streams of migration far more than the actual origins of the country as a slave colony for example.<sup>54</sup> The page 'celebrates' the gained instead of commemorating the lost. It is worth noting, that the slave trade is mainly framed as a part in the mythical struggle for freedom. The actual description of how slavery looked around the Atlantic, as well as who benefitted from it and who caused it, are not really discussed. Additionally, in some ways the Dutch descendants of the slaves of *de West* are framed as a cultural 'Other'.<sup>55</sup> I will return to this problem later in this thesis. Before continuing with the window on slavery, let us briefly consider the window on Michiel de Ruyter.<sup>56</sup>

Michiel de Ruyter has long been seen as one of the most important national heroes of the Netherlands,<sup>57</sup> making him a part of the Assmanns' concept of cultural memory, due to his role in the 'myth' of the Netherlands.<sup>58</sup> He is associated with many naval victories over England and France, with freeing European slaves from Arabic countries, and defending the Dutch mercantile interests on the Atlantic. This additionally means that he defended Dutch slavers and their human cargo. Two things stand out in the Canon's presentation of this figure: firstly, while De Ruyter's status as a naval hero and his most important achievements are very well described, the concluding paragraph does also state

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<sup>51</sup> *Cariben*, on the *Vensterplaat*, part 9: "Vooral de discussie over Zwarte Piet roept veel emoties op. De stereotype Zwarte Piet wordt steeds meer vervangen door rode, gele en blauwe Pieten."

<sup>52</sup> *Cariben*, on the *Vensterplaat*, part 9: "Sinds 2009 wordt ieder jaar in het Oosterpark in Amsterdam op 1 juli Keti Koti gevierd: De afschaffing van de slavernij in 1863"

<sup>53</sup> Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 28-33

<sup>54</sup> *Cariben*, on the *Vensterplaat*, part 9: "Na de afschaffing van de slavernij in 1863 zijn er nieuwe arbeidskrachten nodig. De Nederlandse regering werft daarom met mooie beloften contractarbeiders uit China, India (Hindoestanen), en Java. Na een paar jaar geld verdienen op een plantage zouden ze terug kunnen naar hun familie. Maar de contractarbeiders, in die tijd 'koelies' genoemd, worden slecht betaald en verdienen niet genoeg om hun familie te helpen. De meesten keren nooit terug naar hun moederland."

<sup>55</sup> I point back to a quote made earlier: "Zij vragen begrip voor en erkenning van de pijn en het onrecht dat hun in koloniale tijd is aangedaan" (found on the *vensterplaat* on *Cariben*, part 9). The use of 'zij' (they) implies cultural a distance and difference; as if *they* aim to change *our* culture.

<sup>56</sup> Commissie Herijking, "Michiel de Ruyter" CvNL. Accessed 30-06-2020.

<https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/michielderuyter> From now on referred to as *Ruyter* in the footnotes.

<sup>57</sup> For more on Michiel de Ruyter see: Ronald rud'homme van Reine, *Rechterhand Van Nederland : Biografie Van Michiel Adriaenszoon De Ruyter* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1996).

<sup>58</sup> Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 28-33.

that his status as a hero is under discussion at the moment, due to his part in defending slavers,<sup>59</sup> and secondly, the concluding paragraph opens with a defence of De Ruyter, stating that “Hoewel hij Europese christenen bevrijdde die tot slaaf waren gemaakt [...]”<sup>60</sup> (Although he freed enslaved European Christians). The fact that the discussion around de Ruyter’s defence of Dutch slavers is opened with a qualification that stresses a virtue says a lot. In particular, the mention of the fact that he also freed (European, Christian) slaves, immediately before the note that he protected (Dutch) slavers, can be read as a sort of self-neutralizing argument, all and all making the issue around his part in the transatlantic slave trade seem less problematic, since, after all, he also did the opposite. Framed in this way, the Canon’s entry could be written to ‘defend’ the mythical status of Michiel de Ruyter, whilst also admitting his flaws, and even admitting these flaws into his strong account of heroism. This does not only defend de Ruyter’s position however, but also that of slavery itself in some way: if *even* a national hero such as de Ruyter defended slaves, the people of the United Netherlands *must* not have seen the problematic and unethical nature of slavery as we see it today.

Finally, let us turn to the digital ‘window’ of slavery itself.<sup>61</sup> As already noted, it is quite clear that most of the discussion of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade was left for this window. Leaving the discussion for a certain window might imply something strong however. It could send the message to the reader that slavery should not have to be discussed in relation to everything, but only when it actually is the ‘right time’ to do so. Just as the window on Surinam and the Antilles, more information and context can be found through clicking on an image on the webpage, resulting in a substantial amount of text. The main page of the window, after a summary, opens with the statement that it was the Portuguese who first created slave-based colonies, and that other Europeans followed.<sup>62</sup> The text then proceeds to argue that the Dutch gained their slaves from trading with African kingdoms, who captured them. Next, information regarding how the WIC operated and profited from slavery is provided: where the slaves were brought, who bought them, etc. The peak of the transatlantic slave trade is placed around 1750 according to the text,<sup>63</sup> when about twenty percent of Dutch imports were products produced by slave labour.<sup>64</sup> The total number of slaves traded by the Dutch is also mentioned: 600 000 of the twelve million slaves that were traded in

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<sup>59</sup> *Ruyter*, under the paragraph ‘Beeldvorming’: “voer hij ook naar de kust van West-Afrika om Nederlandse handelsbelangen, inclusief de handel in Afrikanen, te beschermen.”

<sup>60</sup> *Ruyter*, under the paragraph ‘Beeldvorming’

<sup>61</sup> *Slavernij*.

<sup>62</sup> *Slavernij*, under the paragraph ‘Fort Elmina’: “Portugezen stichten in de vijftiende eeuw de eerste Europese kolonies gebaseerd op slavernij: in suikerplantages langs de Afrikaanse kust en later ook op grote schaal in Brazilië. Andere Europese landen nemen dit voorbeeld over.”

<sup>63</sup> *Slavernij*, under the paragraph ‘West-Indische Compagnie’: “Na 1750 is de trans-Atlantische slavenhandel het omvangrijst.”

<sup>64</sup> *Slavernij*, under the paragraph ‘West-Indische Compagnie’: “Rond 1770 wordt maar liefst 19 procent van de importgoederen door tot slaaf gemaakte mensen geproduceerd en bestaat ruim 5 procent van de Nederlandse economie uit slavernijgerelateerde activiteiten.”

total.<sup>65</sup> The story is continued by the mention of the resistance to slavery, a section which opens with the sentence “Op slavernij gebaseerde samenlevingen zijn extreme ongelijk en gewelddadig”,<sup>66</sup> (Societies based on slavery are extremely unequal and violent). An explanation why this is the case is not yet given, but the text makes it clear that many slaves protested and that marron groups were founded. The text concludes by mentioning the abolition of slavery, with which the Dutch were relatively late according to the text: the abolition in *de West* also took place three years later than the abolition in *de Oost*, in 1863.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly enough, the transitional period after the abolition is not mentioned.

More context can be found through the interactive image, the *vensterplaat*. When reading these texts though, it soon becomes clear that the level of language that is used differs quite a bit from the rest of the website. The website of the Dutch Canon can be adjusted to the level of proficiency that the reader has in reading the Dutch language. For the purposes of this study, I consistently refer to the ‘standard’ version, which uses the most nuanced and complex words and sentences. The level of language selected for this particular interactive image, however, is only provided in the variety intended for *groep 5-8*, which consists of children aged 9-12. This choice leaves less room for discussing more complex (or violent) matters. It could be argued that this in turn makes analysis of the text somewhat more difficult, since it can be argued that the lack of nuance is determined by the age-level of the intended audience. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that this is the *only* language and text which is selected to be officially employed in the Canon, which is also explicitly intended for young adults. Therefore the analysis is still beneficial.

The text opens with general information on the transatlantic slave trade: “Er is een tijd geweest dat mensenhandel heel gewoon gevonden werd. Ook Nederlandse kooplieden hebben meegedaan aan die handel.”<sup>68</sup> (There was a time that trading people was seen as very normal. Dutch merchants also participated in this). The page explains how the transatlantic slave trade worked, also stating how the slave traders bought enslaved Africans from other African tribes in exchange for weapons, which were used to wage more war.<sup>69</sup> Immediately after providing information on the logistics of the transatlantic slave trade, there follows another small paragraph that explains that the Dutch traded about 500 000 slaves from

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<sup>65</sup> *Slavernij*, under the paragraph ‘West-Indische Compagnie’: “Tussen de vijftiende en negentiende eeuw vervoeren Europese slavenhandelaren in totaal zo’n twaalf miljoen slaven over de Atlantische Oceaan, van wie 600.000 op Nederlandse schepen.”

<sup>66</sup> *Slavernij*, under the paragraph ‘Opstand’.

<sup>67</sup> *Slavernij*, under the paragraph ‘Afschaffing’: “Afschaffing van de slavernij volgt pas in 1860 voor Nederlands-Indië en op 1 juli 1863 in de Atlantische Kolonies”

<sup>68</sup> *Slavernij*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘1. De WIC en de handel in slaven’.

<sup>69</sup> *Slavernij*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘1. De WIC en de handel in slaven’: “In Afrika kochten Nederlandse kooplieden slaven van Afrikaanse stamhoofden. Er werd in die tijd veel oorlog gevoerd tussen verschillende stammen in Afrika. Een stamhoofd nam zijn vijanden gevangen en voerde ze naar de kust. Daar verkocht hij ze als slaven aan een koopman. In ruil voor de slaven kreeg het stamhoofd onder andere geld en wapens. Met die wapens kon hij weer een nieuwe oorlog voeren.”

Africa<sup>70</sup> (note the significant difference from the aforementioned number of 600 000), and that it was considered normal to trade in slaves; other countries also participated in this trade. Some information is given about a Dutch fort along the Ghanaian coast, and it is noted that the slaves were packed in the European ships very little room. A schematic drawing of how such a vessel looked accompanies the description.<sup>71</sup>

The text continues by describing slave markets, and how the slaves eventually ended up in Curaçao and Surinam, together with a brief mention of how the slaves needed to work hard with few breaks in warm weather.<sup>72</sup> The accompanying image<sup>73</sup> which can be seen here shows two black slaves; one carrying a bundle of sugar canes, and another sitting under a tree with a basket of fruit. Why this picture was chosen is not clear, but it must be mentioned that the image

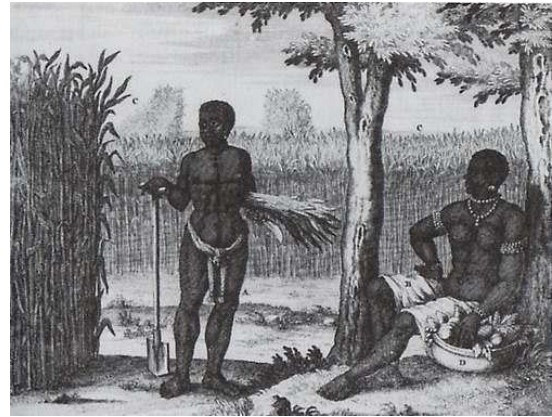


Image taken from:  
<https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/slavernij>

comes across as more idyllic than the text. The branding of slaves is also mentioned, and how branding symbolized the fact that people owned the slaves as if they were goods. It is described how “Een gloeiendheet ijzeren stempel werd twee tellen tegen de huid van de slaaf gehouden.”<sup>74</sup> (A glowing hot stamp was held against the skin of the slave for two seconds.) This mention of branding is paired with an image of a branding stamp on a white background. This same composition is used in the photograph of featured pictures of a chain and a slave collar. Once again this page ends with a mention of the abolition of slavery in the Dutch territories. After a lengthy mention of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its impact on the European view on slavery,<sup>75</sup> attention is given to the abolition of slavery in *de West*, and the commemoration of abolition. *Keti Koti* is framed as something that ‘people in Surinam’ celebrate by dancing, singing and eating in the streets.<sup>76</sup> The text concludes noting that “*Keti Koti* wordt ook op sommige plekken van ons land gevierd.”<sup>77</sup> (*Keti Koti* is also celebrated in some places of our country.) The

<sup>70</sup> *Slavernij*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘1. De WIC en de handel in slaven’: “In totaal zijn er zo’n 500.000 slaven door Nederlandse kooplieden verkocht. Dat is ongeveer 5% van de totale slavenhandel in die tijd.”

<sup>71</sup> *Slavernij*, on the *Vensterplaat*, parts 3, 4 & 5.

<sup>72</sup> *Slavernij*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘7. Op de plantage’: “Tijdens het werk op het veld was het vaak erg warm. Ook kregen de slaven maar weinig pauze. Als ze niet had genoeg werkten kregen ze bovendien zware straffen. Hoe harder er werd gewerkt, hoe meer er was om te verkopen en hoe meer geld de plantagehouder kon verdienen.”

