

Dutch tolerance, innocence and color-blindness: an analysis of the Dutch slavery past in educational history textbooks

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Abstract

This research centers on the Dutch national identity of innocence, tolerance and color-blindness, as articulated in the Dutch slavery past. It examines whether we can discern a shift in the narrative of tolerance and innocence that is reflective of the increased awareness- and critique of race(ism) in Dutch society, emanating from recent years of public debate. It does so by analysing the textual representation of the transatlantic slave trade, slavery and the Dutch role in these practices in two series of history textbooks for Dutch secondary education, stemming from 2009 and 2019. Relying mostly on qualitative tools, this research employs elements from discourse and linguistic analysis to illustrate which textual elements serve to *uphold* or *disrupt* the national narrative of tolerance, innocence and color-blindness. The research concludes by stating that the current portrayal of the Dutch slavery past in history textbooks past does not demonstrate a *significant* shift away from its depiction in the 2009 books. Therefore, it does not reflect a *substantial* change in the national narrative of tolerance, innocence and color-blindness.

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Introduction

Scholars, activists, artists and 'everyday' people alike have long been pointing to the racism and discrimination prevalent in Dutch society (Essed & Hoving, 2015; Hondius, 2009, 2015; Hira, 2012; Wekker, 2016). Recently, however, it seems as though calls for awareness and change are reaching further and gaining a bigger audience. This development is, in part, retraceable to a series of events to do with race and discrimination that have occurred in the Netherlands in the last decade.

A significant development is the debate surrounding the figure of Zwarte Piet (Black Pete). Despite dating back to the 20th century, the Zwarte Piet discussion only started making waves in Dutch society around the year 2011. In 2011, activists began wearing "Zwarte Piet is Racisme" ("Black Pete is racism") t-shirts during the holiday's annual parade and anti-Zwarte Piet activist Quinsy Gario was arrested by the police. Two years later, the discussion gained real traction across the country (and the globe) when a UN umbrella group openly condemned Zwarte Piet and initiated an international investigation into the tradition (Wekker, 2016). Occurrences have, additionally, taken place in the political arena, as can be seen by the emergence of several political parties that are explicitly anti-discriminatory / anti-racist in nature, and highly attentive to equality, diversity, and inclusivity. These parties include 'DENK', initiated in 2015, and 'Artikel 1' / 'Bij1', created in 2016. Noteworthy, too, is the release of tv-documentary 'Verdacht' ('Suspicious) in the beginning of 2019, which centered on racial profiling in the Netherlands at the hands of the police.

The examples listed above reflect only a portion of the numerous developments that have led to increased social awareness and contemporary public debate on issues of race(ism) and discrimination. It is crucial, still, to reiterate that these debates do not address the global troubles of race(ism) and discrimination. They concentrate on the particularities of Dutch racism, discrimination and, in extension of that, tolerance. Moreover, they focus on traditions and the country's history of dealing with said themes. With that, these debates take up questions around the Dutch national identity. Indeed, where it relates to race(ism) and discrimination, the national narrative in the Netherlands is quite outspoken. Dutch identity has long been regarded as one of tolerance, innocence, color-blindness, and anti-racism. Tolerance, for one, is seen, both domestically and abroad, as one of the defining characteristics of the Dutch (Schuyt, 2001; Wekker, 2016; Essed & Hoving, 2011). Part of this tolerance is the supposed inherent and ongoing inclination towards color-blindness and ethical behavior, and the inability to discriminate on the basis of race. And racism, arguably, is a practice that does not exist in the Netherlands.

It is precisely this national narrative that seems to be faced with growing opposition. It has been / is challenged for misrepresenting the actual racism that occurs - and has occurred - in Dutch society, and for distorting the longstanding Dutch tradition to deny or ignore it (Bosma, 2012; Essed & Hoving, 2015; Oostindie, 2011; Vasta 2015). It begs the question, then, whether we can detect a change in the perceived Dutch national identity of tolerance, innocence, and color-blindness, reflective of recent societal developments and debates on race(ism) in the Netherlands.

To investigate whether we can discern a shift in the national narrative, I will look towards the Dutch slavery past and, in particular, how it is represented in educational history books. The Dutch

involvement in the transatlantic slave trade (TAS) and slavery is a suitable area of investigation because it is part of the nation's history and, thereby, identity, and because it is the birthplace of current articulations of race(ism) and discrimination in the Netherlands (Williams, 1994). Indeed, school, in particular is a good place to look for articulations of national identity because it is an institution whose function traditionally has been to educate the nation about the nation.¹

Admittedly, the attention that is paid to the Dutch slavery past in schools has been a hot topic for quite some time, with critics claiming it is incorrectly and under-represented in secondary education at best (Weiner, 2014; Heilbron, 2019; Stipriaan, van, 2007). While there is a lot of research on history education in general or in certain foreign countries (Araújo & Rodríguez Maeso, 2012; Carretero 2011; Davies, 2011; Fuchs, 2011; Grindel, 2017; Zajda, 2015), not many analyses have been conducted of Dutch educational history textbooks (exceptions being: Vos, de, 2009; Weiner, 2014 e.g.). There are scholars who have studied the influence of the public debate on slavery on classroom materials (Jans, 2017), and those who have examined representations of slavery in Dutch fictional children's books (Dessauvagie, 2013). Existing analyses of articulations of the Dutch slavery past in educational textbooks are either purely quantitative, or mostly qualitative but none bring Dutch national identity into the analysis (Hogervorst, 2006; Hoekstra, 2018). That is where this research is different. Indeed, by highlighting the textual representation of the Dutch slavery past in educational history textbooks, this research gives an insight into how the TAS and enslavement are viewed in contemporary Dutch society, and how the Dutch approach issues of race(ism) and discrimination more broadly. Thereby, it hinges on the Dutch self-image as being one of tolerance, innocence, color-blindness and anti-racism. By comparing two series of textbooks, and detecting any changes in portrayal, this research, thus, contributes to current debates on the Dutch national identity.

The first part of the analysis covers a discussion of the textual elements that sustain the current national identity, and asks the question: in what ways is the national narrative of tolerance, innocence and color-blindness upheld? **Chapter 1 focuses on how the Dutch participation in the slave trade and poor treatment of enslaved Africans is justified, and how it enables the Dutch to maintain their innocence. Chapter 2 speaks to the ways in which Dutch traders / slave owners are (partially) freed of blame for their actions. Chapter 3 discusses how slavery, the slave trade and the abuse of Enslaved Africans are minimized. What follows in the second part of the analysis is a consideration of the textual elements that depart from the Dutch self-image, and asks the question: in what ways is the national narrative of tolerance, innocence and color-blindness disrupted?** Chapter 4 elaborates on the space dedicated to racism and the legacy of slavery in contemporary Dutch society, and chapter 5 examines the (explicit) ways in which the Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and slavery is recognized. Subsequently, the conclusion provides a summary of the findings, and an answer to whether they reflect a shift in/away from the Dutch national narrative of tolerance, innocence and color-blindness, similar to recent years of public debate.

Theoretical framework & methodology

Slavery, colonialism and contemporary racism

¹ I discuss this point more elaborately in the theoretical framework.

Though the connection is often overlooked, there is a (strong) correlation between the centuries-old Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave trade (and colonialism) and the contemporary discourse and praxis on race and discrimination in Dutch society. In fact, it centers on the social, cultural, economic, and political legacies of slavery and colonialism. To understand this process fully, it is useful to bring in the work of a few post-colonial scholars.

While the official period of cross-Atlantic slave trade and European colonial domination may have ended, people of colour (POC) / non-European people continue to live under the oppression and constrictions set in place during this time (Bhambra, 2014; Grosfoguel, 2011; Said, 1978; Quijano, 2007).² In fact, it is possible to make a distinction between the domination and exploitation experienced under (the explicit political order of) classic colonialism and the (racist) oppression experienced today, stemming from this time. The latter is also referred to as 'coloniality' and described by Quijano as "‘colonial situations’ in the present period in which colonial administrations have almost been eradicated from the capitalist world-system" (p. 171) 'Colonial situations', in this scenario, can be understood as "the cultural, political, sexual and economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racial/ethnic groups..." (Grosfoguel, 2011: 15).

The planting and passing on of oppressive narratives -and praxis- during the period of colonialism and slave trade worked through mechanisms, such as 'mental colonialism' or 'colonization of the mind / culture'. In these processes, the (cultural) beliefs of the dominated were expropriated and replaced by the ideas of the oppressors (Walsh, 2012; Quijano, 2007). Acting "in the interior of the imagination", local epistemologies and cosmologies became intertwined with those of the rulers (ibid.). These discriminating views, moreover, were reproduced extensively by Europeans/Western people and, thus, gained significant popularity and authority (Said, 1978). In recent years, Dr. Gloria Wekker has described in more detail how these narratives and ideas were -and are- able to live on in the minds of individuals through a concept called 'the cultural archive'. Drawing on Said (1978), Wekker defines the cultural archive as " ... the memories, the knowledge, and affect with regard to race that were deposited within metropolitan populations, and the power relations embedded within them." (2016: 19). She explains that these racial notions can be found not at a geographical location but in the minds and behaviors of people first and foremost. The cultural archive is often -not always, but often- located in the subconscious and works its way into policy, organizational rules, and popular culture.

As such, these concepts help to illustrate how oppressive (racial) notions were able to persevere for centuries and how they continue to do so today.³ One can, thereby, conclude that colonialism and enslavement have played a significant part in the constitution of the modern world, including the continuation and/or intensification of racist discourse and praxis. This means that the Dutch

² An example of a contemporary form of oppression that is a consequence of slave trade and colonial order is the notion of white, European/western superiority in contrast to the inferiority of non-European POC. (Said)

³ Still, the legacy of colonialism and slavery is not limited to the establishment of racist relations. Slave trade and colonial situations have also impacted the organization / distribution of work of the capitalist world system and, by disrupting social patterns, gender relations and local cosmologies, have re-articulated particular European understandings of gender and sex (Quijano, 2007; Lugones, 2007 respectively).

slave trade (and colonialism), too, has undeniably left its mark on Dutch society, national identity, and contemporary discussions on race(ism), discrimination and tolerance.