<sup>73</sup> *Slavernij*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘7. Op de plantage’

<sup>74</sup> *Slavernij*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘8. Gebrandmerkt’.

<sup>75</sup> *Slavernij*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘10. ‘De Negerhut van Oom Tom’’: “Door boeken als ‘De Negerhut van Oom Tom’ gingen in die tijd steeds meer mensen anders over slavernij denken.”

<sup>76</sup> *Slavernij*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘11. Slavernij afgeschaft’: “Nu wordt er in Suriname op 1 juli feest gevierd. Dit feest heet *Keti Koti*. *Keti Koti* betekent ‘gebroken ketens’. De mensen in Suriname dansen, zingen en eten die dag met z’n allen op straat.”

<sup>77</sup> *Slavernij*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘11. Slavernij afgeschaft’

phrase “our country” is noteworthy. In most instances, the authors of the Dutch Canon have not written these kinds of stories from a perspective that differentiates between an ‘us’ and a ‘them’. This last sentence shows that that is not always the case however.

The general tone throughout these webpages, is clear, and can be roughly divided into two categories: The page that has slavery as its subject, and the other pages, in which slavery was not the primary concern. In this latter category, the Dutch contribution to the transatlantic slave trade is presented as a part of a myth, a part of the larger (and positive) cultural memory and history: Michiel de Ruyter is presented as a national hero, and although he did defend slavers sometimes, he also freed enslaved Europeans. The VOC and WIC are displayed as primarily being amongst the largest trade organizations in the world and explored all the corners of the globe for Dutch interests. While they did happen to trade in and use enslaved people, they mainly contributed to the rich nation of traders that was the Dutch Republic. And the marrons and Tula gain a mythical status through their resistance to slavery: it was their struggle against Dutch rule (In which the Dutch slavers are framed as a cultural ‘other’) that created the very foundations of their respective nations (even though Curaçao only chose a form of independence in 2010). Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade are framed as either something that had to ‘be overcome’, or something that ‘also happened’.

The page that focusses on slavery alone is different. First, the language employed to describe slavery is different. Where the other windows talk about ‘enslaved people’, this window talks directly of ‘slaves’. Secondly, the repeated mention of the fact that slavery was considered normal in that period of time, that the Dutch were not the first to do it, and that African tribes helped in the conquering of slaves, is noteworthy. While these details are factually true, it is worth considering why this has to be reiterated multiple times in a limited space. This shift in language level and the fact that two significantly different figures are given for the numbers of slaves that were traded also work against a coherent present of slavery in the Canon, as though the authors are avoiding something.

It should also be noted that the decontextualization of the images make the discussion less confrontational. Showing images of a branding iron, chains, and a slave collar as objects on bland, white background, instead of showing how they were actually used influences the association that people have with these objects: they become neutralized, artifacts with an historic value, and not objects used to torture. Coming up with an alternative is difficult of course. The website is still intended for children, so an actual display of (a re-enactment of) torture is not at its place here. The display of historical objects from wartimes has always been problematic.<sup>78</sup> This does not mean that such a decontextualization has no effect however. A solution might be integrated into the website itself already: A tool is present that can be used to change the level of complexity in the text. More (but

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<sup>78</sup> See for example: Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining: ‘Military Museums and Social History’ in *Does War Belong in Museums? : The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions*. Ed. Wolfgang Muchitsch. (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013.); and Per B. Rekdal. “About the Beauty of War and the Attractivity of Violence” in *Does War Belong in Museums?: The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions*. ed Wolfgang Muchitsch. (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013.)

not too) explicit imagery could through that be shown to older audiences, maybe accompanied with a warning.

The fact that there is only a mention of that the brand was held against the skin for two seconds, and that the accompanying drawings mainly show slaves who are together with their family, resting under a tree, and not chained in any way also contribute to how this narrative is shifted. In sum, while it is acknowledged that terrible things happened, the Canon's communication of history through this webpage frames the transatlantic slave trade as something that '*just* happened', but was normal for the time. There are only downplayed descriptions of the circumstances in which slaves had to live, resulting in is little attention given to the suffering of the slaves overall.

### The School Curriculum

The amount of attention given to slavery and the transatlantic slave trade in the history curriculum is even less than that given in the Dutch Canon. In the history textbook used for this study,<sup>79</sup> it is mentioned outside of the subchapter dedicated to slavery, with references to that chapter, but these references are notably fewer than appear in the Dutch Canon. Especially noteworthy is the lack of reference to the related 'myths' we found in the Dutch Canon. There is no mention of how Michiel de Ruyter has become a somewhat controversial figure due to his contribution to the defence of slavers, nor is it noted how the struggle against colonialism and slavery lie at the foundations of the ex-colonies in the Americas. Some links to slavery are made through exercises, such as, for example, an exercise through in which the student has to link the mercantilism in the Dutch Republic to the resources gained through slavery.

The subchapter on slavery itself has a broader focus than the Netherlands alone and its role in the transatlantic slave trade. The historical account gives more attention to the context of slavery, discussing why Africans were used as slaves, and not the natives in the West Indies for example.<sup>80</sup> It is also noted that the Portuguese and the British traded the most slaves across the Atlantic.<sup>81</sup> But the text always mentions 'Europeans' in general when giving the 'basic' information, and in the opening sections does not yet explicitly mention the Dutch contribution. While the text does observe that slavery already existed in Africa before the Europeans colonization, it also stresses that the European trade increased the number of slaves in Africa. Little attention is paid to the transportation of slaves from Africa to the Americas, but the life on the plantation is mentioned. Torture is not explicitly mentioned, but extreme intimidation and

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<sup>79</sup> For this and following subsections titled 'the school curriculum', any given quotation that *is not* accompanied by a source will be taken from the selected curriculum. Due to the requested anonymity I will only provide English translations, and not the direct Dutch text.

<sup>80</sup> The text mentions how the Spanish King Charles the 5<sup>th</sup> prohibited the enslavement of American Indians. "That had an unforeseen consequence. The prohibition contributed to colonists bringing slaves from Africa to work on the plantations and mines in America"

<sup>81</sup> "The Portuguese traded the most slaves, followed by the British"



rape are, as is the powerlessness experienced by the slaves against superior European weapons.<sup>82</sup>

The Dutch contribution to the transatlantic slave trade is discussed halfway through the chapter. This paragraph opens with a statement that the Dutch initially condemned slavery because Holland's government described in 1623 that "Christians did not trade in humans." Eventually the Dutch changed position because the WIC needed slaves for the plantations to be profitable. It is briefly mentioned that the slaves were shipped to New Amsterdam, and later primarily Surinam.<sup>83</sup> According to the text the Dutch slave trade in the Americas was only about 5 percent of the total transatlantic trade. The text continues with a long mention that the Dutch also kept many slaves in the Dutch Indies: More information is given on slavery in *de Oost* than slavery in *de West*. The chapter concludes with a paragraph on abolitionism, but also places that in a broader European context. The text underlines that the movement's origins lie outside the Netherlands and notes that the Dutch were relatively late in adopting abolitionist ideas, and that even after 1863 many slaves still had to work for their previous owners in a transitional period.<sup>84</sup>

### Conclusion

The school curriculum gives far less lengthy description of the Dutch contribution to the transatlantic slave trade than that found in the Canon. The language that is used situates slavery as something that 'stays in the past'; no attempt is made to link it to the present. Unlike the Canon, the textbook makes no explicit relativizing qualification that that slavery 'was very normal' at that time. While no graphic language is used to describe the violence to which slaves were subjected, there is mention of brutalities like rape, which were very much a part of life on a plantation.

The comparison of the textbook with the Dutch Canon is informative. The Canon can devote far more space to provide details about history, due to the fact that it does not have to take printing costs into account, as well as readability for students in terms of amount of words. History books have to cover a lot more subjects. Still, reading both side by side does confront the reader with certain selections, prioritizations and framing of the displayed history. The Canon presents mythical stories of resistance, and also discusses topics that today are seen as controversial, like the heroic status of Michiel de Ruyter. But it also shows a tendency to sugar-coat the past, repeatedly underlining that it was 'very normal' to have slaves, and that it was already an African practice to keep slaves. The impression given is that the Canon is very much aware of the discussion and controversy around the subject of slavery today. It attempts to avoid being part of the controversy, but it cannot quite shake off the fact that the discussion around slavery still plays a significant role in the public debate. The history curriculum,

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<sup>82</sup> "Intimidation and cruelties often happened; the slavers could do with the slaves whatever they wanted. Female slaves were often raped."

<sup>83</sup> "In total the Dutch shipped around 550 000 slaves to America, of whom half to the plantations in Surinam"

<sup>84</sup> "The plantation owners received financial compensation and the freed slaves had to continue to work for them for a while"

in contrast, uses far more 'bland' language, avoiding the heroic and mythical tone of the Canon. It describes what happened, how it happened, succinctly and efficiently. There is little attempt to sugar-coat or relativize, nor is there really a mention or nod towards the contemporary discussion. In this way the history curriculum limits itself to 'describing' the past in a way that shows how slavery started and ended, that locates it securely in the past. The history curriculum does not link the past to the present, by for example describing Ketj Koti, or how marron culture and resistance to slavery plays a large part in the culture of Surinam and the former Dutch Antilles. These historical events have a significant cultural impact on the Dutch society, especially since the migration that happened after the de-colonization. Not linking these phenomena might have an impact on the created collective memories of the students. The textbook gives the impression that slavery and resulting cultures are something of the past, and not still relevant today, even though for many Dutch citizens its relevancy is still very much present.

## 2.2 The Dutch Indies and its Decolonization.

In the history of the Dutch Indies, there are many dark pages that could be discussed. A few years before the WIC started the transatlantic slave trade, the VOC, its eastern counterpart, had already established a monopoly on trade with the Indies and for a long time the VOC was the dominant naval force east of Africa.<sup>85</sup> The VOC started as a trading company, but additionally gained the right to use force, found cities, and wage war in the name of the Dutch Republic. Though public debate often focusses attention on the transatlantic slave trade, slavery was also an important part of the Dutch history of *de Oost*. The different ethnic groups, special ways of governance, and the overall complexity of the situation in the Dutch Indies is not the focus of this section however. Instead, I will focus on the last moments of the Dutch Indies, and the first of the Republic of Indonesia.<sup>86</sup>

It is important to state at the outset that the Dutch use of exploitative systems of government for the Dutch Indies is well documented. The system, called the *cultuursysteem*, dictated that anybody in the Dutch Indies had to hand over 1/5<sup>th</sup> of their cultivated crops to the Dutch. This policy came into place around 1830, when the Dutch truly established their colonial rule. Gradually, resistance to the colonial exploitation of the Indies grew among the policy makers in the Netherlands, and more and more rules were established that gave more room for, for example, schooling. A small elite started to study at Universities in the Netherlands and came into contact with concepts such as nationalism, eventually resulting in an uprising against the Dutch in 1927. This uprising was put down by the Dutch rulers, but soon WWII would bring the Japanese to the Indies, who

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<sup>85</sup> Jan J.B. Kuipers, "Het 'grote verhaal' van de VOC." Historiek. Last modified 25-03-2021. <https://historiek.net/het-grote-verhaal-van-de-voc/44345/>

<sup>86</sup> For sources on the Dutch colonial rule in the Dutch Indies and the Indonesian war for independence, see: Frances Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995); and Pierre Heijboer, *De Politonele Acties* (Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1979).

defeated the Dutch rulers and its allies in February 1942 at the Battle of the Java Sea, sparking nationalist joy among many of Indonesia's citizens, initially seeing Japan as a liberator and not a new occupant. At the end of WWII, Japan was defeated after the atomic strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Japanese left Indonesia. Two days after the Japanese surrendered, Sukarno, who also led the resistance against the Dutch before the war, proclaimed the independent Republic of Indonesia.

As soon as the Dutch recovered from the German occupation, they sent a large military force towards the Indies. The Dutch wanted to retain their colony, especially because they could use the raw materials produced in Indonesia to rebuild after WWII, but also because the general consensus among the Dutch was that they should *help* the native Indonesians, a result of the so-called *ethische politiek*. What is often failed to be mentioned in addition to this is the so called *Bersiap* period. *Bersiap* (which is a Malaysian battle cry) followed the proclamation of independence, in which many Dutch and Indo-European people were attacked by radical nationalists using extremely violent tactics. The Dutch soldiers sent to the Indies were themselves motivated to combat these radical Indonesians, and did thus not see themselves as an occupying force, but as saving civilians from these violent attacks.<sup>87</sup>

The Indonesian nationalists fighting the Dutch were seen as remnants of Japanese rule and thus there was need for *politieele acties*, or 'policing actions', to be conducted by the Dutch army together with the local force loyal to the Netherlands, the *Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger* (Royal Dutch-Indie Army) or KNIL, mainly comprised of men from the Moluccas. The Dutch army and the KNIL conducted two large military operations, which were both halted due to international pressure. The second action, *Operatie Kraai* almost saw the colonial rule re-established, but the UN, and especially the US, heavily criticized the Dutch and demanded a Dutch retreat.

There still is a lot of controversy around the *politieele acties*, for multiple reasons. Firstly, the international opinion on colonialism has shifted heavily in the past hundred years, changing the perspective on colonial wars in general. Secondly, the KNIL were promised an autonomous Moluccan state after the *politieele acties*, a promise that was never fulfilled. But the most controversial topic is probably the perceived covering-up of the intentions of the Dutch rulers, and the motivation given to the Dutch soldiers. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea that the Dutch were *helping* the Dutch Indies through their colonial rule became stronger. People thought that their rule was a good thing: they brought civilization and Christianity to people who needed it. This, together with the idea that they were fighting 'evil' Japanese-influenced nationalists, and the use of the word 'policing action' gave the Dutch soldiers the idea that they went there to liberate the Indies. However, the Dutch military actions were in some occasions so violent that soon, many soldiers questioned methods used by the Dutch. In the years after, a substantial amount soldiers realized that they were not the liberators, but the occupying force. That is not to say that the violence was one-sided; war is

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<sup>87</sup>Gert Oostindie, *Postcolonial Netherlands : Sixty-Five Years of Forgetting, Commemorating, Silencing* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010),76-85.

always brutal on two sides. The war in *de Oost* quickly became something the Dutch did not talk about. Additionally, the decolonization resulted in massive stream of immigrants from Indonesia and the Moluccas that came after Indonesian independence as well, since their home-state was not safe for them anymore due to their having backed colonial rule.

### The Dutch Canon

There are many ‘windows’ in the Dutch Canon that deal with the Dutch Indies. That is of course no surprise, the Dutch have had a presence in what is now Indonesia for over 300 years in total, and the eventual colony has had a substantial economic and cultural impact on the Netherlands. On Indonesia however, together with the *politieele acties*, there is only one window: the aptly named window *Indonesië*.<sup>88</sup> Context seems to be discussed quite extensively, with the text starting with introducing the political situation: activism against colonial rule was already growing before WWII, but the Dutch did not allow it.<sup>89</sup> But when the Japanese invade and beat the Dutch, putting them in camps and forcing them to work, the colonial rule ends. A small amount of text focusses on the *politieele acties*. The text does imply negativity though, stating that the Dutch want to restore their authority, or at least have control over the process of decolonization, with “ononderhandelingen, oorlogsvoering en geweld”<sup>90</sup> (Negotiations, war and violence). The two military actions are mentioned by name, after which it is said that “Beide operaties worden aangeduid met de term ‘politieele acties’”<sup>91</sup> (Both operations were described with the term ‘policing actions’). Note how the source text already uses quotation marks around ‘policing actions’, already implying controversy. It is mentioned that the *politieele acties* were put to a halt through pressure from the UN, and that a total of 100 000 Indonesians fell during their war for independence, against five thousand Dutch and KNIL soldiers along with thousands of civilians.<sup>92</sup>

The following paragraph discusses the influx of migration that followed the war, which has had a heavy impact on Dutch society and culture. It is mentioned that about 300 000 Indonesian ethnical minorities moved to the Netherlands in the years following the proclamation of independence, “Vanwege de nieuwe machtsverhoudingen”<sup>93</sup> (due to a shift in power relations). It is also explicitly

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<sup>88</sup> Commissie Herijking, “Indonesië” CvNL. Accessed 30-06-2020.

<https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/indonesie> From now on referred to as *Indonesië* in the footnotes

<sup>89</sup> *Indonesië*, under the paragraph ‘Onafhankelijkheid’: “Al voor de oorlog bestaat in Nederlands-Indië een brede activistische beweging die zich inzet voor zelfbeschikkingsrecht. (...) Maar het Nederlandse gezag houdt de touwtjes strak in handen.”

<sup>90</sup> *Indonesië*, under the paragraph ‘Onafhankelijkheidsoorlog’

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> *Indonesië*, under the paragraph ‘Onafhankelijkheidsoorlog’: “De Verenigde Naties geven het bevel de militaire acties te stoppen en de gevangene vrij te laten. Pas in mei 1949 geeft Nederland toe aan de internationale druk. Gedurende de periode 1945-1949 vallen aan Indonesische zijde ruim honderdduizend doden, aan de Nederlandse zijde zo’n vijfduizend militairen en duizenden burgerdoden.”

<sup>93</sup> *Indonesië*, under the paragraph ‘Migratie’

mentioned that the KNIL soldiers and their families were promised an independent state in the Southern Moluccas, and that that never came to be, resulting in some extreme hostage-takings in the seventies.<sup>94</sup> I would like to point out that it is not told exactly *why* these people had to leave Indonesia.

The last paragraph starts by stating that “Lange tijd wordt er over de verloren koloniale oorlog gezwegen.”<sup>95</sup> (For a long time, there was not spoken about the colonial war). It is discussed that the different standpoints and interpretations about the war among both veterans and migrants are quite diverse. However, more ‘implicit’ negativity can be found when the text discusses how since 2008 there have been some court cases on war crimes conducted by Dutch soldiers,<sup>96</sup> resulting in payment from the Dutch state to the survivors of the massacre of Rawagede. It is also recognized that the Netherlands still struggle with this past, and that in 2020 the Dutch king has made a formal apology for how the violence went out of control.<sup>97</sup> The king additionally congratulated Indonesia on 75 years of independence.

The more detailed text found through the interactive *vensterplaat* is also present on this webpage. The used language is, much like the *vensterplaat* on slavery meant for younger children. Despite that, this additional text does give some more nuance to the political situation, especially around the Japanese occupation. The work camps, or *Jappenkampen* where the Dutch prisoners had to work in are mentioned, for example.<sup>98</sup> All and all this part of the text seems to have a bit more focus on the suffering of the Dutch and the *Indiërs*<sup>99</sup> (Dutch-Indo people, or people with a mixed Dutch-Indonesian heritage) in these camps, and while building the Burmese railroad.<sup>100</sup> Less nuance is given to the reasons why the Dutch resisted the first calls for independence by the Indonesians before WWII. The text states that “Er wonen veel Nederlanders. En de Nederlanders verdienen veel geld aan de producten die uit Nederlands-Indië komen”<sup>101</sup> (A lot of Dutch people lived there [in Indonesia]. And the Dutch people earned a lot of

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid: “In totaal komen er 12 500 Molukkers naar Nederland. Zij verwachten op korte termijn terug te kunnen keren naar hun eigen Molukse staat. Maar deze verwachting wordt nooit waargemaakt. Dat leidt in de jaren zeventig tot schokkende gijzelingsacties door jonge Molukse activisten”

<sup>95</sup> *Indonesië*, under the paragraph ‘Geen Verleden Tijd’

<sup>96</sup> Ibid: “Vanaf 2008 wordt de erkenning van de oorlogsmisdaden in de rechtszaal uitgevochten. Het bekendst is de Rawagede-zaak. (...) In 2011 oordeelt de rechtbank dat de weduwen hier (compensatie) recht op hebben”

<sup>97</sup> *Indonesië*, ‘Geen Verleden Tijd’: “In 2020, 75 jaar na de Proklamasi, maakt koning Willem-Alexander excuses voor ‘ontsporingen van geweld’ in de oorlog en feliciteert hij Indonesië met 75 jaar onafhankelijkheid”

<sup>98</sup> *Indonesië*, on the *Vensterplaat*: ‘2. Alles verandert!’: “De Japanners stoppen Nederlandse mannen, vrouwen en kinderen in wekkampen. Die worden al snel ‘Jappenkampen’ genoemd. Daar krijgen ze weinig te eten en moeten ze heel hard werken. Als ze niet luisteren naar wat de Japanners zeggen, worden ze zwaar gestraft.”

<sup>99</sup> *Indonesië*, on the *Vensterplaat*: ‘3. Jappenkampen’: “Mannen zitten in mannenkampen, en de vrouwen en kinderen in vrouwenkampen. Het leven is daar heel zwaar. Veel mensen gaan dood in het kamp.”

<sup>100</sup> *Indonesië*, on the *Vensterplaat*: ‘3. Jappenkampen’: “De Japanners dwingen gevangen ook een spoorlijn aan te leggen in Birma (Birma heet nu Myanmar. Het ligt vlak bij Indonesië.) Het werk is heel zwaar en de Japanners mishandelen de gevangenen.”

<sup>101</sup> *Indonesië*, on the *Vensterplaat*: ‘4. Indonesië roept onafhankelijkheid uit’.

money with the products coming from the Dutch Indies). The war itself is hardly discussed, only stating that “er wordt hard gevochten”<sup>102</sup> (there is heavy violence). More attention is given to the repercussions of the stream of migration following independence,<sup>103</sup> that the Dutch minister of foreign affairs joined the celebration of 60 years of Indonesian independence in 2005, and that through this presence the Dutch state recognized the fact that Indonesia was independent from 1945, and not 1949.<sup>104</sup>

It is, right from the start, quite clear that the language used to describe the *politieele acties* is quite different from the language used when the Dutch Canon described the transatlantic slave trade. Where the slave trade is indeed painful, the language used also makes it something that is very much ‘from the past’. Indeed, it falls into the Assmanns’ cultural memory as I already stated previously. The Indonesian war for independence did not happen so long ago though, and that can be found in the language on the website. The Netherlands are described in such a way that they seem to have done something ‘bad’: the Netherlands are framed as having fought for greed, only stopping after international pressure, and eventually the Netherlands giving their formal apologies through our king. Apologies are in not given when the apologizing party perceives themselves as having acted in a just and fair way, but only when they admit to their own wrongdoing. In the case of the transatlantic slave trade, the language seems a lot more indifferent: There is no talk of apology in the text, but it is said multiple times that “it was normal”. In other words, it could be interpreted in such a way that the topic is something of the past, and we don’t have to discuss it anymore. It *was* normal, so it is not anymore: problem solved. The ‘Dutch’ described in the page on the transatlantic slave trade seem to be framed far more as a cultural ‘other’ than the Dutch on the page on Indonesia.

The difficulty lies with the fact that the Indonesian war for Independence and the *politieele acties* are clearly still in the communicative memory discussed by the Assmanns.<sup>105</sup> People who witnessed these events are still alive today. The remarkable part is the lack of communication in this communicative memory: This dark page is rather forgotten than remembered, which means that through time this difficult part of Dutch history might fade away to become more and more abstract. Especially in contrast with WWII, which is often mythicized in a way that lies focus on the suffering of the Dutch and the victory of the Allies, while these events for the Indonesians are probably seen as *one* continuous struggle against oppression.

### The School Curriculum

The school curriculum spends two sub-chapters on the decolonization, one explaining the spread of nationalist ideas to the Indies before WWII, and one on

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<sup>102</sup> *Indonesië*, on the *Vensterplaat*: ‘5. Vechten voor vrijheid’

<sup>103</sup> *Indonesië*, on the *Vensterplaat*: ‘6. Een zelfstandig land’: “Ruim 300.000 Nederlanders, Indische Nederlanders, Papoea’s en Indonesiërs verlaten na 1949 het land. De meesten gaan naar Nederlands. Ook 12.500 Molukse soldaten verlaten Indonesië.”

<sup>104</sup> *Indonesië*, on the *Vensterplaat*: ‘6. Een zelfstandig land’: “Met zijn bezoek geeft Nederland alsnog toe dat Indonesië in 1945 is ontstaan.”

<sup>105</sup> Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 28-33

the actual process after WWII. The first of these subchapters will not be discussed, since it does not focus on the *politioenele acties*. It mainly describes how "European ideas" eventually inspired the Indonesian and Hindi peoples to resist colonial rule. The chapter dealing with the decolonization takes a far broader perspective than just looking at the Netherlands. It mainly seems to describe the struggle for independence in India. Regarding Indonesia, it describes how the Indonesian nationalists collaborated with Japan "to the astonishment of the Dutch" when Japan invaded the Dutch Indies. It continues with a mention of how the Nationalists declared their independence after Japan was defeated. It is described how the Dutch saw Soekarno as a traitor due to his collaboration with the Japanese, explaining the position of the Dutch regarding the nationalists. The *Bersiap* is not mentioned at all however, nor are the *Jappenkampen*

Regarding the 'politioenele acties', the school curriculum explains how this is a misnomer with the words "as if it was an internal affair instead of a colonial war" when discussing the operations. The excessive violence used by the Dutch, as was used in Ragwede is explained as retaliation against the guerrilla tactics used against the Dutch soldiers. The *politioenele acties* were halted through political interference of the US and UN, eventually leading to a transition of power. Note that in addition to the *Bersiap* and the *Jappenkampen*, the chapter does not mention the role of the KNIL, the promises made to the Moluccan people, or the resulting stream of migration. In a later chapter it is mentioned that about 300 000 people from the Indies have migrated to the Netherlands, but the complicated political situation around the Moluccans is not mentioned. The chapter immediately follows by showing how the US did not call for a similar halt to violence in Vietnam, due to the communist nature of the revolutionaries.