The way in which the transatlantic slave trade and the Dutch contribution to it are currently represented is indicative of the extent to which they are acknowledged/minimized, and to which responsibility is taken for the physical/emotional abuse and racist behavior inflicted by the Dutch. Importantly, they also tell us something about acknowledgement of *contemporary* racism, tolerance, innocence and colorblindness in Dutch society.

The importance of history education

Still, why does it matter what *is* and what *is not* represented in educational history textbooks? What is the importance of history education in the first place? What is taught in textbooks is significant because of the role that institutional education plays in society and in someone's life. High school is an extremely formative experience that takes place at a time when individuals are young and impressionable. Yet, what is taught is far from arbitrary for another reason. Institutional education does not revolve simply about conveying facts and skills. Instead, as it teaches students certain narratives, tells them about 'real' knowledge, as well as their own role in producing these 'truths', it is not only a cultural but also a political act (Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000).

Certainly, schools, through the selection of classroom materials and teachers, get to stipulate what counts as legitimate knowledge, what is valuable enough to learn; which voices, events and memories should be included, and which are acceptable to leave out (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Surely, these inclusions and omissions have important repercussions.⁴ Textbooks in particular, have been granted an authoritative position for containing the values and ideas that societies expect students to know (Foster, 2011). As Apple reminds us, "Textbooks are...conceived, designed and authored by real people with real interests" (1993: 46). Hence, rather than being neutral items, they can be construed as powerful tools able to be used for specific purposes.

Focussing on the subject of history in particular, textbooks and schools are then able to determine which stories about the past are worth *remembering* and which are not. They transmit that information about a society which is deemed relevant, and, as such, can be viewed as sites for the creation of what comes to be the collective memory of a nation. (Fuchs & Otto, 2013; Grindel, 2017; Müller, 2018; Stearns, Seixas & Wineburg, 2000). This process of utilizing (specific parts of) the past to further specific present-day ends is called 'politics of memory' (Fuchs & Otto, 2013). One such goal to pursue could be the construction of a national identity, which has traditionally been considered an important feature of history education (Foster, 2011; Zajda, 2015; Montgomery, 2006; Fuchs & Otto, 2013; Grever & Stuurman, 2007; Carretero, 2011, Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).⁵

Building on that, Seixas argues that history classes taught in school, have the ability to influence social change (2000). The reasoning for this is twofold. An initial important factor centers on ha-

⁴ Such as simplifying the past. See for example: Barton and Levstik, 2004.

⁵ Through history lessons, stories can be told about the nation, other nations, and the relationship between nations, and hereby an official narrative and self-image can be constructed.

ving a narrative grounded in history that is able to support the particular cause. Without it, calling for any social or national purpose is futile. Moreover, it is crucial that students are able to place this potential social change in a historical context, for it does not make sense otherwise. Thereby, if aware of their potential, “schools can operate to shape the consciousness which guides social change over the next generation” (2000: 34).

As such, what we are taught in high school -what becomes part of our memory- is not erratic, and significant power lies in the (history) textbooks used in class. As textbooks are able to influence one’s view of the world, one’s ‘knowledge’ of history and society at large, they must also have the ability to shape a person’s racial notions. This is a crucial point to recognize, as it are thoughts and ideas that largely determine one’s behavior -one’s activity or passivity-, the results of which can be found not just in popular culture, unwritten rules or knowledge of everyday life, but also in policy. Hereby, it impacts people’s lived experience. Moreover, what is taught in (history) class is taught not just to one person or a handful of people, but to an entire generation. They are the people that are going to make up and be active agents in society for the next few decades.⁶ Still, it is (history) education’s potential to shape and create (more) tolerant, empathetic attitudes, which go on to form the basis of policies for peace and understanding, that is perhaps the most salient. (Pingel, 2010). Indeed, it illustrates why conducting this type of research is an important undertaking.

Methodology

Before anything else, this research is centered on the content of textbooks as opposed to didactics. That is to say, it examines the text itself and not the pedagogy behind it. The method used to measure the textual content is a combination of quantitative tools and qualitative analysis, with a focus on the latter.

Quantitative analysis employs relatively strict methods that produce quantifiable data. Here, *numbers* are used to describe what exists. (Gray, 2007). A widespread advantage of this type of research is the possibility of counting or storing the findings on a computer, and easily reproducing them. In textbook analysis, in particular, quantitative methods can efficiently point to the emphasis of a text. For my research this means that I am able to easily determine whether attention is paid to the Dutch involvement in the TAS and enslavement, as well as to the role of racism and slavery in contemporary Dutch society. It gives an indication of the degree to which responsibility is taken by the Dutch, enabling me to reflect on whether the textbooks display a continuation of the innocence that is supposedly inherent to the Dutch. Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, relies more heavily on values and interpretation to find a text’s messages and underlying assumptions (Pingel, 2010). Hereby, it is able to identify subtleties of *meaning* that quantitative analysis is not. By offering the possibility of close reading, qualitative research tools provide more detailed and nuanced findings, substantiating and strengthening an initial interpretation. Individually, either approach yields valuable results, but combined they make for an even stronger textbook analysis (ibid.). For this reason, they are used in tandem.

⁶ We can see, then, that the information and messages conveyed through education become part of the cultural archive once more.

In terms of quantitative analysis, I will focus on the space allotted in the textbooks to 1. the Dutch partaking in the transatlantic slave trade and enslavement, as well as 2. the role of racism, slavery and the transatlantic slave trade in contemporary Dutch society. In doing so, I will concentrate on the number of pages (full / half / quarter) dedicated to these topics. Additionally, I will measure the frequency with which the terms 'slave' or 'enslaved' are employed to refer to enslaved Africans. By doing so, I am employing the quantitative research category: 'frequency' (ibid.).

Besides these quantitative units of analysis, the majority of this research is conducted using qualitative tools. For the qualitative portion of the analysis, I will make use of principles of discourse analysis as well as elements of more general linguistic analysis. Discourse analysis looks at the multiple ways in which language shapes our social and cultural realities. It centers on how language brings particular notions or versions of events into being by employing certain words, rhetorical strategies, grammatical constructions etc. (Willig, 2018). Thus, discourse analysis assumes the constructive and performative nature of language and discourse⁷, and argues that it forms the basis of how we make sense or 'meaning' of the world (ibid.). Unsurprisingly, then, the main interest of the discourse analyst is: language.

This research takes an approach very similar to the one described above. However, rather than abiding by strict qualitative analytical guidelines, this analysis is grounded in a broader discursive theoretical framework, namely 1. the discursive, constructive perspective on language mentioned above, which enables me to see how events or practices during the transatlantic slave trade are portrayed (constructed) differently than what is accurate or to be expected. For example, slave labor being described as effortless for enslaved Africans, by stating their ability to 'resist' illness, instead of exhausting and strenuous. I focus on the use and effect of several other linguistic / stylistic elements, in a similar fashion. I illustrate: how the use of certain lexicon (nouns and adjectives) can minimize the actions of European traders and/or slave owners by emphasizing the normality of the transatlantic slave trade. Moreover, I demonstrate how words can invoke an emotion or feeling. To that, I, for example, highlight how expressions, metaphoric language, as well as the use of explicit/implicit verbs can create and enhance a sense of understanding or sympathy (for European traders) or imminent danger. Both of which can, in turn, minimize and/or justify actions committed by the Europeans. But I also show how they can imply certain characteristics, such as the supposed barbarism of enslaved Africans. Moreover, I point out how the use of passive/active voice impacts whether/which actor receives blame for a certain action. Finally, I demonstrate how similes (comparisons), euphemisms, and a focus on fractions or percentages instead of real numbers can work to minimize an event or circumstance. For example, how the ambiguity of displaying the amount of deceased enslaved Africans in percentages keeps implicit, and thereby minimizes, the full extent of the harm done. The other part of the discursive methodological framework of this analysis is 2. an understanding of 'meaning' as something that is assigned to a discourse by language users in the process of 'interpretation' or 'comprehension' (Dijk, van, 1997: 9). Additionally, this approach allows me to read between the lines and go beyond the words of the text.

Research material

⁷ A particular way of representing the world

The materials under analysis are educational history textbooks designed for secondary education in the Netherlands. Workbooks or additional teaching materials, such as online content, are not included, because they are not the main source of information on the slave trade and slavery. The textbooks range in educational level (VMBO, HAVO, VWO etc.), school year (books meant for pupils from year 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6), and are mostly written in Dutch. However, also included are a few English history textbooks used in the bilingual education track, which is a popular educational option in Dutch high schools (Kaap, van der & Visser, 2016). The books analyzed stem from the four most popular publishing houses for educational history books for secondary school in the Netherlands: ThiemeMeulenhoff, Noordhoff, Malmberg, and WalburgPers Educatief (ibid.). Hereby, they represent the books that are used by the largest number of teachers and pupils, and the books whose content have the biggest impact.

As the aim of this paper is to investigate whether recent years of social debate (on national identity) are reflected within the content of history textbooks, two portions of books were selected for comparison. One portion contains textbooks from the beginning of the outlined period of societal developments and public debate, and another includes the most current editions, from present-day. A period of ten years was allotted in between the publication of these two series of books, so as to allow for a real change to take place within the textbooks. For these reasons, the textbooks selected stem from 2009 and 2019 respectively. From the 15 books analyzed in this paper, 7 were published in 2009 and 8 in 2019.

The final selection of textbooks was made on the basis of the above mentioned criteria, using the websites of Thieme Meulenhoff, Noordhoff, and Walburg Pers. Subsequently, the majority of these materials was accessed through the Dutch Royal Library in The Hague, where print copies are available for inspection. The other portion of books was lent to me by individuals employed in the educational sector.

Section 1 Upholding Dutch tolerance

Chapter 1 Justifying Dutch involvement

Emphasizing the normality of slavery prior to- and at the time of European involvement

The textbooks under investigation contain elements that reflect a conservation of the traditional anti-racist, innocent Dutch self-image. This section speaks to those, and explains how the national narrative of innocence, tolerance and color-blindness is upheld. One way in which this occurs is through language that emphasizes the normality of slavery prior to (and at the time of) European arrival, justifying the actions of the Europeans. This allows the actions of the Europeans to be met with understanding and for them to be judged less harshly. A few quotations will serve to illustrate this point. Akin to several other fragments, this excerpt from a 2009 textbook states that: "Slavery had always been a regular occurrence in Africa... From the 16th century onwards, Europeans, too, became interested in the slave trade. They needed slaves for their plantations in America. As a result, tribal warfare in Africa increased." (Goris, 2009: 71)⁸.

Emphasizing that slavery had always already existed, the language in this quote shifts responsibility. It shifts condemnation from the Europeans traders to other players. It points to the fact that the Europeans did not invent this horrible tradition, and that it was not until much later, "from the 16th century onwards", that Europeans became involved in this inhumane practice. Thus, the European traders are not to be seen as the original wrongdoers. Additionally, the effect of European involvement in the slave trade is significantly understated by suggesting it to mainly exist of an increase in tribal warfare.

Some textbooks contain multiple examples of this phenomenon within the same chapter or on the same page. Consider the following two:

"Slavery was an ordinary affair in Africa. On the West coast, Europeans bought increasingly more slaves for the plantations in America. In Africa, regions got depopulated and the economy got damaged. Slavery was also an ordinary affair in the Arabic and Turkish regions." (Geugten, van der, 2009a: 50; Geugten, van der, 2009b: 51)⁹

"Slavery was a normal affair in Africa as well as in the Arabic and Turkish regions. The Portuguese established trading posts along the West coast of Africa to buy slaves. Arabs did

⁸ Translated from original: "Slavernij was altijd al een gewoon verschijnsel in Afrika. Elaboration. Vanaf de 16e eeuw raakte ook West-Europeanen geïnteresseerd in slavenhandel. Zij hadden slaven nodig voor hun plantages in Amerika. In Afrika na het aantal stammenoorlogen daardoor toe."

⁹ Translated from original: "Slavernij was een gewone zaak in Afrika. Europeanen kochten aan de westkust steeds meer slaven voor de plantages in Amerika. In Afrika werden gebieden ontvolkt en liep de economie schade op. Slavernij was ook een gewone zaak in de Arabische en Turkse gebieden."

the same on the East coast. Pirates created slaves on the North coast.” (Geugten, van der, 2009a: 50; Geugten, van der, 2009b: 51)¹⁰

Both of these fragments begin with a statement (“slavery was a normal affair in Africa”) followed by an elaboration that strengthens the statement. In so doing, it develops understanding of those actors that decide to also engage in it. But it also stimulates viewing this participation as a natural, respectable activity. The Dutch thereby also come off as having engaged in a natural practice. Their actions cannot be condemned severely, because it was, after all, a common affair in those regions at the time. It even prompts the question of whether we as readers should assess historical practices, like the slave trade and enslavement, using today’s moral framework? Seen in this light, the texts seem to encourage the reader not to denounce too quickly any actor partaking in it, including the Dutch. Yet, even if we do choose to analyse this fragment with an understanding of the slave trade and slavery as ethically wrong, the excerpt still partly excuses the actions of those European traders partaking in it. If we assume the position that slavery was, indeed, the norm and ethically justified, and we also assume that the Dutch, living in such a time and place, acted in line with their morals and values, would their choice to partake in slavery not also come from a good place? Or at least not have been made with the worst of intentions?

As can be seen, the nouns and adjectives used these fragments subtly invoke a sense of understanding for the (actions of the) traders involved in the slave trade. As actors involved in this trade, the Dutch, then, are condemned less severely. The textual excerpts, hereby, contribute to an image of the Dutch as innocent, anti-racist etc. Admittedly, this effect is as strong as it is, in part, due to the frequency with which it occurs. Especially in the 2009 textbooks: give some numbers. The emphasis on the normality of slavery prior-to and at the time of European interference, is not present in the 2019 textbooks in equal measure: specify how often. There are, however, still some examples to be found, such as the following: “From Europe, European and African products were traded for slaves. In 17th century Africa it was normal for defeated opponents to become slaves. European traders made use of this tradition, bought enslaved Africans and took them to the Caribbean.” (Bouw et al, 2019a: 213)¹¹. Here, too, the commonality of slavery and enslavement in Africa is reiterated. Yet, it invokes even more strongly a sense of justification for the horrors committed by the Europeans - and the Dutch, in extension of that - by explicitly mentioning the fact that the traders were simply making use of an existing tradition.

¹⁰ Translated from original: “Slavernij was een gewone zaak in Afrika en in de Arabische en Turkse gebieden. Portugezen stichtten handelsposten langs de Afrikaanse westkust om er slaven te kopen. Arabieren deden het zelfde aan de oostkust. Piraten maakten slaven aan de noodbust.”

¹¹ Translated from original: “Vanuit Europa werden Europese en Aziatische producten in Afrika geruild tegen slaven. Het was in de 17e eeuw in Afrika normaal dat verslagen tegenstanders slaaf werden. Europese handelaren maakten gebruik van deze gewoonte, kochten tot slaaf gemaakte Afrikanen en namen ze mee naar het Caribisch gebied.”

Crucially, it is this implication of similarity between the slavery in Africa prior to European arrival and the system of slavery that ensued after European colonization that is both troublesome and incorrect. Indeed, the economic system that existed in Africa prior to European expansion was substantially different than the slavery that we refer to today. Before European arrival, most African societies, as well as other places, knew a system of servitude and a tradition of classifying people as 'free' or 'unfree' (Nimako, Abdou & Willemsen, 2015; Vaughan, 1995; Williams, 1994). Based on this classification, unfree folks could end up working for free people as servants - not slaves. This system did not rely on the physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of the servants/slaves in order to function. Nor was it meant to be a "normal state of affairs". According to Williams, "... slavery was viewed as of an occasional nature, a preventive penalty and not as a normal and permanent condition." (1994: 7). Perhaps most importantly, it was not yet a system based on racialized difference. At the time, unfree people or servants / slaves were not comprised exclusively of black people. People of all skin colors, or religion or sex served as 'slave' (Vaughan, 1995; Williams, 1994). Thus, the racial element of only enslaving and abusing black African people for labour was added later: once the Europeans got involved. Europeans started (ab)using only African people for slave labor because it seemed that they made stronger, more efficient workers, which was required for their large scale production. To justify this economic system, reliant on the extensive abuse of an entire group of people, the Europeans set in place the idea that people of a certain skin color (white) are superior to those of a different skin color (black). As such, the comparison between the two economic systems is problematic because it foregoes precisely those elements that make this European practice/version of slavery so significant: the fact that it established racialized difference, and that, by doing so, it is responsible for today's reality of racist discourse and praxis. In other words, leaving this fact unacknowledged evades the racism that was inherent to this European practice, that was carried out by the perpetrators, and the racism that stems from it. Still today, and also in the Netherlands.

What all of these quotes have in common is the fact that they invoke understanding for the grueling actions taken by European colonizers. They incite viewing these actions in a milder light and, by extension, also the actors performing them. Hereby, they contribute to the Dutch still being seen in the same light: as innocent, color-blind people. Crucially though, when comparing the two textbook series, one can detect a significant decrease in the occurrence of these phenomena. Whereas there were 12 such appearances in the 2009 textbooks spread out over four different books, five were left in the 2019 series and distributed among two books. The decrease indicates, to some degree, an acknowledgement of the (racialized) difference between slavery prior to European involvement and during. It also suggests some form of recognition for the horrors that took place at the hands of the Dutch. Still, as this textual depiction *does* still occur in the 2019 books (five times), the above mentioned effect is not (completely) lost. Hereby, this element does not represent an anchoring of the notion of Dutch innocence and tolerance, but it does not indicate a radical departure from it either.

Necessity of the slave trade and enslavement

There is another way in which the textbooks excuse Dutch participation in the slave trade as well as their harmful treatment of enslaved Africans. The reason given for their actions is their supposed necessity: a general necessity to partake in the trade and a necessity to physically or emotionally abuse the people they enslaved. An extract from a 2009 textbook speaks to the latter, illustrating how cruel behavior towards enslaved people can be justified.

“By the end of the 18th century the number of slaves had risen to 45,000. On some plantations there were 65 slaves to each white person. If the slaves had rebelled, the white people would have been totally at their mercy. Some white people were so obsessed with anxiety that they seemed to have developed ‘split personalities’: they were friendly towards other white people but cruel towards the slaves.” (Bastiaans, 2009: 60; Buskop, 2019: 166)¹²

What strengthens the sense of justification that is created is the fact that the Europeans and enslaved are set up on two sides of the moral spectrum, against one another. One framed as dangerous and evil, and the other as innocent and scared. The slave/plantation owners, including the Dutch, are appointed the latter classification. They appear as respectable and fragile beings, “obsessed with anxiety”. Soliciting sympathy, the anxiety of the white owners, hereby, creates a valid justification for the cruel behavior. The words make it seem as though the Europeans had little choice in the matter. Their barbarism appears to have been the anxiety’s fault. Admittedly, the addition of the party responsible for this obsessive anxiety works to strengthen the image of the innocent Dutch, as well as its effect. The part of ‘culprit’ is, indeed, assigned to the enslaved Africans, who, with their population of 45,000 and overpowering ratio appear to threaten the Europeans. Creating the illusion of a destructive and relentless force of slaves, the text positions white Europeans as subjects in danger. Read in this light, it suddenly appears that acting cruelly towards Africans was an act of self-defense, a necessary evil. Not something the white plantation owners can be held accountable for.

In the previous fragment the necessity of the Dutch contribution to slavery and treatment of enslaved Africans remained relatively implicit. However, in the following excerpt from a 2019 textbook there is no uncertainty as to the message.

“The Netherlands participated in the slave trade as well. Initially, the Republic condemned the Spanish and Portuguese slave trade... But after the WIC had captured territory, they started partaking in the slave trade, because the conquered territories had many plantations that needed slaves.” (Geugten, van der, 2019b: 91).¹³

¹² Translated from original: “By the end of the 18th century the number of slaves had risen to 45,000. On some plantations there were 65 slaves to each white person. If the slaves had rebelled, the white people would have been totally at their mercy. Some white people were so obsessed with anxiety that they seemed to have developed ‘split personalities’: they were friendly towards other white people but cruel towards the slaves.”