### Conclusion

Once again there are two different styles of describing history. The Dutch Canon, as was the case when discussing the transatlantic slave trade, seems to 'pull history into the now' by describing some of the causes of contemporary discussions and cultural phenomena, such as the immigration of the Moluccans to the Netherlands. The history curriculum does use language that criticizes *the politioenele acties*, which can most clearly be observed through the description of the operations as a 'colonial war' and mentioning the excessive violence used by the Dutch soldiers. The *Bersiap* is not mentioned, nor how most of the Dutch soldiers were unaware of the larger political context during the *politioenele acties*. The Dutch Canon fails to discuss this as well. Both interpretations of history seem to struggle in finding a nuanced way of describing this. Once again the Canon has more room to describe what happened, so more context is expected in that case. Either way, both cases are reluctant to show two sides of the story, rather following in the international criticism of the Dutch soldiers than actually giving context around a discussion that is still relevant today, now that more and more soldiers who fought in the Indonesian war for independence are sharing their stories.

### 2.3 The fall of Srebrenica

The final difficult moment in Dutch history discussed in this thesis is known in the Netherlands as the fall of Srebrenica. I will start this part with providing some background on this event<sup>106</sup> and its surrounding political situation in the following paragraph, after which I will take a look at the Dutch Canon. The school curriculum will be discussed as well, but mainly due to its lack of reference to Srebrenica.

After the death of President Tito in 1980, the ethnic tensions in Yugoslavia started to grow stronger. This practically meant that as soon as communism in Yugoslavia fell, the country started to divide itself through a civil war, eventually leading up to the different states that can be found in that geographical location in the Balkans today. In the resulting chaos of these tensions, Bosnia-Herzegovina held a referendum, resulting in a proclamation of independence from Yugoslavia. The majority supporting this independence existed of two of the three ethnical groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims (also known as *Bosniacs*). The third group, the Bosnian Serbs, did not agree with the independence and proclaimed their own state: The Serbian republic (Not to be confused with the Republic of Serbia). War quickly brewed, primarily due to this divide, but the violence had a strong ethnical undertone. The Bosnian Serbs received support from the Yugoslavian army and Serbia, and started an ethnic cleansing of Bosnia, targeting the Bosnian Muslims. Soon, the UN sent military ‘peacekeeping’ support to Yugoslavia to make sure that the conflicts, including the conflict in Bosnia, did not get out of hand. The goal of the UN was mainly to protect civilians and ensure some stability, not to actively participate in the wars. Eventually, the Dutch military battalion ‘Dutchbat III’ gained the task to oversee the demilitarized safe zone that was established in the town of Srebrenica. Since their mission was to keep the peace, and not wage war, the soldiers were lightly armed and were given the instructions to only use violence in self-defence. They were told that if need would arise, UN would send air-support. Eventually, this need did indeed arise. The army of the Bosnian Serbs, led by General Ratko Mladić, reached Srebrenica. Thousands of Bosnian Muslims had sought refuge in the enclave when Mladić’s army started their assault. Dutchbat stood no chance against the hostile forces, and UN air-support did not arrive when needed. Dutchbat had to retreat and hand over control of Srebrenica to the Bosnian Serbs, eventually resulting in the execution of around 8000 Bosnian Muslim men. Ratko, who would later be known as the *Slager van Srebrenica* (The English counterpart: The Butcher of Bosnia), supposedly ordered these executions himself. The fall of Srebrenica fell hard on the soldiers; they had to stand by powerless while Mladić’s army conducted the largest European genocide since the Holocaust,

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<sup>106</sup> For a detailed reconstruction of the events in Srebrenica and the surrounding political situation around the Yugoslav wars, see: J.C.H Blom and P. Romijn, eds. *Srebrenica: een ‘Veilig’ gebied. Reconstructie, achtergronden, gevolgen en analyses van de val van een Safe Area*. (Amsterdam: Boom, 2002). For more information on the aftermath of the fall of Srebrenica, see: Lara J. Nettelfield and Sarah E. Wagner, *Srebrenica in the Aftermath of Genocide*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); For a more brief and comprehensive summary of the events in Srebrenica, see: Coen van de Ven, “Wat gebeurde er in Srebrenica?” NPO Kennis. Accessed 25-06-2021. <https://npokennis.nl/longread/7526/wat-gebeurde-er-in-srebrenica>



against a people among whom they have been living for the past weeks. Many of the *Dutchbatters* got traumatized through these events. Quickly after the fall, questions arose both nationally and internationally, whether Dutchbat should have retreated at all. Eventually, the Dutch prime minister Wim Kok even stood down as prime minister after a rapport on the matter was published in 2002, due to the political failure around the events.

### The Dutch Canon

The fall of Srebrenica also has its own ‘window’ in the Dutch canon.<sup>107</sup> It introduces the topic by describing the origin of UN peace missions and the role of the Dutch in those missions: The Dutch have joined the UN in these missions from the beginning, starting with a mission in Israel in 1948.<sup>108</sup> It is already stated that there is one returning problem in these kinds of missions: the mandate that states that UN-peace troops can only use violence in self-defence, which gives them few options to defend citizens.<sup>109</sup> Noteworthy is how this statement already ‘warns’ for what is to come: due to the mandate, Dutchbat has not been able to defend Srebrenica. The text frames the mandate, as if it should have been known from the start, that violence would escalate at some point.

The text continues with explaining how the UN proclaimed Srebrenica a ‘safe zone’ or enclave: a proclamation that the city should not be besieged or attacked in any way. The Dutch are sent there by the UN to make sure that Srebrenica stays safe for anyone entering the enclave. The fact that Dutchbat, as a UN batallion, is lightly armed is once again mentioned,<sup>110</sup> after which it is described how the Bosnian Serbs blocked the supply routes into the enclave and applied intimidation tactics<sup>111</sup> (it is not described which tactics were used). This resulted in the attacking army marching into the city without much resistance. The text continues by stating how the Dutchbat troops eventually assisted the Bosnian Serbs to separate the male Bosnian Muslims from their families and putting them on buses.<sup>112</sup> These buses took at least 8372 men towards the destination where they would be executed.

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<sup>107</sup> Commissie Herijking, “Srebrenica” CvNL. Accessed 30-06-2020.

<https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/srebrenica> From now on referred to as *Srebrenica* in the footnotes.

<sup>108</sup> *Srebrenica*, under the paragraph ‘Vredesmissies’: “Het Nederlandse leger heft vanaf het begin meegedaan aan de vredesoperaties van de Verenigde Naties. (...) De eerste missie gaat van start in 1948, in Israël.”

<sup>109</sup> *Srebrenica*, under the paragraph ‘Vredesmissies’: “Een van de terugkerende problemen bij deze operaties is het zogenoemde mandaat: als vredestroepen mogen VN-soldaten alleen geweld voor zelfverdediging gebruiken. Ze krijgen weinig militaire ruimte om burgers te verdedigen en beschermen”

<sup>110</sup> *Srebrenica*, under the paragraph ‘Genocide’: “Dutchbat is lichtbepand en heeft maar weinig middelen om de vrede rondom Srebrenica te handhaven.”

<sup>111</sup> *Srebrenica*, under the paragraph ‘Genocide’: “Ook proberen de Serviërs Dutchbat op allerlei manieren te intimideren.”

<sup>112</sup> *Srebrenica*, under the paragraph ‘Genocide’: “De Serviërs voeren de achtergebleven mannen en jongens af in bussen, nadat ze hen eerst met hulp van de Nederlandse militairen van de vrouwen en kinderen hebben gescheiden.”

The last part of the primary page of the Canon on Srebrenica discusses accountability. When the fate of the Muslims started to get public attention, the Dutch started to ask themselves if the country had a moral failure.<sup>113</sup> An investigation is started that shows how Dutchbat's mission was doomed from the start due to a lack of information, weapons and communication.<sup>114</sup> Effects on society are also briefly mentioned: Wim Kok stood down as prime minister, and the Dutch have gotten more attention for the complexity regarding peace missions. This resulted in the fact that Dutch soldiers on such missions will always be properly armed<sup>115</sup>. The page ends by mentioning how Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, the leaders of the Bosnian Serbs, were convicted of war crimes and by the Yugoslavia-tribunal.

The interactive *vensterplaat* sheds some more light on the story around Srebrenica. It is once again written for a younger public, and starts by giving an overview of the political situation in Bosna-Herzegovina,<sup>116</sup> followed by a description of the UN peace mission: The Dutch *blauwhelmen* (UN peace-troops with a blue helmet) were sent to keep an eye on Srebrenica, but only have ten bullets per person.<sup>117</sup> This meant that they did not even dare to combat the attacking Serbs, resulting in a lot of criticism on the mission itself and the UN. Another result is that the Dutch government has become “voorzichtiger geworden in het uitvoeren van vredesmissies”<sup>118</sup> (more careful in conducting peace missions). The text continues with discussing general Mladić, and how he has been tried for his war crimes. Where the text takes an interesting turn is in also stating how a Bosnian officer has been tried for attacking Serbian villages, and that thus not only the Serbs committed cruelties,<sup>119</sup> and that “Zoals in bijna elke oorlog ligt het ingewikkelder”<sup>120</sup> (Like in almost every war it is more complicated). The following paragraphs once again emphasize how the Dutch soldiers were not allowed to fight the attacking Serbs, and how 15 000 Bosnian Muslims fled Srebrenica when the army approached, of whom half were still executed.<sup>121</sup> It is also discussed how “De Nederlandse soldaten worden gedwongen de Servische soldaten te helpen bij het selecteren van de mensen”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> *Srebrenica*, under the paragraph ‘Verantwoordelijkheid’: “Nederlanders vragen zich af of hun land moreel heeft gefaald.”

<sup>114</sup> *Srebrenica*, ‘under the paragraph ‘Verantwoordelijkheid’: “Dutchbats opdracht was in feite een *mission impossible*.”

<sup>115</sup> *Srebrenica*, under the paragraph ‘Verantwoordelijkheid’: “[After the investigation was published], neemt premier Wim Kok de politieke verantwoordelijkheid voor de ramp in Srebrenica en treedt af. (...) Voortaan worden alleen nog maar soldaten gestuurd die voldoende bewapend zijn, zoals bij de Nederlandse missies naar Irak en Afghanistan.”

<sup>116</sup> *Srebrenica*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘1. Burgeroorlog in Bosnië-Herzegovina’

<sup>117</sup> *Srebrenica*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘2. Nederlanders op vredesmissie’ “Dutchbat mag niet zelf vechten, maar moet in de gaten houden dat de Serviërs de Bosniërs niet aanvallen. Hierdoor hebben de Dutchbat-soldaten alleen lichte wapens, en maar 10 kogels per persoon.”

<sup>118</sup> *Srebrenica*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘2. Nederlanders op vredesmissie’

<sup>119</sup> *Srebrenica*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘3. Generaal Ratko Mladić’ “Het zijn dus niet alleen de Serviërs geweest, die wrede heden hebben begaan.”

<sup>120</sup> *Srebrenica*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘3. Generaal Ratko Mladić’

<sup>121</sup> *Srebrenica*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘4. De Nederlandse legerbasis’; ‘5. Vluchten naar de bergen’ and ‘6. Scheiden van mannen en vrouwen’

<sup>122</sup> *Srebrenica*, on the *Vensterplaat*, ‘6. Scheiden van mannen en vrouwen’

(the Dutch soldiers were forced to help the Serbian soldiers in selecting (read: separating) the people), and how “Behalve de Serviërs weet op dat moment nog niemand wat er precies zal gaan gebeuren”<sup>123</sup> (Except for the Serbs, nobody knew at that moment what would happen).

Attention is given to the memorial for the Bosnian genocide, and it is explained what exactly a genocide is: “Het vermoorden van grote groepen mensen om hun geloof en/of afkomst.”<sup>124</sup> (The murder of large groups of people for their religion and/or their origins). But the most interesting part might be found in the last paragraph. This starts with stating that “De genocide in Srebrenica is in de eerste plaats verschrikkelijk voor alle vrouwen en kinderen die hun mannen, vaders, zoons en broers moeten missen. Maar ook voor de soldaten van Dutchbat is het een ramp.”<sup>125</sup> (The genocide in Srebrenica is, in the first instance, terrible for all women and children who have to miss their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers. But it is also a disaster for the soldiers of Dutchbat) The paragraph once again emphasizes the powerlessness of the Dutchbat soldiers: They befriended the Bosnian Muslims, and were tasked to protect these civilians, but eventually could not do what they were tasked with. The text states how some of the soldiers, even today, have a “verdrietig, boos en machteloos gevoel, waar sommige soldaten de rest van hun leven last van blijven houden”<sup>126</sup> (sad, angry and powerless feeling, which can continue to stay with soldiers for their entire life), defining it as a war-trauma.