¹³ Translated from original: “Ook Nederland deed mee aan de slavenhandel. Aanvankelijk veroordeelde de Republiek de Spaanse en Portugese slavenhandel. ... Maar nadat de WIC gebieden had veroverd, ging ze meedoen aan de slavenhandel, want in de veroverde gebieden waren veel plantages die slaven nodig hadden.”

The plantations on the Dutch territories “needed” slaves. That is what the quote literally gives as reason for the Dutch involvement in the slave trade. Apart from serving as justification for Dutch crimes, the argument that the Dutch *had* to partake in the slave trade because their plantations needed slaves (in order to survive or thrive) distorts the truth. The exhaustive labor that was enforced on enslaved Africans was not a necessity in and of itself. In fact, it was only required for large-scale production, something that the Europeans strived for in their search for growth, profit and capital gain (Williams, 1994). That is to say, European style slave labor was contingent not upon the survival of society or the livelihood of locals e.g., but on developing one particular economic system and the wish to be the richest, most successful nation in the world. Thus, while the abusive slave labor for economic purposes was optional, it is falsely portrayed to have been a necessity. By calling on ‘necessity’, the text, additionally, takes away part of the condemnation because it removes intention from the equation. The reader cannot be sure it was a wish - something they would be condemned for - of the Dutch to partake in the heinous, inhumane activities of slavery. In fact, the wording in the text implies that it was not. Hence, it suggests that the Dutch cannot be blamed for it too harshly.

A final quote worth discussing reads:

“Profits of the trade ended up in Europe. Owners of the ships and plantations stayed in Europe. Reason for this was that it was very unhealthy for Europeans to be in Africa or tropical parts of America. Many died of malaria or the yellow fever within a year. For that reason, the work on the plantations could not be executed by European workers.” (Geugten, van der, 2019a: 40).¹⁴

Striking about this fragment, in the first place, is the sympathy that it invokes for the European traders. Indeed, the excerpt mentions the hazardous effect of Africa and/or America on Europeans’ health as well as the fact that many Europeans died as a result of sickness. Yet, by explaining why/that European workers could not perform the (slave) labour themselves, the enslavement and usage of African people is framed as the only alternative. The text implies that the Europeans had no other choice but to enslave them. Indeed, the fragment suggests it was an act of necessity.

¹⁴ Translated from original: “De winst van de driehoekshandel kwam in Europa terecht. Eigenaren van schepen en plantages bleven in Europa. Een reden daarvoor was dat het in Afrika en de tropische delen van Amerika voor Europeanen zeer ongezond was. Velen stierven er binnen een jaar aan malaria of gele koorts. Daardoor kon het werk op de plantages niet door Europese arbeiders worden gedaan.”

The justification of the Dutch contribution to the slave trade, and treatment of enslaved Africans during slavery has the effect of saving face. To some extent, it upholds the reputation of the Dutch as never being completely immoral or malicious, and maintains the idea that because the Dutch were not racist then, they are not racist now. The frequency with which these justifications appear in the books is not high. In total, I found two occurrences in the 2009 series and three in the books stemming from 2019. Equally, they were spread out over two distinct books in 2009 and three books in 2019. This shows a slight increase on both ends. While not extremely significant on its own, this element does serve to uphold the national narrative of tolerance, innocence and color-blindness.

Enslaved Africans: barbaric and dangerous

Previously, I have spoken about how the justifications for the inhumane behavior of the Dutch make them appear more tolerant and holds in place the traditional Dutch self-image. The following section continues that discussion, but focuses on the way in which the portrayal of (formerly) enslaved Africans contributes to it. Specifically, it talks to how depicting enslaved Africans as dangerous, relentless people excuses those (incl. the Dutch) committing violence to them. In the fragment below, for example, a one-dimensional description of Boni is given¹⁵.

“Boni stood on top of one of the four metre high walls of his fort. Like a general, he looked out over the swamp. Yesterday, they had succeeded, once more, in keeping the Dutch outside of his fort. Their attacks emanating from the swamps had not stood a chance. Tomorrow, Boni wanted to get back out there himself. Again, he expected to do some big looting on one the plantations in the area.” (Schrover, 2009: 34)¹⁶

In this source, Boni is sketched as a merciless, war-raging rebel. The explicit comparison of Boni with an army-figure, the mentioning of a fortress as his homebase, and the illustration of him as someone that loots and attacks create an association of violence and mal intent. In particular because no other context or elaboration is given, it seems that this is all that there is to Boni and, in extension of that, to other enslaved Africans. Suddenly, any harm done to them (by the Dutch) can be justified or even read as self-defense.

Still, another way of negatively framing a people is by implicating them in overtly harmful actions and using explicit verbs to describe it. Within both series of textbooks -2009 and 2019- the verbs used to express the harmful actions committed by the enslaved are *all* blunt and outspoken.

¹⁵ Boni was the child of a Dutch plantation owner and an enslaved African woman. He grew up to become the leader of a guerilla movement of formerly enslaved people.

¹⁶ Translated from original: “Boni stond op een vier meter hoge muur van zijn fort. Als een veldheer keek hij over het moeras. Gisteren was het weer gelukt om Nederlandse soldaten buiten zijn fort te houden. Zij waren kansloos met hun aanvallen vanuit de moerassen. Morgen wile Boni er weer zelf op uit trekken, en weer verwachtte hij grote buit te maken op een van de plantages in de buurt.”

They are similar for both years and read: to hit, to raid, to rebel, to attack, to torch, to massacre, to wage war. Used in a sentence, they can look like:

“Some slaves sought freedom by running away, usually alone or in small groups. Sometimes all the slaves on a plantation would rebel, massacre the white people and torch the buildings.” (Bastiaans, 2009: 60; Buskop, 2019: 167)

“Maroons came by weapons, tools and women by raiding plantations and thus posed a constant threat to slave owners.” (Bastiaans, 2009: 60; Buskop, 2019: 167)

Noteworthy is the fact that the textbook authors did not use implicit or toned down alternatives to the verbs *once*, as does frequently occur for activities performed by European traders or plantation owners. Imagine: ‘to start a fire’ instead of ‘to torch’ and ‘to kill’ instead of ‘to massacre’. This would not have constructed as much of a malicious image of the enslaved Africans. Currently, however, the behavior (and characteristics) attributed to them is brutal. Consequently, the damage that one does to these dangerous and malicious people becomes a little more reasonable. To a small degree, the fragment invokes understanding for the European traders or overseers that inflicted harm on enslaved Africans. As a result, the Dutch, too, are met with less resentment. Hereby, the slavery past doesn’t take away as much from their good-guy, tolerant reputation.

This particular choice of very explicit verbs to describe harmful actions done by enslaved Africans, is constant throughout the textbooks. That is to say, the resulting justification of the Dutch violence and/or (ab)use of enslaved Africans occurs equally in both years. In turn, this textual element does not seem to indicate a significant change in how the Dutch view themselves as tolerant etc. But, surely, this lack of difference does not reflect a departure from this narrative either. However, the amount of times wherein enslaved Africans are portrayed negatively, but *not* explicitly through the use of certain types of verbs, *does* show a change: a decrease. In total, I have discerned five such instances in 2009 spread out over two different books, and three fragments in the 2019 series, but all from the same book. Thus, overall, the justification of the Dutch violence towards enslaved Africans appears slightly less in the 2019 book, which could demonstrate a nuanced approach to the belief in the innocence of the Dutch.

Chapter 2 Evading blame

Sympathy for European slave traders / owners

Another pattern, deduced from the textbooks, that upholds the pervasive Dutch narrative of tolerance, innocence and color-blindness is the way in which European traders and/or slave owners are able to evade blame. This occurs through *not* mentioning the Dutch as the subject responsible for physical violence, and by invoking sympathy for European traders and/or slave owners. The following quote is illustrative of the latter and reads:

"Around 12% of the slaves did not survive the sea voyage. Approximately 18% of the crew died too, but they had to travel more than twice as far (the slaves went from Africa to Suriname, whereas the crew went first to Africa, then Suriname, and then back to the Netherlands)." (Bastiaans, 2009: 55; Buskop, 2019: 165)

The text seems to express that, while the percentage of 'slave deaths' was lower than the 'European (crew) deaths', the amount of enslaved Africans that passed away is relatively high. This, supposedly, is due to the fact that this 12% percent is the result of a much shorter journey, meaning that the amount of 'slave deaths' on a journey of the same duration would likely be higher than the amount of 'European deaths'. Indeed, this particular message does not generate critique from me. However, the actual words used in the fragment do not reflect the message as interpreted by me. They do not make explicit, anywhere, what is implied: the fact that the number of enslaved Africans that passed away was much higher than the amount of Europeans that died. Only the critical reader will pick up on this. By remaining vague, (what seems to be) the message gets lost. With that, the inhumane and grueling circumstances for the enslaved aboard the ships get lost, too. Hereby, the subjects responsible (for putting the enslaved Africans on these ships and transporting them in these conditions) get away with their actions. They are able to evade blame.

Moreover, the ambiguity of the overall message shifts attention to what cannot be disputed: numbers. What remains, then, is a higher percentage of 'European deaths' than 'slave deaths', giving the impression that the sea journey was worse for the Europeans than it was for the enslaved Africans. Or at least, that it was very *bad* for them. After all, the text emphasizes that the duration of their journey was much longer than that of the enslaved Africans: first stating the fact that it took "twice as long", and then elaborating upon it in closed brackets. By mentioning the deaths of the two groups in the same breath, without giving much specification to one or the other, the fragment even implies the deaths are comparable: that they occurred under the same circumstances and are the result of the same practice. Evidently, this vastly minimizes and misrepresents actual events. Thus, instead of invoking condemnation, this fragment appeals to the sympathy of the reader for the European traders. And instead of (rightfully) depicting the European traders as perpetrators, this fragment portrays them as victims.

The Dutch, in extension of being a European trader, are thus able to escape blame through the text used in this excerpt. Appearing once in both textbook series, this particular element reflects a continuation of the belief in Dutch innocence, part of the traditional narrative.