The Dutch Canon takes quite an strong position on what happened in Srebrenica. Just as the *politioenele acties*, it is explicitly called a ‘black page’. The focus of attention is quite different however. In both cases the Dutch soldiers returned home traumatized, and in both cases *their* morality was heavily questioned. With Srebrenica, it quickly became clear that the soldiers stood no chance; a lot of bad decisions were made, but Dutchbat was not at fault. The framing for this starts already in the first paragraph describing the UN peace missions: it was already known that there were problems. All the soldiers did was follow orders. In the case of the *politioenele acties*, the discussion took a turn the other way: there, the Dutch soldiers *were* at fault, and fought for something that should not have been fought for. In that case, it is stated multiple times not how the Dutch soldiers became traumatized, but how the Netherlands apologized for their wrongdoings, directing the reader to not feel empathy for the soldiers at all. No attention is given to why the Dutch and KNIL soldiers acted how they did and what they believed, nor is attention given to the horrors that the soldiers endured under leadership of their superiors. It is as if admitting the fact that war is always horrible for every actor involved is taboo when discussing colonial wars. In contrast, in the case of the Bosnian war there is a whole paragraph discussing the complexity of war.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> *Srebrenica, on the Vensterplaat*, ‘7. Genocide in Bosnië-Herzegovina’

<sup>125</sup> *Srebrenica, on the Vensterplaat*, ‘8. Ook voor Dutchbat een ramp’

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

### The School Curriculum.

Interestingly enough, the history curriculum discussed in this thesis does not mention the fall of Srebrenica at all. This in itself already has quite an influence on the 'official narrative' created through this specific curriculum, as it skips a part of history that is still discussed today. The curriculum does discuss other European developments from later dates than the genocide in Srebrenica, so its absence cannot be explained through the fact that the curriculum stops discussing history after a specific date. The fact that Srebrenica is not mentioned does correspond with my own memory of following history class: I also did not learn anything about the genocide at my school. The discussed history curriculum does discuss the European Union, European cooperation after the Cold War, and even more contemporary tensions resulting in events such as Brexit, but there is no mention of the Yugoslav wars or the impact of the fall of the Iron Curtain in the Balkans at all. The absence of the largest European genocide since WWII, which took place in a country that is now a potential prospective EU-member, is at least remarkable, especially with the impact that the genocide has had on Dutch military missions and Dutch politics.

### Conclusion

The Dutch Canon introduces its reader to the fall of Srebrenica with a Dutchbat-centered perspective; it emphasizes the trauma and powerlessness of the Dutchbat soldiers, while it also discusses a broader context around the fall of Srebrenica, even showcasing the complexity of conflict when discussing morality in war itself. The fact that the school curriculum has no mention of this at all, not of the ethnic tensions, not of the genocide, not of the Yugoslav wars, and not of the influence and actuality of Srebrenica today, gives us two very distinct narratives. One where Srebrenica is a place, or even a *lieu de mémoire*, where many Dutch soldiers were forced to help guide Bosnian Muslims towards a certain death, resulting in trauma and guilt. And one narrative in which Srebrenica might as well not exist at all. Neither truly creates a narrative on the murdered men, or their families and children.

### 2.4 Conclusion

It was expected to find similar narratives when comparing the Dutch Canon and the history curriculum used at schools. After reading and analysing each of these different interpretations on different moments throughout history, I have found that the truth is, just as with these discussed subjects, far more nuanced. In general there are some substantial distinctions between the two. First of all, the history curriculum for schools has to convey a broader history, with more different national and international events, in a limited amount of words. This influences its ability to create nuanced interpretations of the past, resulting in the fact that the curriculum mostly keeps to describing history without imprinting too many morals on the stories. The most disturbing details are left out, but are certainly not denied. The curriculum takes on a critical stance against the treatment of slaves (and the existence of slavery as a whole), and also criticizes the use of the term 'politieele acties'. There is much not mentioned however,

which eventually does contribute to a less detailed and nuanced collective memory of the events around especially the Indonesian war for Independence and the fall of Srebrenica.

The Dutch Canon on the other hand, has a lot of room to provide nuances: It only focuses on fifty points in history in total, choosing depth over a more broad general knowledge, and does not have to adhere to a limited amount of words. And since it also does not have to deal with international history which the school curriculum does have to, the Canon can have a better discussion on the complexity of some subjects. This can be seen in multiple facets, like how all the different windows seem to 'pull the history into the now', by which I mean that the Canon links the history to the contemporary discussion, and takes a strong stance in that discussion. Reading the Canon makes it clear that, for example slavery is bad, but was normal; the colonial war in Indonesia was only fought for Dutch economical gain, sadly also resulting in war crimes; and the fall of Srebrenica was not the soldiers' fault, but that of the UN. By creating these narratives, the Canon presents a version of history that is more politically loaded than the school curriculum. These points of focus, like often repeating that slavery was considered normal, show not only that these discussions are relevant today, but also prime the reader to take a stance in that discussion, even if it is not the intention of the writer.

The Dutch Canon, strives more to create a *collective memory* instead of conveying an objective history. It gives more 'mythical' narratives than just a description of events, and seems to introduce the reader to more *lieux de mémoire* through the introduction of for example the holiday of Ketikoti. The school curriculum remains somewhat more distant. It concerns itself with giving factual information, of which some seems to get lost in the process of selecting relevant histories. Its more neutral vision on history seems to be concerned with sharing facts, not opinions.

Similarities between the two interpretations of history do also exist however. In both cases (since there are no similarities between the two sources regarding the fall of Srebrenica), the interpretations of history take quite a critical stance towards 'the Netherlands of the past'. Regarding the transatlantic slave trade, both speak of the horrible ways slaves were treated, even if the added pictures do not always convey that same message. The stance taken by both media is somewhat complex. They criticize the Netherlands of the past, but do not seem to 'want' to discuss slavery any longer. The school curriculum's text, through its more factual descriptions, describes slavery as something very much in the past. The Canon does link it to cultural phenomena and discussions today, but tries to undermine the discussion by mentioning slavery's normality in the past. In both cases slavery comes over as 'solved': it happened in the past, the Dutch realized it was bad, and slavery was ended as a result of that realization. Note that since we discuss Dutch history intended for *Dutch* children, there is most probably an implicit 'othering' happening in describing national historical events like this. 'We' found out slavery was bad, so 'we' abolished it and freed 'them'. This might even be enforced even more through the extensive attention that is given to abolitionism in both versions of history.

Regarding the '*politioenele acties*', both methods seem far more critical of the Dutch actions than regarding slavery. Where slavery was wrong but 'normal', the war in Indonesia is described as a brutal colonial war, which was stopped through direct intervention of the US and UN, with whom the Netherlands is allied. 'We' are portrayed as being on the wrong side of history in this case, having done something of which 'we' should have known that it was wrong. Little attention is given to the broader context however. It is not mentioned how the Dutch soldiers were treated when they came home and how that differed from when they were sent away. It is additionally not mentioned how the Indonesian nationalists during and after the Japanese invasion used brutal tactics against Europeans and Indo-Europeans in Indonesia, even though that fact would already create a far more nuanced narrative and shed light on the traumas endured by the Dutch soldiers, as well as the traumas and the betrayed feelings among the descendants of the KNIL. In chapter 3 I will discuss these findings more through a theoretical analysis, linking them to the theories mentioned in chapter 1.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Analysis

### Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis aims to take the displayed theories and data, and explore their influences. The first subchapter analyses the data presented in the second chapter: What image is created and how does it impact society? It explores how the 'official' history sometimes actively hinders social stability through its frames and use of language. The second subchapter explores ways of how to deal with this fact: What tactics could be employed by the history mediums and in society as a whole to combat the social tensions that follow from the dark pages in history?

### 3.1: Understanding the collective memory:

#### A divisive memory

As already described in the previous chapter, there are multiple divides that can be made when analysing the 'official' memory portrayed in the second chapter. When taking the Assmanns' separation between cultural and communicative memory into account, we can see clearly that the 'official' history of the transatlantic slave trade falls into the first category. Not only can this be concluded due to the fact that the transatlantic slave trade ended over 150 years ago, but the language used in both the Canon and the school curriculum is significantly different from the language used in the other two historical cases. When reading about the transatlantic slave trade in both the Canon as the school curriculum, the slave trade is presented as being 'of the past'. The collective memory of the slave trade, through that, is framed as if it is set in stone: it is very much framed as a factual 'history', a part of the 'myth' of the Netherlands. The slave trade is framed in such a way that it cannot be discussed anymore, because it is *over*. It is framed as a dark part of Dutch history yes, but still one that is 'overcome'. The most obvious example of how this is done can be found in both the Canon and the curriculum: the repeated disclaimer of how slavery *was* normal. This small sentence keeps appearing in both media, and can also be found in most contemporary debate around the transatlantic slave trade. But through framing the slave trade in such a way, the contemporary discussion that has been re-ignited by the Black Lives Matter movement is portrayed as obsolete. The history of the transatlantic slave trade is made myth by the authorized heritage experts discussed in chapter one. Both the given sources are also very much in line with Asad's ideas on human rights discourse. They use criticizing language regarding slavery and how the slaves were treated. The texts both spend quite some words describing how exactly slavery was abolished, how it was 'normal' (almost creating sympathy for the Europeans), how African lords also traded in slaves, and how other countries traded far more slaves than the Netherlands. The texts frame the slave trade as something bad that was considered normal. 'We' did not know that it was bad until 'we' came to realise 'our' fault, after which slavery was 'solved'. The frame here is quite similar to modern human rights discourse

criticized by Asad, as the history is described in a way that not necessarily justifies, but ignores modern violations of human rights. It is no secret that racism still has a strong impact on the lives of many people in the Netherlands, and that both ex-slave colonies and people with roots in those colonies often have an economical and educational disadvantage. These problems can be seemingly traced back to the period of the transatlantic slave trade,<sup>127</sup> and even if these problems are not as pressing as more extreme cases like in the US, they are still present. Thus the application of a human rights discourse, the focus on the violation of human rights and how the violation is stopped, eventually still lead to a wedge in society today: attention is put too much on how slavery ended, and not on how societal reparations are still not finished. We can see this wedge in Dutch society today. More and more people request a better and more honest education on the history of the Dutch slave trade to explain societal differences and intergenerational trauma, whereas others do not see the need for more attention, since slavery is something from the past.

Both texts ‘shift’ the attention from the modern discussion in a way. The history curriculum does this by not really discussing contemporary discussions at all. It is far more concerned with discussing history ‘as it has been’. This position can be both criticized and supported of course. Is it really the task of history lessons to focus on contemporary debate? Especially with the limited time given? The answer could definitely be no, but the question then arises who *should* discuss these debates. If a history curriculum does not link the past to the present when the influence of that past is still felt so hard as it is today, it creates the false image discussed above, resulting in a blind spot in the collective memory regarding the transatlantic slave trade.

The Dutch Canon does try to link the discussion of the slave trade to contemporary debate. This is still done through a questionable way however. The text frames the immigrants from Surinam and the Dutch Antilles, who are descendants from slaves, as outsiders in Dutch society. This is done through discussing how ‘they’ think that *Zwarte Piet* is racist for example. The frame and discourse created in the Canon portray descendants from former slaves as the only ones who are questioning some ‘Dutch’ traditions and the Dutch ‘official’ history, even though this is definitely not the case. This creates a divide in the debate around the transatlantic slave trade: Those who criticize the ‘official’ history and focus on the contemporary effects that the transatlantic slave trade still has today, and those who think *from* the ‘official’ history, and see the slave trade as something that has been ‘solved’.

The case of the *politioenele acties* is different from the case of the transatlantic slave trade. First of all, it is far more recent: Veterans who fought in Indonesia still live today. Both the Canon and the school curriculum were, again, critical of the *politioenele acties* held by the Dutch army and the KNIL, describing it as a colonial war, and using the Rawagede massacre as an example. The human rights

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<sup>127</sup> “Heden van het Slavernijverleden” Tropenmuseum. Accessed 23-06-2021.  
<https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/nl/heden-van-het-slavernijverleden>



discourse is far more visible in this discussion: The colonial power is framed as morally 'wrong', since oppression of a people in such a way does not conform with modern ideas of human rights. This frame and this discourse are both distracting however. As already mentioned in chapter 2, the *Bersiap* is not mentioned in any of the discussed history mediums, even though that period saw Indonesian nationalists use extreme forms of violence against Europeans and Indo-Europeans in Indonesia. Not mentioning the excessive violence portrayed by one side of the war almost gives the Indonesian Nationalists a non-violent status; the only frame of violence given is a massacre conducted by the colonial power, not the other way around.

In addition, both texts fail to mention that, just like slavery was considered 'normal' in the period of the transatlantic slave trade, colonial rule was considered 'normal' and even morally 'good' by the Dutch who went to the Indies to fight the Indonesian nationalists. It was in the years after WWII that this mentality shifted. It is the discourse on human rights here that focuses extensively on the morally bad actions conducted by the Dutch that it almost becomes impossible to try and provide context. This probably because the war is still very much in 'our' communicative memories. This does blind students who learn about this history for the other side of the conflict however. The Dutch reluctance to talk about what happened in Indonesia, and especially the unwillingness to talk about it in a nuanced way, since that does not conform with our standards of 'human rights' has left both the veterans and the resulting immigrants on the wrong side of history. Eventually, just as in the examples of Asad discussed in the first chapter,<sup>128</sup> the violation of human rights (the *Bersiap*) is overshadowed by the violation of another (the colonial rule) without any context.

As in the discussion around the transatlantic slavery, the Canon and the curriculum contribute to a one-sided debate. They seem to focus only on the wrongs that have been done in the past, but in doing so, create a frame and a memory that 'un-remember' many of the nuances to actually understand the conflict. The created memory, portrayed as history, makes it more difficult for veterans to share their side of the story. If the 'official' history of the Netherlands that most students learn, portray the soldiers who fought in Indonesia as war criminals through a focus that only gives attention to the wrongs done by the Dutch and the KNIL, and not against them, then little room is created for understanding. There is no denying that the *politioenele acties* in Indonesia were horrible, and contrary to the slave trade, the blame cannot be 'discarded' as something from the past. This results in the discourse to shift towards a self-criticism that lays much of the blame for what happened with the actual soldiers in Indonesia, as if *they* should have known better. This results in a one-sided debate when discussing the *politioenele acties*. The Dutch soldiers, following orders at the time, are not given much space to defend themselves. *They* are framed as war criminals, and nothing more. And since our ideals around human rights dictate that war crimes are always unforgivable and unjustifiable (at least without good reason, even though that seems somewhat like a paradox), war criminals should not be given space to explain their point of view.

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<sup>128</sup> Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*.

The Srebrenica example differs most from the other cases. Srebrenica is not really a point of discussion in the Dutch society. It is generally agreed that Dutchbat could not resist the overwhelming force of the Bosnian Serbs and were right to surrender. Because of that, the Canon does not necessarily create a collective memory that 'distracts' from nuance. On the contrary, the Canon actively foreshadows the disaster in the text leading up to the discussion of the actual fall of Srebrenica, placing as many details in the text as possible to defend the choices made by Dutchbat III. It makes it clear that the Dutchbatters are the victims of the story as well, giving more attention to their suffering than to the actual genocide itself. In addition, the Canon mentions how people from both the Serbian *and* the Bosnian side of the conflict have been convicted of war crimes. Where the discussion around the *politioenele acties* does not provide any room to discuss the two-sided nature of conflict, this discussion does. Discussing this two-sidedness only here does something with the narrative of the *politioenele acties* as well. It makes it seem as if only the Yugoslav wars have a complex enough nature to highlight war crimes on both sides. This might have to do with the lack of active contribution to the conflict from the Dutch, unlike the transatlantic slave trade and the *politioenele acties*.

What additionally must be discussed about Srebrenica is the absence of the event from the school curriculum. The absence of such a large genocide in a history book does eventually influence the collective memory on the Netherlands, as well as the collective memory surrounding Europe in general. If students learn about a multitude of extreme violations of human rights in history, it would be logical for them to assume that they learn about all relevant violations of human rights. Not learning about Srebrenica and the 'ugly' history of the Yugoslav wars does indeed place the Netherlands and Europe in a more 'perfect' frame, which only now starts to show cracks with a rise of Islamophobia resulting from, among other reasons, the refugee crisis.<sup>129</sup> Telling the story of the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia sheds a different light on modern Islamophobia: phobia of Muslims is not 'modern', but has been present for a long time, just as antisemitism has been a part of European history for far longer than just the period around WWII.

The question arises why the histories are portrayed in these ways. Especially the transatlantic slave trade and the *politioenele acties* are surrounded by controversy, resulting in a general feeling of unease that can be found whenever these subjects are discussed. Let's consider the reluctance of the publisher of the history curriculum to provide the materials requested for this research. The curriculum is published and thus publicly available. Nothing stops any researcher or journalist from buying the curriculum and investigating it without mention towards the publisher. But still the publisher hesitated to provide the materials, only doing so eventually with a guarantee of anonymity. Even with the writing style of the curriculum, that frames the history in a way that avoids most political discussion, the publisher apparently knew that there still was a potential for

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<sup>129</sup> Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, eds. *European Islamophobia report 2019*. (Ankara: SETA, 2020)

controversy in the text. Additionally, instead of offering explanation and defending choices in history writing, it was apparently an attractive option to the publisher to avoid the critical discussion of their materials at all. It must be said that eventually the representative of the publisher did mention that they are very much interested in how they could improve their curriculum, which does not only show a willingness to learn, but once again also implies knowledge of controversies. This is quite representative of the texts on the transatlantic slave trade and the *politioenele acties* in general: the history writers rather remove the discussions from the ‘official’ history than actually mentioning the discussions at all. The Canon does mention the discussion around the slave trade somewhat, but frames it in such a way that it creates a cultural ‘them’ (descendants from slaves) as opposed to a cultural ‘us’. This does not accurately portray the discussion, instead overgeneralizing it.

The reluctance to discuss these controversial topics is also understandable however. Especially the publisher, but also the Canon, do not want to spark controversy. A publisher could lose customers, and the Canon could spark a discussion aimed at the ministry and government who approved of it. A fear of accidentally writing a sentence that can be misinterpreted, or will be considered controversial in a few years due to an unpredictable change in the public debate is realistic. Participating in these debates is a risk. However, *not* participating in them, or at least not mentioning them, actually contributes to the division from which these debates arise. Framing the transatlantic slave trade as something that has been ‘solved’, and framing the *politioenele acties* as a one-sided war crime, actively ‘blinds’ students from the nuances that lie at the cores of these controversies, essentially hollowing out the debate and the ability to understand the other’s perspective.

#### Non-remembrance and reconciliation

This inability to understand the ‘other side’ of a debate as opposed to the ‘official’ history is a societal tension that still is a remnant from a past conflict, resulting in the structural misunderstanding and through that, injustice against specific groups in the Netherlands. This could be described as an absence of ‘positive peace’, meaning that even though the Netherlands are not actively in violent conflict, there still are tensions present that need to be addressed.<sup>130</sup>

How can these tensions and conflict be removed from a society, especially if these discussions are still very much embedded in the ‘official’ history taught to new generations? The ‘official’ narrative does distract from these tensions by laying the focus on modern ideals, instead of still relevant tensions and discussions that have roots in past injustices. Little room is given for context and nuance when discussing difficult history, eventually leading to those nuances being ‘forgotten’, from the public memory. The ethicist and theologian Miroslav

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<sup>130</sup> Johan Galtung. “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research.” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91. 183

Volf defines this forgetting as remembering, or retelling, untruthfully:<sup>131</sup> history is re-told in a way that does not show all relevant aspects of a conflict, and eventually does “deepen in memory the conflict created by the initial injury”.<sup>132</sup> An untruthful memory of conflict thus eventually stands in the way of reconciliation and stability Volf claims. It must be noted that Volf mainly discusses a ‘direct’ memory of events, an eye-witness account and maybe one generation further: what in this thesis is described as communicative memory, following the Assmanns’ theories.<sup>133</sup>

Reaching reconciliation is seen as the main step towards a positive peace. In the *Routledge Handbook for Peacebuilding*, Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker describe it as dealing with the “deep societal wounds that inevitably open up after war and other traumatic events.”<sup>134</sup> It is the step that comes *after* ending violence. Reconciliation is needed before the past can be ‘forgotten’ in a way that does not alter the narrative in such a way that it becomes untruthful. Volf prefers the term ‘non-remembrance’, since that implies not the erasure from memory, but the erasure from the discussion of a past conflict. Volf’s idea of non-remembrance is by him portrayed as directly following after reconciliation: When truthful memories are created, suffering is acknowledged, and societal wounds are healed, then people have a duty to not linger on the past, but forgive and non-remember. A conflict, a past atrocity, can and should then still be remembered in history, but all grudges and tensions are forgiven and thus the past conflict will not lead to new tensions in the future.

If we take these ideas and apply them to the aforementioned interpretations of history, we see that the collective memory on the transatlantic slave trade and the *politioenele acties* become untruthful memories, standing in the way of reconciliation and the end of the controversies surrounding them. In the case of the *politioenele acties*, many people who fought in Indonesia feel misrepresented by the ‘official’ history, creating tensions. This has even led to descendants from KNIL soldiers using violence in the past<sup>135</sup> to make a statement regarding the failed Dutch promise to grant them an independent state and to gain recognition for their situation. A *truthful* memory of the events in Indonesia would, according to Volf, help towards a reconciliation: The pain of all parties must be acknowledged by the Dutch state, and there should be a less negative emphasis on the soldiers who often are and feel framed as the ‘morally bad’, without any attention for their side of the story. Soldiers often only follow orders, as they are trained and expected to do. The actions of the soldiers during the *politioenele acties* should not be praised of course, but *all* suffering should be acknowledged before

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<sup>131</sup> Miroslav Volf. *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006.) 44

<sup>132</sup> Volf. *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, 44

<sup>133</sup> Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 28-33

<sup>134</sup> Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker. “6. Reconciliation” in *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. ed. Roger Mac Ginty. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.) 81

<sup>135</sup> See for example: Peter Bootsma. *De Molukse Acties: Treinkapingen en Gijzelingen 1970-1978*. Revised version. (Amsterdam: Boom, 2015)

something as complicated as the *politioenele acties* can eventually be non-remembered and left out of history books without any problems.

Srebrenica is similar in that it very much still lives in the memories of many people, although far more than the Indonesian war for independence. It took almost 70 years for the Netherlands to start discussing the *politioenele acties*, and the fall of Srebrenica happened far more recent. Additionally, Srebrenica has had a less extensive impact on the Dutch society as a whole. The war in Indonesia saw international anger towards the Netherlands, the loss of the most profitable Dutch colony, and a substantial influx of immigrants after the war ended. In comparison, there is barely any moral controversy around the part that Dutchbat played in Srebrenica. However, *not* discussing Srebrenica, or calling the Bosnian Muslims ‘Bosniacs’ instead of ‘Muslim’ as was done in the Dutch Canon, does still contribute to some tensions today. Islamophobia has been present in Europe for a long time, with narratives focussing mainly on what transgressions ‘Muslims’ have committed. Integrating the Bosnian genocide into that narrative shows another side, one of oppression and terror used *against* European Muslims by other Europeans, even though many Europeans see themselves as a collection of peoples who have ‘past’ those kinds of brutalities. This is supported by Asad’s definition of human rights as a floating signifier.<sup>136</sup>

The transatlantic slave trade might be the most different due to its mythical status as a part of the cultural memory instead of the communicative memory. Due to it having happened this far in the past, many Dutch would argue that ‘we’ do not have to deal with it anymore, supported by how the slave trade is framed in both the school curriculum as in the Dutch Canon. Slavery becomes decontextualized, and even trivial. On the other hand, resistance to slavery also has a strong mythical status. The portrayed Dutch histories emphasize heavily the abolishment of slavery, where the ‘myths’ of Surinam and the former Dutch Antilles see a mythical origins in their struggle against the Dutch slavers themselves. In both cases however, slavery is beaten, implying that it does not need further discussion.

A problem arises when discussing reconciliation for the slave trade: how can one reconcile for a myth? The ‘official’ history, together with its mythical status, make the memory untouchable. Slavery has moved to Volf’s status of non-remembrance for those who primary learn about it through school curricula and the Dutch Canon: slavery and the transatlantic slave trade are canonized in history, but are framed in such a way that it seems as if reconciliation has already taken place. On the other hand, there are Dutch citizens for whom slavery is still very much of influence on their lives. They experience discrimination, poor economic circumstances, and often feel misrepresented when the Dutch *Gouden Eeuw* and overall historical wealth is mentioned without the mentioning of slavery.<sup>137</sup> For this group, there has not yet been reconciliation, so the move towards un-remembering has as of yet also not happened. Seemingly, there are

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<sup>136</sup> Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 158

<sup>137</sup> The school curriculum and the Canon both do discuss the *Gouden Eeuw* and the Dutch mercantile power after the *Gouden Eeuw* ends, as well as slavery, but they do not link these two, even though they can be.

two different dominant collective memories present: The ‘official’ history of the Netherlands, which most Dutch children learn from schools and from their parents, describing Slavery as ‘from the past’, and the collective memory of those descendant from slaves: a minority who still experience societal remnants of past practices of slavery. These two memories seem mutually exclusive: One asks for recognition, while the other frames itself as ‘already having recognized’. Additionally, once somebody is raised in such a narrative, it is hard for that person to see how that narrative influences their own vision. It is the ‘official’ history that stands in the way of this reconciliation. It creates a memory that actively breaks any possibility of the idea of continuation between the past and the present through its language, whereas people descendant from slaves do still experience continuation.