Explicitly implicating the Dutch in physical violence

There is another manner in which the textual representation of the TAS and slavery minimize Dutch culpability and uphold the image of the Dutch as innocent and tolerant. It occurs through not explicitly mentioning in the same sentence: both the Dutch as perpetrators of physical harm and details of the harmful event / action itself. In practice, it entails either: 1. not explicitly mentioning the Dutch as perpetrators - but instead referring to 'the traders', or 'overseers' etc. - when a harmful action is described using outspoken verbs, or 2. not explicitly describing the harmful action - but instead using vague, implicit or euphemistic verbs - when the Dutch are specifically mentioned as the ones performing said activity, or only mentioning them as active agents in relation to trade .. aspects.

The research has proven that the textbooks do not share in the same sentence both a specific mention of the Dutch as perpetrators and an outspoken description of the physical abuse using explicit verbs. It appears to be 'either', 'or'. At times, the textbooks get particular about the details of the physical violence done to enslaved Africans, and employ relatively explicit verbs to describe it. These verbs are: to chase, to restrain, to authorize beatings, to (violently) repress, to brand, to chop off, to rape. When these types of verbs are employed, instead of euphemistic alternatives, the Dutch are *never* mentioned in the same sentence (as a perpetrator).¹⁷ The harm is either done by anonymous 'slave traders', 'slave / plantation owners', 'overseers' and in exceptional cases by European colonizers. These are the actors that *are* explicitly referred to as the guilty party. Respectively, examples read:

"The slaves only did their job because they were chased with firearms and whips by overseers." (Geugten, van der, 2019b: 90).¹⁸

"The planters and white overseers violently repressed resistance in any shape or form." (Bastiaans, 2009: 54; Buskop, 2019: 89).

"A slave that hit an European, could get his arm chopped off." (Betten & Geugten, van der, 2009: 70).¹⁹

¹⁷ My search for 'the Dutch' in the textual fragments included mentions of: 'Nederland' (the Netherlands), 'Nederlanders' (the Dutch), 'Nederlandse handelaren' (Dutch traders), 'Nederlandse kolonisten' (Dutch colonizers), 'de WIC' (the WIC).

¹⁸ Translated from original: "De slaven deden hun werk alleen omdat ze door opzichters met vuurwapens en zwepen werden opgejaagd."

¹⁹ Translated from original: "Een slaaf die een Europeaan sloeg, kon een arm worden afgehakt."

Occasionally, texts mention no culprit at all and use passive language to circumvent this: “After the public auction the slaves were branded once more, now with the logo of their new owner.” (Goris, 2009: 74).²⁰ Yet, this enables the European traders - including the Dutch - to be deleted as subject, as the one performing this grueling action. Indeed, it is why this type of passive grammatical structure is also called a ‘dishonest construction’, because it allows an event to be described without appointing it to any source (Barrata, 2009). Due to passive voice, the Dutch are enabled to evade blame.

Admittedly, in certain fragments the Dutch *are* pointedly acknowledged as culprits, however never the culprits of behavior, actions or decisions that lead to the physical harm of an enslaved person. Rather, when they are set up as the ones performing a certain activity, it is either one that causes no direct physical harm, or one that centers on the business side of trade. An example reads: “Here slaves were locked up and traded by the WIC.” (Goris, 2009: 15).²¹ The verbs that are used to describe (trade-related) actions unmistakably carried out by the Dutch are: to retrieve, to transport, to sell, to buy, to exchange, to import, to bring, to trade, to deliver.

As can, thus, be seen, the Dutch are never explicitly implicated in performing a physically harmful action. Instead, the light is cast on anonymous perpetrators, such as: (slave) traders, plantations owners, colonizers and overseers. They receive the blame of the damage done, while the Dutch are able to escape part of the fault and liability. This telling manifestation is present in the textbooks stemming from 2009 and holds up in the same way in the books published in 2019. It is another mechanism that suggests the perseverance of the non-racist, tolerant, and innocent Dutch self-image.

Chapter 3 Minimizing slavery, the slave trade and the abuse of enslaved Africans

Size of the Dutch contribution

A final way in which the Dutch identity of tolerance, innocence and color-blindness is upheld in the textbooks, is through textual elements that minimize slavery, the slave trade and the abuse of enslaved Africans. One aspect of the slave trade that is minimized is the Dutch contribution. Indeed, the Dutch are one of several nations that actively partook in slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the 16th until the 19th century. European countries, such as Spain, Portugal, France and the United Kingdom, played a part in these practices, too. In comparison to these states, the Dutch contribution was relatively small (Oostindie, 2012). In a number of textbooks, this information is laid out in a manner that effectively minimizes Dutch participation and shifts part of the blame away from the Dutch traders and slave owners. This happens through explicitly articulating the difference in participation without elaborating on the extent of the Dutch share, and/or by emphasizing the small size of the Dutch contribution. Of the seven textbooks published in 2009, one exhibits this particular element. Consider the following text fragment as an example:

²⁰ Translated from original: “Na de openbare verkoop werden de slaven opnieuw gebrandmerkt, nu met het logo van hun nieuwe eigenaar.”

²¹ Translated from original: “Hier werden slaven opgesloten en verhandeld door de WIC.”

"The Dutch weren't the only ones dealing in slaves. The Portuguese, French and English did it much more." (Betten & Geugten, van der: 43)²²

At first glance, this section appears rather straightforward. Indeed, other European countries *did* play a bigger role in the slave trade than the Netherlands, making a statement such as this one correct. However, in this instance the mere mentioning of this fact works to minimize the Dutch involvement. This is because the paragraph does not elaborate further on the Dutch participation. Prior to this fragment a general explanation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is given. What follows, is a brief word on the colonies of the Netherlands. There is nothing on, for example, the amount of people the Dutch traded. Thus, as the book (swiftly) turns to the other perpetrators, the heinous actions of the Dutch are brushed right over. Rather than acknowledging the extent to which the Dutch traded and enslaved humans - even while it was less than other countries - attention is turned to the fact that there were 'worse' actors, still. Emphasis is placed on the relative innocence of the Dutch instead of on the massive harm that their 'small' contribution still caused. With that, the damage to their innocent image is minimal.

Though slightly different, the following section has a similar effect:

"From the 16th until the 19th century, European slave traders brought eleven million slaves from Africa to America. The slaves worked on sugar-, tobacco-, or cotton plantations, served as domestic slaves or processed sugar in factories. During that time, one out of twenty slaves was traded by the Dutch." (Betten & Geugten, van der: 69)²³

In this fragment, only the share of the Dutch in the trans-Atlantic slave trade is mentioned, and not those of the other European traders. Yet, the way in which this is done is problematic, still. Here, the amount of forcibly traded people is expressed as a fraction, as opposed to an explicit number, which diminishes the Dutch involvement and the harm done by them. It would have been different had the text explicitly mentioned the amount of people (in this instance: 550,000). Explicitly stating the full number not only gives an clear representation of the amount of victims, but it also acknowledges all of the 550,000 people that were traded during that time. Moreover, it shows a certain degree of responsibility on the part of the perpetrator; taking ownership for the part that one has played in victimizing a people. However, the fraction that was chosen in this instance as a tool of expression is a lot more abstract. It does not outspokenly illustrate the amount of people that were traded. It does not convey clearly the extent of trafficking (and enslavement) that happened at the hands of the Dutch. As such, the full extent of harm done by the Dutch is not expressed. Verbalized in this manner, the Dutch traders are able to escape some of the blame. Hereby, the Dutch image of tolerant, innocent, and anti-racist remains.

Looking at the series of books published in 2019, one can similarly deduce two examples of textual elements that minimize the Dutch role in the TAS and slavery. The first one reads as follows:

²² Translated from original: "De Nederlanders waren niet de enigen die in slaven handelden. De Portugezen, Fransen en Engelsen deden dat veel meer."

²³ Translated from original: "Zo brachten Europese slavenhandelaren van de 16e tot en met de 19e eeuw elf miljoen slaven van Afrika naar Amerika. De slaven werkten op suiker-, tabak- of katoenplantages, dienden als huisslaven of verwerkten in fabrieken de suiker."

“European influence at that time did not reach far. Only few Africans were enslaved by Europeans. For the slave trade they [the Europeans] were dependent on African and Arabic traders, who brought slaves to the coast and sold them there.” (Dalhuisen: 101).²⁴ The information that this paragraph tries to bring across, is not incorrect. Whereas Europeans were the main culprits in the *trade* of enslaved Africans, the enslavement of Africans was less the result of European action and took place more at the hands of local African leaders or Arabic traders (Postma, 1990). However, the actual words written suggest something else. As the text states that Europeans enslaved “only few Africans”, there is no explicit mention that the small degree of enslavement is relative. That is to say: there is no add-on to specify that the Dutch enslavement is only ‘small’ in comparison to that of other traders. As the part that follows does not clarify this uncertainty, the reader is left with the sentence “Only few Africans were enslaved by Europeans.” Which, taken on its own, is not true. Even though it was not to the extent of other actors, the number of African people the Dutch enslaved still amounted to thousands of people (Postma, 1990). This fact is played down significantly by way of the phrasing in this fragment. Hereby, this section considerably diminishes the harm that was caused by the Dutch.

The next quote features an explicit comparison between the contribution of the Dutch and that of other colonizing countries.

“Within America, the Netherlands was a much smaller colonizing power than Spain, Portugal, England or France. The Dutch part in the trans-Atlantic slave trade was proportionately limited, about 5%. But, the Dutch also transported hundreds of thousands of slaves in Asia.” (Geugten, van der, 2019b: 91).²⁵

Similar to the example from 2009, the Dutch share in the TAS is minimized by an accentuation of the fact that it was “much smaller”. This quote additionally describes the Dutch contribution as “limited”, which implies that the abuse and violence that ensued from this contribution were equally limited. As the latter is a vast misrepresentation of actual events, this section diminishes the role of the Dutch and the harm caused by them. What follows, however, is an explicit acknowledgement of the Dutch involvement in a slave trade taking place elsewhere. When it comes to the trafficking of people in Asia, responsibility *is* taken for their part in it. While this is a positive development, it does not negate the fact that the Dutch part in the TAS is minimized in the sentence prior.