The other side does see continuation. For them, the mythical past has seemingly flowed into the communicative memory. Family lineages to people born in slavery are still explicitly mentioned and resistance to slavery is still very much celebrated, just like its abolishment. There has never been any form of apology towards the freed slaves, nor their descendants. Freed slaves were often just left to themselves, without financial support, education or any fair chance on the labour market. Additionally, racism was not abolished when slavery was. These problems are still present today, and even though racism often develops outside of the ‘official’ history and can thus not be instantly dissipated through a change in the ‘official’ history, an acknowledgement of the complex and traumatic past could still contribute to a shift towards less racism.

### Conclusion

The ‘official’ history of the Netherlands contributes to misunderstanding and social tension in the Dutch society. Through avoiding the discussion of the mentioned dark pages in Dutch history, especially those in which the Netherlands can be seen as the transgressors, a blind spot is created in the collective memory of the students who learn history. The reluctance to discuss these difficult subjects, probably out of fear to spark controversy, is contributing to this actual controversy itself. In order to combat this, the accounts of these past atrocities should shift to become as truthful as possible to create a collective memory that embraces the different perspectives that are at play in these discussions. This would actively contribute to a process of reconciliation, eventually leading to non-remembrance, which would eventually result in the loss of the need to discuss these subjects. In brief: in order to tell the ‘official’ history on the dark pages as ‘just’ history without any political tensions, these tensions must first be discussed.

This is of course easier said than done. The ‘official’ history of the transatlantic slave trade in particular is difficult to discuss due to the two different memories that are at the centre of the discussion, and it having taken place outside the communicative memory of the Netherlands to date. A move towards non-remembrance of the dark pages will require a complex re-evaluation of the ‘official’ history, which is not without danger. In the next subchapter I will discuss how this might still be achieved.

### 3.2: Changing the Memory

#### The Museological approach

If the 'official' history as it is now stands in the way of reconciliation and non-remembrance, it seems evident that it must be altered in a way that would at the least not contribute to a division in the collective memory, and ideally actively add to creating understanding and reconciliation. The question does arise who should be responsible for this. Can it be expected from publishers of school curricula to take this task upon themselves? Surely not: The publishers are too much in a vulnerable position of which they are strongly aware, as portrayed by the reluctance and doubt shown when a publisher was asked to provide materials for this research. A wrong phrasing could result in the loss of reputation and income. History curricula understandably try to not discuss too many difficult histories and even though arguably there is room for improvement for the discussed curriculum, like mentioning the *Bersiap* and the fall of Srebrenica, or adding a few sentences that link the transatlantic slave trade to societal inequalities in the Netherlands today to rid the 'official' history of its blind spots, it should not be asked of these curricula to actively take a very nuanced position in every dark page in Dutch history.

The Dutch Canon has to take controversy less into account. Due to its government funding it is less reliant on schools deciding to employ it into their curriculum. This is also shown in the language that it uses already: The Canon discusses some contemporary debates around the dark pages in Dutch history. Additionally, it is less limited to word count, so it can provide more information on the subjects that are discussed. However, the Dutch Canon is still not quite suited to discuss controversial subjects, purely due to its dependency on the Dutch government. It is (too) directly funded from government, and through that is not entirely impartial. If the Canon would, for instance, spend too much attention on the *Bersiap*, it could be framed in such a way that the Dutch government still think that the *politioenele acties* were justified. This brings too many risks.

A memory must be created that does not facilitate blind spots, is representative for different points of view, and is accessible for at least all school students who follow history curriculum, which would eventually result in a new 'official' history which represents as much people as would be possible. This brings us back to the Authorized Heritage Discourse. In order for a new collective memory to be created, it has originate in the authorization of its heritage. The Canon and the school curricula would follow only after that. It should not be expected that these interpretations of history actually actively initiate a change the collective memory. Rather, they could follow in spreading a collective memory that has already been created. A first step towards this could be achieved through combining different narratives and visualizing them in museums. There are multiple examples of how visualizing experiences from conflict have helped to

show trauma and suffering.<sup>138</sup> These museums, through the use of story and image, can show the *human* side of suffering, which creates a stronger image than a textbook or website could achieve.

Many examples of such museums can be found in the edited volume *Heritage and Peacebuilding*.<sup>139</sup> Each of these museums have similar aspects that I will quickly discuss. First of all, the museums are *honest*, often looking at both sides of a conflict. The idea is to create understanding for both positions, acknowledging that both sides of a war always suffer, *even* when there is a clear aggressor. Both sides of a war have civilians who can get hurt and conscripted soldiers who get traumatized. A strong example of such an honest approach would be German museums that try to show the traumas endured by the population due to the excessive bombings conducted by the Allies.<sup>140</sup> This shows and demands acknowledgement for how there has been loss and pain on both sides of the war, even if Nazi Germany was clearly morally wrong. All loss should be acknowledged.

The second important characteristic is given by Bosse Lagerqvist,<sup>141</sup> who uses the example of industrial heritage in Sweden to show that the AHD can itself not initiate these museums, meaning that such a museal project has to come from ‘the people’ themselves. Even if a historian can display what happened in history, it is often the stories and experiences of the people who actually witnessed or were part of these black pages that must share their stories. This means that a museal project on the *polititionele acties* for example, should strive not to ‘display’ stories from the victims of the war, but assist these people in displaying their own story. The AHD will then eventually comply and ‘authorize’ the heritage presented by the non-expert, if the exhibition has the desired effect. Through that way, a marginalized group, especially in the time of modern media, can still impact the national narrative.

The third aspect shared by these museums can be found in their tone and their frame. The museums try to create recognition of past traumas, not re-ignite the controversy. This results in museums of reconciliation being careful of their frame; they do not focus on the perpetrator, but on the victim. Through that, they try to steer towards acceptance and understanding instead of blame and aggression. The museums explain the standpoint of the hurt group(s), and with that also explain where some aggression and emotional responses might come

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<sup>138</sup> See different articles in: Diana Walters, Daniel Laven, Peter Davis, eds., *Heritage and Peacebuilding* (Boydell & Brewer, 2017). Good examples can be found in: Peter van den Dungen, “The heritage of Peace: the Importance of Peace Museums for the Development of a Culture of Peace”; Tatjana Cvjetičanin and Aida Vežić, “Museum, Peace and Reconciliation: The Impact of the Balkan Museum Network”; Timothy Gachanga, “Transforming Conflict Through Peace Cultures”; Elena Monicelli, “Challenging the Roots of Prejudice: The Monte Sole Case Study”; and Lotte Hughes. “Mau Mau: the Divisive Heritage of Liberation Struggle in Kenya”.

<sup>139</sup> Walters, Laven and Davis, eds., *Heritage and Peacebuilding*.

<sup>140</sup> Susanne Hagemann. “The Bomb and the City: Presentations of War in German City Museums” in *Does War Belong in Museums?: The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions*, ed Wolfgang Muchitsch (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013),.

<sup>141</sup> Bosse Lagerqvist. “Conflict or Reconciliation? Industrial Heritage Practices at a Turning Point” in *Heritage and Peacebuilding*. eds. Diana Walters, Daniel Laven and Peter Davis. (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017).



from. The goal pursued by these museums is reconciliation and eventually non-remembrance, not what some would call ‘justice’ in the form of reparation payments or criminal persecutions. This also means that there is not much generalization present in these museums. They often tell the stories of individuals and their experiences, which are easier to identify with and understand for outsiders trying to learn of dark pages in history.

The problem with museums is that they are small, have a limited geographical reach, and are visited by only a select few, often interested, group of people. And while good marketing can have a positive influence in some cases, the fact remains that a museum displaying intergenerational traumas and excessive forms of violence is not suited and/or attractive for many different audiences. Many war memorial museums struggle with that same problem: visitors often come for the ‘spectacle’ of war, and will not visit museums that are too serious or confrontational.<sup>142</sup> This does not mean that museums cannot play a part in the solution however. In line with Lagerqvist’s article, a museum or exhibition that aims to improve the ‘official’ history can already change the AHD by shifting the collective memory of ‘experts’. In turn, even though that is a long process, the narrative presented by the museum will gradually be added to the ‘official’ history created through the authorization of the AHD ‘experts’ themselves. A museum has no direct impact on the collective memory, but can still have influence on those who design the ‘official’ history through school curricula and the Dutch Canon. The Netherlands have already started a process like this regarding the transatlantic slave trade, with an exhibition in the *Rijksmuseum*. This discussion has already sparked discussion among historians, journalists and activists, which will probably result in a change of ‘official’ history. An exhibition regarding *de Oost* is also in the making and will be presented in 2022.

Additionally museums, even if they do not directly change the ‘official’ history, could still contribute to speed up this process. This can be done through two different ways. First and most obvious would be the requirement for schools to visit these museums and/or exhibitions. The tactics that museums can employ are much more extensive than just text: They can use image, sound and space as extensions of the portrayed stories, creating an experience that is more immersive and impressive than text or a narrated video clip. The problem arises that it is as good as impossible to require school to do that. It would bring costs that not every school could afford, and would logistically be quite problematic. Even while the Netherlands is a small country, this does not mean that it is possible for schools to bring their classes to Amsterdam and back again within a reasonable amount of time.

What could be employed however, are some museal tactics in the curricula or the Canon themselves. Once again, it might be difficult for school curricula to share these complexities due to their limitations. Curricula could refer to the Dutch Canon however, which in turn could utilize the museal tactics described above. A website cannot use space of course, but could still employ the other

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<sup>142</sup> Per B. Rekdal, “About the Beauty of War and the Attractivity of Violence.”

tactics that were mentioned: sharing stories that are honest, originate from people who have experienced or feel the repercussions of the dark pages, and utilizing a tone and frame that fits well with the serious character of the discussed dark pages. The focus should not so much be on the ‘wrong’ or ‘right’, since that would either result in more controversy or the distractive language that is used in the ‘official’ history as it is written today, but it should portray the human experiences and feelings of loss and pain. This would then contribute to more understanding of the different societal positions in the Netherlands, instead of having a blinding effect. The Dutch Canon could directly employ the knowledge experts in peacebuilding museums by collaborating with museums that portray stories of these dark pages, such as the Rijksmuseum in the Netherlands, or the Srebrenica Memorial Museum in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Combining their knowledge on portraying difficult stories and the pedagogical and historical knowledge of the committees that are tasked with writing the Canon would then result in a comprehensive but detailed and engaging history that would contribute to understanding and reconciliation.

#### ‘Inventing’ heritage

Museums and museal tactics do contribute to reconciliation, but cannot on their own achieve this change. This is done through the Authorized Heritage Discourse giving value to the presented heritage, and eventually integrating it with the ‘official’ history. The ‘official’ history has to shift towards a narrative that provides the room and understanding needed to make a move towards reconciliation. Regarding an event already in the cultural memory, this would mean that extra effort is needed due to its embeddedness in the national narrative itself. A new narrative should consistently be presented through different means. Turning back to the *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*, we can find that its seventh chapter<sup>143</sup> discusses the role that a public memory plays when wanting to achieve reconciliation.

In this chapter, Marc Howard Ross argues in the same line, claiming that “Collective memories are rarely directly malleable and simply telling people they are wrong is rarely productive”,<sup>144</sup> and that a good strategy to move towards reconciliation is “not to deny the past, but to ‘contain’ it”.<sup>145</sup> Ross proposes multiple ways of shifting the public memory towards a more inclusive variant, most of which can be found in the aforementioned museum-strategies. Ross’ fifth and sixth propositions are not yet discussed however. Where the first four (inclusiveness, acknowledgement, focusing on a shared future and disregarding stereotypes)<sup>146</sup> deal with *presenting* a changed and more inclusive collective memory, the last two propositions are about *creating* a shared heritage on which new collective memories are built.

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<sup>143</sup> Marc Howard Ross, “The Politics of Memory and Peacebuilding,” in *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*, ed. Roger MacGinty (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 98

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 99

Ross argues that the invention of shared rituals and the creation of an inclusive symbolic landscape are strong tools in changing narratives. The creation of new tradition can actively contribute to the reconciliation needed for eventual non-remembrance. This brings us back to Eric Hobsbawm who was introduced in the first chapter. Hobsbawm shows how the invention of tradition can have multiple functions, like establishing or legitimizing institutions, or the spreading of beliefs.<sup>147</sup> Ross uses Hobsbawm's idea and operationalizes it in a way in which it could contribute to reconciliation. By developing common rituals and expression, a communal culture is developed which would lay the focus on unification instead of division. Examples of this would be a communal memorial, or ritual feast. Ross essentially proposes to utilize religious tactics to create a new chain of memory, which brings us back to Hervieu-Léger's theory on how the 'religious' could be found outside of 'religion'.

Additionally, the creation of an inclusive symbolic landscape (which is a religious tactic as well) adds to a collective heritage through the creation of new or change of existing monuments and rituals. Ross' two points from a memory studies perspective can additionally be understood through Nora's *lieux de mémoire* discussed in the first chapter. The creation of new and adaption of existing *lieux de mémoire* (which is achieved through AHD) will eventually influence and change the collective memory and national narrative, after which the 'official' history will also follow. In the Netherlands, an example of how to employ this tactic would be celebrating a feast such as *Keti Koti*, as well as the memorial that accompanies it, as an official, free holiday. This would make people more engaged with the collective memory of slavery and make sure that people at least acknowledge the pain still left from the transatlantic slave trade once a year.

Regarding the Indonesian war for independence, not only dealing with the national shame regarding the *politioenele acties*, but also daring to acknowledge the pain felt by many people on the Dutch side through a ritualized memorial, could eventually soothe the pain that is still felt and make these subjects open for discussion. A remembrance of Srebrenica on a national level, of which plans for a memorial monument in The Hague are already being made, would help create a better image on the complexity of racial and religious relations, as well as criticizing the populist image of the Islam being a 'threat' to Europe. From there on out, a new narrative can be accepted as 'official' history.

When these stories are ritualized, they can be officialised. This would not shift the narrative instantly, especially with regards to a dark page that is embedded in the cultural memory as opposed to the communicative memory. But as Hobsbawm shows us, after a few generations, the collective memory can change in such a way that there is a sense of continuation, leading up to less societal tension, reconciliation and eventually Volf's non-remembrance. Creating a climate in which such an 'official' history can be accepted is indeed more complex than only changing what is written in 'official' history. The written 'official' history taught at schools does contribute to misunderstanding, but

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<sup>147</sup> Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", 9

changing can only be a part of the process of reconciliation and non-remembrance.

Before this chapter is concluded, it must be mentioned that these processes also have a downside. The invention of tradition, and changing of histories, also brings the potential of abuse of power. Hobsbawm talks about how German National Socialism has used these tactics in their rise to power, and many examples exist of memorial museums that, even though they are framed as inclusive, show very one-sided stories. Examples of this are the House of Terror in Hungary,<sup>148</sup> or different military museums in Peru.<sup>149</sup> These museums extensively focus on the suffering and heroic actions of only one particular side of an armed struggle or conflict, without admitting own mistakes. Ritualization and heritagization should thus not only be seen as potential assets in shifting an ‘official’ history and collective memory towards reconciliation, but also in shifting a collective memory towards more extreme forms of disregard, tension and distrust.

### Conclusion

Shifting a collective memory is a complex and slow process. In order to change an ‘official’ history towards a more inclusive one, different tactics must be employed. It is clear however that the overall goal, should be to shift the collective memory. One of the tactics that can be employed to facilitate this is using exhibitions in museums. These have proven to be good media in displaying emotion and visualizing invisible inequalities or traumas through the portrayal of stories from individuals. These museums should produce an inclusive and honest portrayal of their subject, acknowledging both the rights and wrongs of all involved groups. Additionally, some museal tactics could be used in the Dutch Canon to speed up this process. Not only should the ‘official’ history taught to children change, but the goal must also be to create new *lieux de mémoire*, inventing new traditions and ‘creating’ a continuation with the past that eventually facilitates reconciliation and non-remembrance. Using these tactics, an ‘official’ history and collective memory can completely change to a more inclusive one within a few generations, which is in itself both a powerful tool for reconciliation, and a strong weapon against reconciliation as well.

### 3.3: Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the data provided in chapter 2, rooting itself in the theories discussed in the first chapter. It used Asad’s theories on human rights as a floating signifier to highlight how collective memories can have a similar effect: Due to their presentation as ‘history’ and not ‘memory’, they can create a blind spot for students who learn about history by not mentioning all relevant details regarding dark pages in history. For different reasons, history mediums can provide a frame that is too one-sided which can in turn result in discussion and

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<sup>148</sup> Amy Sodaro. *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018) Chapter 3: The House of Terror: “The Only One of Its Kind”

<sup>149</sup> Cynthia E. Milton. *Conflicted Memory : Military Cultural Interventions and the Human Rights Era in Peru*. (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018)

societal tension. This results in an interpretation of history that might blind students for certain other point of view, or repercussions of those histories that are still relevant today (like the social and economic status of people descendant from slaves for example).

It was discussed how reconciliation in these cases might be necessary to rid the social tensions that are still present. This turns out to be complex, especially regarding the collective memory of the transatlantic slave trade, due to how it has been framed in the 'official' history. The impression is created that reconciliation has already occurred, even though the efforts that have been made in this regard are not considered to be sufficient yet by those descendant from slaves. The created frame additionally shifts the blame for these societal tensions towards the people descendant from slaves, which creates a collective memory that results in a divide in the Dutch society through framing the descendants from slaves as a 'them' who seek to change Dutch cultural traditions.

To create more stability, it is important to first honestly display the past in a frame that represents all involved peoples and points of view to create understanding between these different groups. This is a difficult task however. The second part of this chapter explores one theory on how this can be achieved. It explores how museum and museal tactics can be a part of a needed process of reconciliation. Through focussing on individual stories that do not aim to create blame or guilt, but do aim to display suffering and difficulty, understanding can be created between different groups. It is important to acknowledge that conflict often has losers on both sides, and that the suffering of different parties is discussed in a complex case like the *politieonele acties* for example. These tactics do not only have to be employed by museums. Even though museums have the means and the physical space to utilize these tactics best, some of these tactics could be used for (additional material for) history curricula. This would best be done in cooperation with museum professionals.

Lastly, reconciliation and understanding could benefit from the creation of communal heritage. Religious tactics, such as collective rituals or symbolic landscapes would create a stronger feeling of community instead of a divide. The collective memorial of the abolishment of slavery by making *Keti Koti* a national holiday in the Netherlands would be a good example. Not only does this day focus on a more ritualistic memorial akin to the memorial of WWII in the Netherlands, but the festivities accompanying this would make the holiday a strong candidate. The creation of new *lieux de mémoire* like this could encourage different societal groups to listen to the 'other'.

## Conclusions and further research

This thesis has covered a lot of different subjects towards one goal: Understanding how collective memory created through ‘official’ history can create ‘blind spots’ in society which actively contribute to some social tensions. Additionally, the thesis identified tactics to combat this.

The collective memory of the Netherlands that in this thesis is called the ‘official’ history, is the collective memory that children learn at school through their history curriculum and the Dutch Canon, and the collective memory endorsed by the Dutch government. This memory lies at the basis of what children learn about the Netherlands and its society: It explains where certain mentalities have come from and how the Netherlands became what it is today. Rooting itself in theories on collective memory, like Nora’s *lieux de mémoire*, and the Assmanns’ distinction between communicative and cultural memory, this thesis analysed three different moments or periods in Dutch history that are today described as ‘dark pages’: The period of the transatlantic slave trade, the *politioenele acties* in Indonesia, and the fall of Srebrenica and the genocide following Dutchbat’s surrender. These moments and periods have sparked a lot of controversy in the past and still do so to this day.

Using memory studies and critical heritage studies, I showed how exactly collective memory is created, how it is linked to heritage and how it can be considered as ‘religious’, even if it is not necessarily explicitly belonging to religion. It argued that the idea of ‘history’ is often a misnomer, and how this can cause confusion among the children who learn about history: due to a perceived impartiality of history books, it is forgotten that the ‘official’ history is more akin to collective memory than to the objective ideal of ‘history’. Failing to discuss this creates a one-sided idea of history that in these cases focus more on our contemporary ideals than on historical context and other perspectives. Using Asad’s and Abu-Lughod’s theories on human rights and how they can be used as a ‘floating signifier’, it discussed how this process also happens with regards to history. Due to the focus that the ‘official’ history has on contemporary moral ideals and the achievement thereof, some crucial aspects of history might be ‘forgotten’, resulting in blind spots in the collective memory.

Taking these ideas, this thesis conducted a close reading of the Dutch Canon and one selected history curriculum. It was discussed how exactly the discussed dark pages were portrayed, which differed in all different cases. The transatlantic slave trade focused primarily on its abolition through the language used. It is constantly discussed how slavery *was* considered normal, how other European nations did the same, how African kingdoms did the same, and how eventually the resistance to this practice grew in the Netherlands. Discussing resistance to slavery and the abolition almost more than the actual practices and economical and societal consequences of the transatlantic slave trade lays a stronger focus on the positive. The students (could) get the idea that slavery is ‘solved’ without any significant consequences, even though slavery still has effect today on the economic, social and sadly even ethnic statuses of the people who are descendant from slaves.

Regarding the *politioenele acties*, the ‘official’ history is far more self-critical. It mainly focusses on how the Dutch soldiers were doing wrong, laying an emphasis on contemporary ideas that oppose colonialism. What is forgotten however is the entire other side of the story. The Dutch are portrayed as war criminals, without a mention of the *Bersiap* period, the ‘normality’ of colonialism at the time (even though a similar thing *was* done regarding the slave trade), nor the perspective that the Dutch and KNIL soldiers had. This creates a one-sided memory that has become difficult to discuss, since the Dutch soldiers are portrayed as war criminals and should thus not be listened to.

Finally, the fall of Srebrenica is discussed. Especially its absence from the school curriculum is noteworthy, considering its impact on Dutch politics and perspective on peacekeeping missions, as well as the collective memory of Islam that does often not portray brutalities that are committed against Muslim populations. The Canon focusses mainly on the Dutch soldiers and their suffering, foreshadowing how the peacekeeping mission was doomed to fail from the start and discussing how the UN failed Dutchbat. The suffering of the Bosnian Muslims is not mentioned as extensively as would be expected. It is even discussed how commanders on both sides of the war have been convicted for war crimes, which does not only teach children the two-sidedness of conflict, but through discussing it only here also creates the impression that that two-sidedness was not present in the Indonesian war for independence for example.

The last chapter discusses these cases once again, combining them with the theories that were introduced in the first chapter. It is portrayed how these ‘official’ histories create a collective memory that contributes to social tensions, due to the portrayed one-sidedness. Especially the collective memory on the transatlantic slave trade seems problematic: It happened outside of the communicative memory, and is thus harder to judge or question. This leads to some social tension that cannot easily be combatted. One side in the debate has learned that the conflict is ‘solved’ and forgiven, whereas another side still feels the social and economic effects of the period of slavery. Through discussing theories on reconciliation, it is found that in the discussed cases, this is still missing. Reconciliation is still needed to combat these social tensions, which is hindered by the framing employed by the ‘official’ history.

Finally, the last chapter discusses options to reach this reconciliation and eventual ‘non-remembrance’. It is displayed how museums and museal tactics can have a positive effect on creating understanding between different groups who are in a societal conflict. Through the portrayal of the experience of the ‘other’ rather than a ‘factual’ description of the past, a stronger sense of empathy can be created which would open different groups up for conversation. Important is that these portrayals are always honest and focus more on the suffering of a victim than the actions of the transgressor. The goal is to create understanding and not blame. Admitting and portraying past wrongs is difficult however, since it can possibly spark up controversy. The complexity of these situations can already be seen through the reluctance to initiate these changes or the doubts found with the publisher of the history curriculum to contribute to this research. This task should

thus not fall upon publishers, but be made by an independent team, possibly aided by museum professionals. The Dutch Canon seems to be a good option for this, even though it is not completely independent.

Additionally, reconciliation and understanding could also be created through communal heritage. Religious tactics such as the creation of rituals, feasts and symbolic landscapes that emphasize shared interests and address the societal pains that are still felt can contribute to a stronger feeling of community, which creates room for the discussion of the black pages in history with more understanding and less hostility.

The ‘official’ history of the Netherlands can have a negative effect on contemporary societal discussions, actively increasing misunderstanding through the creation of a one-sided collective memory that focusses too much on complying with our contemporary moral ideals than discussing the actual difficulties in fear to spark up controversy. This makes reconciliation for past atrocities more difficult. There are ways to combat this however: The use of museal and religious tactics could create more understanding and a stronger feeling of community, opposing the one-sided and divisive collective memory that sometimes is created by the ‘official’ history. More research can be done however. First of all, a larger research should be conducted that compares more school curricula: Different publishers, different levels of education and different age groups should all be compared to create a stronger image of what is the ‘official’ history of the Netherlands. Additionally, existing monuments and public rituals can be investigated to display what is and what is not considered ‘rememberable’ by the Dutch state to strengthen this interpretation of the ‘official’ history even more.

A set of interviews or another means of ‘boots-on-the-ground’ research could also be conducted to actually confirm these interpretations of the ‘official’ history: How do students and ex-students remember their history lessons and how do they interpret the contemporary discussions on these dark pages? This would also be needed to actually operationalize the described museal tactics in order to move towards reconciliation: It must be known what exactly the ‘gaps’ in understanding are.

Finally, it might be worth investigating the wedge between the communicative and cultural memories more. It is clear that the cultural memory is more difficult to reconcile, but how exactly do tactics in creating this reconciliation work? How do they differ from reconciliation for a conflict that is present in the communicative memory? How can apologies be made for a history that has a more mythical status? A research into this might help in solving more similar societal tension around the word, or at least help explain them.



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