The total number of these inferences has stayed the same across the two series of textbooks. However, there is a difference in the amount of unique books that feature them each year. Rather than both examples hailing from the same textbook, the examples from 2019 stem from two unique books. Albeit an increase, it is not a large one. Regardless, the emphasis placed on the limited size of the Dutch contribution, through the use of similes e.g., minimizes their actual involve-

²⁴ Translated from original: “Europese macht reikte toentertijd niet ver. Slechts weinig Afrikanen werden door Europeanen tot slaaf gemaakt. Voor de slavenhandel waren zij aangewezen op Afrikaanse en Arabische handelaren, die slaven naar de kust brachten en daar verkochten.”

²⁵ Translated from original: “Nederland was in Amerika een veel kleinere kolonist dan Spanje, Portugal, Engeland en Frankrijk. Het NL-se aandeel in de TAS was dan ook beperkt, zo’n 5%.”

ment. Hereby, the Dutch are able to maintain part of their supposedly inherent innocence and tolerance. This particular textual element, then, does from the national narrative.

Sea journey and physical/sexual abuse of enslaved Africans

Two additional aspects of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery that are minimized are: the sea journey enslaved Africans were forced to make -from Africa to America- and the abuse of enslaved Africans. Within textbooks from both time periods, this occurs through the use of euphemisms. They (frequently) describe or refer to the grueling conditions of slavery and the TAS in a way that detracts from their severity. The euphemisms employed, specifically, mislead the reader into believing that the slave trade or life on the plantations was more mild, respectable, and/or sustainable than it actually was. Consequently, the euphemisms make the actors involved, too, appear more humane and less cruel. Such is also the case for the Dutch. Consider, for example, the following text fragment from 2009, which describes the attainment of African men and women: “The consequences for Africa were drastic. Because so many young men and women were removed, the population demographics changed.” (Geugten, van der, 2009a: 51).²⁶

In this instance, the acquiring of Africans is referred to as a removal, using the verb ‘to remove’. Though not incorrect, this is a relatively neutral way of speaking of what was often a violent, involuntary event. ‘Removing’ men and women usually involved: raiding villages, chasing or hunting down individuals, kidnapping people from their homes and/or tearing apart families (Postma, 2005). Yet, none of this is encapsulated by this textual description. The image that is created of this process, instead, is a much more mild one, which does not portray the actual, full experience of many.

A similar example is this one, stemming from a 2019 textbook:

“In the 17th century their [African people] numbers rose rapidly when the Dutch, French and the English, too, founded plantations in the Caribbean and surrounding countries, the area they called West-Indies or the West. Until the 19th century, more Africans than Europeans came to South- and Central America. In total, approximately eleven million Africans were brought across the Atlantic Ocean in European ships.” (Geugten, van der, 2019a: 46).²⁷

In this fragment, two events are described in a euphemistic manner. The first one relates to the process of Africans getting to South- and Central America up until the 19th century. The verb used to illustrate this is ‘to come’, which suggests a voluntary action; that the decision to come was one African people were free to make themselves. Evidently, this depiction minimizes the actual process, as it speaks not of the forced obtainment, nor of the grueling sea journey that ‘coming’ to South- and Central America entailed (Postma, 2005). Similarly, the verb ‘to bring’ does

²⁶ Translated from original: “De gevolgen voor Afrika waren ingrijpend. Doordat zoveel jonge mannen en vrouwen werden weggehaald, veranderde de bevolkingsopbouw.”

²⁷ Translated from original: “In de 17e eeuw nam hun aantal snel toe toen ook Nederlanders, Fransen en Engelsen plantages stichtten in het Caribisch gebied en de landen eromheen, het gebied dat ze West-Indie of de West noemden. Tot de 19e eeuw kwamen meer Afrikanen dan Europeanen naar Zuid- en Midden-Amerika. In totaal zijn ongeveer elf miljoen Afrikanen in Europese schepen de Atlantische Oceaan overgebracht.”

not do justice to the inhumane manner in which Europeans forcibly transported enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean. It hides all clues of the sickness, abuse and death that ensued aboard these ships.

Certain euphemisms are found in both the 2009 and 2019 edition of the same textbook. So it pertains to this description of violence committed by European rulers: "The governors were regularly sending soldiers after the maroons, but with very little success, as the maroons usually knew they were coming." (Bastiaans, 2009: 55; Buskop, 2019: 80)²⁸ 'Sending soldiers' is a very minimal way to describe the harm this type of military action encompassed. There is no explicit mention of 'attacking', 'shooting', 'killing' or 'war-waging' done by Europeans. Even though such events were a regular occurrence (Postma, 2005). Not mentioning this absolves Europeans of blame of any truly harmful actions and diminishes a violent event to a more innocent version of history. The avoidance of using precise and outspoken verbs to describe European violence is especially telling since the actions attributed to (formerly) enslaved Africans - and the verbs used to describe them - *are* blunt and brutal. (Formerly) enslaved Africans are explicitly implicated in 'raiding', 'torching' and 'massacring', a point to which I will return later on in the paper.

Briefly, a final example of euphemistic language relates to the following portrayal of sexual relations between Europeans and enslaved women: "White people and slaves were legally prohibited from having sexual relations. But many white people took no notice; there were only a few white women in Suriname. So, many white men took a slave as a housekeeper and mistress." (Buskop, 2019: 166). In this quote, a seemingly innocent story is told of white men having sexual relations with enslaved women. What is not mentioned, however, is the forced nature of this event: the fact that most enslaved women did not agree to this activity (Postma, 2005). The actual activity that is, thus, illustrated here is not consensual sexual intercourse, but sexual abuse and/or rape. 'Taking a slave as a mistress', then, is a vast downplay on actual events, and minimizes the physical/sexual violence and emotional harm enslaved women had to endure at the hands of European men.

²⁸ Maroons: (descendants of) escaped former slaves who lived in independent communities in the colonies.

As can be seen, these textual representations of the conditions of TAS/slavery do not tell the full story. A part of it gets silenced, and with that a part of people's lived experience too. In subtle and not-so subtle ways, the euphemisms employed decrease the intensity of the (brutal) conditions that enslaved Africans were exposed to, and hereby too, the the intensity of the crimes and actions the Dutch were involved in. As such, the damage done to their innocent image is minimal. The number of euphemisms employed in the 2019 series of textbooks is close to the same as the amount used in 2009. The same goes for the amount of unique books they occur in: three (out of seven) in 2009 and four (out of eight) in 2019. Therefore, this particular element serves to uphold the Dutch self-image of tolerance.

The impact of the slave trade on people vs. society

Apart from the sea journey and physical/sexual abuse of enslaved Africans, the negative impact of slavery on the people themselves is also minimized. In this instance, this occurs through portraying the effects of the slave trade on society to be of more value than the effects on human beings. In the 2009 textbooks, there are two separate instances in which the ramifications of slavery and the slave trade on the enslaved people themselves are valued less than the consequences they have on the state and on society in general. I will highlight one: a textual fragment that contains a quotation from a Ghanaian historian and is worth referencing in full.

“Initially the Atlantic slave trade had little effect on African society. But after 1750, the demand for- and price of slaves increased by so much that various gangs sprung up. They raided villages and kidnapped parts of the population to sell as slaves. This had significant consequences. Abdo Fenning, a Ghanaian historian, writes: “The Europeans bought the cream of the crop, our best people. The old, cripple and inept were left behind, and the people who could have established Africa disappeared as slaves. The people that remained, lived in insecurity. What use would it be to start something, a large company for example? A raid could take place at any moment and then everything would be gone anyway.”” (Schrover: 73; Goris: 70).²⁹

Several things to point out, starting with the fragment as a whole. Within this piece, the conditions and consequences of the slave trade / slavery are minimized by neglecting to mention their effects on African people. As a quotation from historian Abdo Fenning is employed to illustrate the consequences of the slave trade, only the ramifications for the greater society / the continent of Africa are discussed. Not a word on the communities that were torn apart, the hurt of those who lost a friend or family member, or on the horrors that awaited the enslaved people themselves. That is to say, what is deemed important is not the effect on human lives, but the interests of society / the state. Importantly, this critique is not geared specifically towards the words of the quotation, as they were not written by the textbook authors themselves. Yet, in choosing to use this

²⁹ Translated from original: “Aanvankelijk had de Atlantische slavenhandel maar weinig effect op de Afrikaanse samenleving. Maar na 1750 werd de vraag naar slaven zo groot en de prijs zo hoog, dat er allerlei bendes bestonden. Zij overvielen dorpen en kidnapten een deel van de bewoners om ze als slaaf te verkopen. Dit had grote gevolgen.” “Abdo Fenning, een Ghanees historicus, schrijft daarover: De Europeanen kochten het neusje van de zalm, onze allerbeste mensen. De ouden, kreupelen en onbekwamen liet men hier en de mensen die Afrika hadden kunnen opbouwen, verdwenen als slaaf. De mensen die achterbleven, leefden in onzekerheid. Wat had het voor nu iets op poten te zetten, een groot bedrijf op te bouwen bijvoorbeeld? Ieder moment kon er weer een overval worden gepleegd en dan was alles toch weg.”

quotation from mr. Fenning without any reflection - on the commodification, devaluation, and dismissal of African people's hurt and loss during slavery - this fragment not only feeds into the idea that Africans are less worthy / inferior, but also makes slavery and the TAS seem to bear little effect on human lives. As a result, the ones responsible for the brutalities during slavery appear less cruel. This includes the Dutch.

This tendency to depict the consequences of slavery on African people as less significant than the consequences on the state also appears in the series of textbooks published in 2019. The only instance reads:

“Still, the arrival of the Europeans came with big consequences for Africa. Due to the high demand for slaves from America, black slave traders moved increasingly farther into Africa to steal people and enslave them. Entire regions got depopulated. The slaves who went to America also suffered more.” (Geugten, van der, 2019a: 47).³⁰

Admittedly, this section acknowledges the grueling conditions for enslaved people and elaborates upon them in the paragraph following this text. However, both literally and figuratively, the effects of the slave trade and slavery for the enslaved people are placed second to the ramifications for the state and/or society. In fact, the *lives* of enslaved Africans come second to the interests of the state. This (new) hierarchy is passed on to the reader, whose association of slavery and its victims consequently changes. Slavery becomes more about the state or societal interests, demographics, and less about human lives. The human aspect is taken away, minimizing the brutal experience of enslaved Africans under slavery. Yet it also diminishes the severity of the harm done by the perpetrators - the Dutch - during this period. As a result, the Dutch are painted only limitedly as a racist etc. people, sustaining the current narrative.

Though the total number of appearances of this phenomenon is not high (twice in 2009, once in 2019) and does not appear in many a lot of individual textbooks (two in 2009 and one in 2019) it is something that contributes to the aforementioned national narrative, nonetheless, and therefore worth mentioning. There is a decrease in the amount of appearances (from two to one), which is a small positive development. It might not actively contribute to a more nuanced, critical view of the Dutch national identity, but it does not significantly sustain the old narrative either.

³⁰ Translated from original: “Toch had de komst van de Europeanen voor Afrika grot gevolgen. Door de grote vraag naar slaven vanuit Amerika trokken zwarte slavenhandelaren steeds verder Afrika in om mensen te roven en tot slaaf te maken. Hele streken raakten ontvolkt. De slaven die naar Amerika gingen, kregen het ook zwaarder.”

Suitability of African bodies for slave labor

Thus far, I have illustrated several ways in which the language used in the 2009/2019 textbooks minimizes slavery and the TAS. There is one final aspect, still, that needs mentioning. It centers on the supposed suitability of African bodies for slave labour, which downplays the physical (and emotional) harm that the enslaved Africans experienced. Consecutively, this enables the culprits, of whom the Dutch are part, to come across as less brutal, and minimizes their loss of face. A first example from a 2009 textbook illustrates this well:

“The work in American mines and on plantations was taken on by black Africans. As early as 1502, Portuguese ships brought slaves who were bought in Africa to Haiti. When the Spanish noticed the Africans were able to handle the strenuous slave labour well, the demand for African slaves grew, especially for work on the plantations.” (Geugten, van der, 2009b: 52)³¹

What is striking is the use of the word ‘well’ to describe how enslaved Africans dealt with slave labour and the impact it had on them. Being designated as ‘well able’ to handle something is, to begin with, relative. ‘Well able’ in comparison to whom? In this instance, one can presume the text refers to the native Americans who were initially forced to work as slaves for Europeans. They are mentioned earlier on in the paragraph. Yet, this comparison is not made explicit nor is the relativity of the classification (“Africans are able to handle strenuous slave labour well”). As a result, this sentence falsely suggests Africans truly were well-equipped to take on the torturous work and, importantly, that they were not too harmed in the process. But indeed, “well” grossly understates the physical and emotional hurt that Africans suffered by performing the labor Europeans forced them to do (Postma, 2005). This description, additionally, places the perpetrators on (slightly) higher moral ground, because they do not appear as forcing enslaved Africans to do things that were *that* damaging. Moreover, as becomes apparent from the fragment, the Spanish only started employing more enslaved Africans - only started exposing Africans to the hard labour - *after* they noticed they could deal with it. After they became convinced that the Africans weren’t too harmed by it. In turn, this absolves the Europeans of part of the blame and evades classification as ‘the bad guy’.

A similar fragment from a 2019 textbook also mentions the enslaved Africans predecessors but is more specific as to why Africans would be suitable for slave labour.

“At first, the Spanish forced native Americans to do the heavy labour. But many native Americans fled, or died of exhaustion or sickness. In 1543, Charles V prohibited the slavery of native Americans. The Spanish, then, began using black slaves from West-Africa, who were mostly resistant to illness.” (Geugten, van der, 2019a: 46)³²

³¹ Translated from original: “Het werk in de Amerikaanse mijnen en op de plantages werd overgenomen door zwarte Afrikanen. Als in 1502 bracht een Portugees schip slaven, die in Afrika waren gekocht, naar Haïti. Toen de Spanjaarden merkten dat de sterke Afrikanen het zware slavenwerk goed aan konden, groeide de vraag naar Afrikaanse slaven, vooral voor het plantage werk.”

³² Translated from original: “De Spanjaarden dwongen eerst indianen om het zware werk te doen. Maar veel indianen vluchtten of stierven van uitputting en aan ziekten. In 1543 verbood Karel V de slavernij van indianen. De Spanjaarden gingen toen zwarte slaven uit West-Afrika gebruiken, die veel bestand waren tegen ziekten.”

Before anything else, this fragment serves to normalize the procurement- and abuse of Africans as slaves by suggesting that enslaving them as an alternative to native Americans was a logical decision. The only explanation or justification offered is, after all, a bold and seemingly persuasive one: Africans are “mostly resistant to illness.” But more relevant to this argument is that the excerpt gives the impression that this inherent ability to ward off generic illnesses made the enslaved Africans able to also avoid any physical harm resulting from slave labour. Especially since the text alludes they did not even suffer exhaustion, like the native Americans *are* mentioned to have. If the resistance of most Africans to disease did not translate in equal measure to their ability to handle slave labour, the text at least portrays the labour to have come with some measure of ease. Apart from misrepresenting the experience of most enslaved Africans, it makes Europeans appear only partially wrong. Hereby, it still keeps in place the image of the Dutch as innocent good-guys, not racist.

Indeed, this type of portrayal was found twice across the 2019 range of textbooks, and appears in two individual books. This is a stagnation from the overall occurrence in 2009. In that period, too, the phenomenon is visible in two different books. Similarly, this means there is no indication that the traditional image of the Dutch as tolerant, innocent and non-racist has found even deeper roots. However, it also shows no signs of a different, more nuanced approach.

Section 2 Disrupting Dutch tolerance

Chapter 4 Acknowledging race(ism) and slavery in contemporary Dutch society

Certainly, there are also textual elements that illustrate a more nuanced view of the Dutch and their supposed innocence and lack of racism: aspects that counter the narrative completely or aspects that neither encourage nor go against it. Therefore, this section speaks to the ways in which the national narrative of innocence, tolerance and color-blindness is disrupted. One such, potentially, disruptive element is the amount of space dedicated in the books to the position of race(ism), discrimination and slavery in contemporary Dutch society.³³

The following quote is the introduction to an assignment included in one of the textbooks and reflects on the Dutch tendency to brush aside its past dealings in slavery and the Transatlantic slave trade.

“Many books and films have been produced about slavery in the US. It seems that the Dutch would rather forget that their forefathers also had slaves. That is odd. Many descendants of slaves live in the Netherlands. Not only did the Dutch transport slaves from Africa to the Americas, they also used slave labour to run plantations in Brazil, on the Antilles and in Suriname. And the Dutch in Indonesia also had slaves. At the time, not all Dutch people thought that slavery was normal. Many of them, called abolitionists, were already protesting against slavery in the 19th century.” (Buskop, 2019: 84)

Certainly, this piece is critical of the (absence of) recognition of the slavery past in the Netherlands. By bluntly acknowledging the Dutch denial of its past indiscretions, this fragment encourages a more nuanced approach to the age old narrative of the Dutch. However, it is the only example of a textual reflection of the role of race(ism) and discrimination in Dutch society, as it appears in only one of the textbooks under investigation, in both its 2009 and 2019 edition. Clearly then, its occurrence does not alter either over the course of a decade. As such, the significance of this piece is not very high, and does not point to a substantial change in how the national identity of the Dutch is considered.

Chapter 5 Recognizing Dutch involvement

Slave vs. enslaved

One way that textbooks can depict the TAS, slave traders / owners and enslaved people fully, in a manner that recognizes both the harm traders did and the harm enslaved people endured, is by using accurate terminology to refer to enslaved Africans. This entails employing the term ‘enslaved’ instead of ‘slave’ when talking about people who were captured, made slave and forced to carry out slave labour in factories, the house or on plantations.

³³ ‘Space’ being understood as pages (half / full / quarter) in the textbook.

The distinction between 'slave' and 'enslaved' was first made by historian C.L.R. James (2012). Whereas 'slave' suggests acceptance of- and (voluntary) obedience with captivity and enslavement, 'enslaved' embodies the resistance people showed towards capture and enslavement, highlighting the fact that they were *made* slave and *made* to work. Importantly, 'enslaved' thereby also demonstrates that enslaved people were not docile subjects, underlining their agency. In turn, this distinction reflects back on those involved with capturing, enslaving and abusing the enslaved people: the traders and/or plantation/slave owners. Acknowledging the forced nature of enslaved people's existence - by using the term 'enslaved' - means recognizing the part that the perpetrators - the European traders, including the Dutch - played in it. It implies a degree of taking responsibility for their horrifying indiscretions and of *not* minimizing the experiences of the enslaved.

Therefore, the frequency with which both terms are used is quite significant. I have counted the amount of times the texts of the 2009 and 2019 books refer to enslaved Africans using either 'slave' or 'enslaved'. This includes the presence of the term in chapter- or subheads, as well as picture or source descriptions, but excludes their presence in the glossary or table of contents. I did not include the usage of the term 'slave' if it was used in different, already existing nouns, such as: 'slave trade'.

In the 2009 textbooks, 98.1% of the referrals to enslaved Africans are done using the term 'slave' next to 1.9% that encapsulates the usage of 'enslaved'. Three out of the seven books employ the term 'enslaved' at least once.³⁴ In the 2019 textbooks, 94.1% of the referrals to enslaved Africans are done using the term 'slave' next to 5.9% that encapsulates the usage of 'enslaved'. All of the eight books that were analyzed employ the term 'enslaved' at least once.³⁵ This demonstrates an increase of 210,5% in the total usage of the term 'enslaved' and an increase of 132.6% in the amount of books that employ this term. The increase in total frequency of 'enslaved' is significant, but should not be weighed too heavily. After all, the total frequency with which the term is used in 2019 is still only 6%. This is a very low number and, as such, does not tell us much. The second factor shows an increase that isn't as big but is potentially more relevant. This is because the more widespread usage of the term 'enslaved' - representing a recognition of the agency and humanity of the enslaved, and of the Dutch part in enslaving them - could indicate a heightened awareness of Dutch racism, past and present. Thereby, it could imply a slight departure from the Dutch tendency to deny its colonial and slavery past and a departure from the rigid identification with colorblindness and innocence.

Dutch contribution to the slave trade and enslavement

Another factor pointing to a departure from the rigid view of the innocent Dutch is the space assigned in the books to the Dutch contribution to slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Meaning, I am talking about independent chapters or subsections -with their own subheads- that are

³⁴ Total amount of times the textbooks refer to enslaved Africans = 260. Amount of times the term 'slave' was used = 255 = 98.1% Amount of times the term 'enslaved (African)' was used = 5 = 1.9%. Amount of books that employ the term 'enslaved' at least once = 3/7 = 37.5%.

³⁵ Total amount of times the textbooks refer to enslaved Africans = 288. Amount of times the term 'slave' was used = 271 = 94.1% Amount of times the term 'enslaved (African)' was used = 17 = 5.9% Amount of books that employ the term 'enslaved' at least once = 8/8 = 100%.

exclusively dedicated to this topic. The presence of these sections are relevant because they illustrate an awareness of the current public debate on race(ism) and discrimination: the presence of slavery and racism in contemporary Dutch society. Combining the data of the 2009 textbooks suggests that 0.74% of all pages on slavery are devoted exclusively to the Dutch role in this practice.³⁶ Of the seven books published in 2009 one dedicated an independent section to it, translating to 14,3%. Taking information from the 2019 textbooks proves that 6,3% of all pages on slavery are devoted exclusively to the Dutch role in this practice.³⁷ Of the eight books published in 2019 four dedicated independent sections to it, which translates to 50%. This shows an increase on both parts, with an increase of 257.1 % in the amount of distinct books that allot space to this topic. This is a significant increase, and seems to reflect the contemporary public debate on Dutch people and race(ism) and tolerance. Thereby, it also suggests a more critical approach to the narrative of the tolerant Dutch: one that for example, acknowledges its abusive, racist past and the contemporary articulations of it (in people, institutions, public space etc.).

Direct/explicit acknowledgement

Another way in which the books fully recognize the slave trade and the subjects responsible for the racist abuse, in a way that assumes responsibility, is through explicitly and directly acknowledging it. That is to say without using euphemistic, implicit or vague language that hides part of the story. The following quote from a 2009 textbook illustrates a way of taking ownership for a grueling act: “Why did they Dutch want to use slaves in Surinam? Mostly because they wanted to make as much money as possible from their colony...” (Schrover: 35)³⁸

As can be seen, this quote does not deny or minimize Dutch engagement in the slave trade. It implies taking ownership, firstly, by using the verb 'to want', showing that not only did the Dutch choose to partake in slavery, they did so willingly. Hereby, the excerpt does not hide the ugly truth, the morally or ethically 'bad' side of the Dutch. In fact, it explicitly acknowledges Dutch brutality: their preference for economic advantage rather than the wellbeing of human beings. The text states it as it is, without downplaying certain circumstances or events. It reflects an acknowledgement of Dutch participation and a degree of taking responsibility for it.

Another straightforward textual fragment from 2009 reads: “Just like in North America, the strenuous labor on the plantations was done by slaves. And the WIC retrieved those from Africa themselves...” (Schrover: 35)³⁹

Again, fingers are not pointed at others and blame is not shifted. After all, the fragment admits the

³⁶ Total amount of pages = 1063. Total amount of pages dedicated to slavery = 33,5 = 3,2%
Total amount of pages dedicated to Dutch part in slavery = 0,25.

³⁷ Total amount of pages = 1904. Total amount of pages dedicated to slavery = 31,5 = 1,7%
Total amount of pages dedicated to Dutch part in slavery = 2.

³⁸ Translated from original: "Waarom wilden de Nederlanders slaven gebruiken in Suriname? Vooral omdat ze zo veel mogelijk geld wilden verdienen met hun kolonie ..."

³⁹ Translated from original: "Net als in Noord-Amerika werd het zware veldwerk op de plantages gedaan door slaven. En die haalde de WIC zelf uit Afrika. ..."

Dutch (WIC) did it “themselves”. The text does not convey that the Dutch simply went along with what was an existing practice, or find some other justification. Instead, this fragment portrays a simple but effective way to take responsibility. Indeed, it does not only acknowledge explicitly the *retrieval* of slaves, but also gives a hint of the consequences: the fact that these slaves would await a tiresome existence filled with “strenuous labor”. As a result, this excerpt to a small degree also represents an acknowledgement of the Dutch role in exposing enslaved Africans to grueling working conditions.

The following excerpts from 2019 textbooks, too, present to some extent an acknowledgement of the part played by Europeans in the slave trade.

“The transatlantic slave trade reached new heights in the 18th century. This happened because at the time European domination was being expanded. The number of colonizers and plantations increased and with that the demand for slaves grew as well.” (Geugten, van der, 2019d: 105)⁴⁰

“Slavery and the slave trade had existed in Africa long before the arrival of the Europeans. But because of the arrival of the Europeans and their demand for slaves the hunt of African and Arabic slave traders for Africans in Western Africa increased.” (Dalhuisen: 101)⁴¹

“Because of European demand the slave trade in Africa increased.” (Geugten, van der, 2019b: 89)⁴²

⁴⁰ Translated from original: “De trans-Atlantische slavenhandel bereikte zijn hoogtepunt in de 18e eeuw. Dat kwam doordat de Europese overheersing toen verder werd uitgebouwd. Het aantal kolonisten en plantages nam toe en daarmee groeide ook de vraag naar slaven.”

⁴¹ Translated from original: “Slavernij en slavenhandel bestonden al in Afrika vóór de komst van de Europeanen. Maar door de komst van de Europeanen en hun vraag naar slaven nam de jacht van Afrikaanse en Arabische slavenhandelaars op Afrikanen in West-Afrika toe.”

⁴² Translated from original: “Door de vraag van de Europeanen nam de slavenhandel in Afrika toe.”

Admittedly, there is no beating around the bush: no hiding behind existing traditions, or implicit or vague language that serves to minimize liability. The texts portray accurately what happened: that the European traders were the cause of the massive increase in slave trade. Hereby, they illustrate a degree of taking ownership of the European part in the slave trade. However, they do not assume responsibility in the same way for the horrors that took place *during* this slave trade. That part of the European contribution remains implicit. As such, these quotes are not as significant as fragments that depict European traders and/or slave owners as more explicitly admitting to immoral behavior or abuse.

As illustrated, the textbooks from 2009 and 2019 contain fragments that explicitly recognize the Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. This is valuable because it represents an acknowledgement of sinful actions or behavior, and assumes guilt. Hereby, they represent a departure from the position of innocence, that is so often claimed by the Dutch. However, the extent to which the immorality of the Dutch is acknowledged differs between the two series of textbooks. In total, the 2009 textbooks contain two elements that exude responsibility and ownership for the involvement in the slave trade, as opposed to four of these elements in the 2019 series. Moreover, the number of distinct textbooks that these fragments appear in have also increased: from two books in 2009 to four books in 2019. These numbers indicate a higher degree of taking responsibility. However, as illustrated, ownership of the unethical practices of the Dutch is less outspoken within the 2019 excerpts. Hence, these textual elements demonstrate a departure from the rigid claim to innocence and tolerance, albeit a limited one.

Conclusion

After discussing the many textual elements that represent the Dutch slavery past in educational history textbooks, the question remains whether we can determine a shift in the national narrative of Dutch tolerance, innocence, color-blindness and anti-racism, similar to recent years of social developments and public debate.

Within the textbooks there are textual elements that suggest there has, indeed, been a shift. More responsibility seems to be taken for the Dutch involvement within the transatlantic slave trade and slavery. Indeed, the fragments that explicitly and clearly state the actions of the Dutch (thus: *not* employing euphemistic language or implicit verbs etc.) show a slight increase in numbers, even though the recognition does not always include a recognition of the brutality of their behavior. More significant is the amount of space that is allotted exclusively to the Dutch involvement in the textbooks, which has increased substantially in the total amount of appearances and in the amount of books it occurs in. Additionally, the use of accurate terminology in referring to enslaved Africans has also increased, signifying a deeper recognition of the abuse experienced by enslaved Africans and the actors who inflicted it. However, as the total amount of appearances is still very low, this increase must not be weighed too heavily. The decrease in fragments that emphasize the normality of slavery and the slave trade, then, is more convincing. It entails making fewer excuses for the Dutch's actions and suggests, to some degree, an acknowledgement of the (racialized) difference between slavery prior to European involvement and during.

Still, there are also many textual elements that indicate the national narrative of tolerance, innocence, and color-blindness is still in place. In justifying the Dutch abuse of enslaved Africans, enslaved Africans are still portrayed almost equally as barbaric and dangerous through the use of certain nouns and adjectives, harsh verbs and metaphors. The supposed necessity of participation in the slave trade and slavery, pervading through choice in lexicon, even shows a slight increase in times that it is portrayed in the textbooks. In a similar fashion, the Dutch traders are equally enabled to evade blame for their actions in the 2009 as well as 2019 textbooks. Particular nouns and adjectives are employed that invoke understanding for the European traders, including the Dutch. Moreover, the Dutch are kept away from explicit and direct implication with physical violence by the use of passive voice when harmful actions are described, or by *not* mentioning them as the subjects/perpetrators of the harmful act. The books also illustrate elements that minimize the slave trade, enslavement or the abuse of enslaved Africans. The supposed limited or small contribution of the Dutch to the slave trade is emphasized equally in 2019 as it was in 2009 by employing similes, among other things. Euphemistic language is still used to downplay the horrors of the sea journey (from Africa to America) and general abuse of enslaved Africans. Additionally, there are similar amount of instances wherein slavery's negative impact on society or the state is valued more than the effects on human beings. Finally, the suitability of African bodies for slave labor is argued equally in the 2009 and 2019 books.

It appears, then, that despite (positive) developments there is no *significant* change in the narrative of the Dutch as tolerant, innocent and color-blind. Certainly, we can see elements that disrupt the rigid national narrative of tolerance, innocence and color-blindness. However, they are not very substantial or widespread. Defiantly, not in comparison to the many elements that still rein-

force the existing self-image. If anything, the research suggests a slight awareness or recognition of the part the Dutch played in the slave trade and slavery, but not so much of the grueling damage that was done *by* them at the time. Thereby, the loss of face for the Dutch is minimal, and the notion of Dutch innocence, and specifically Dutch tolerance and color-blindness seems to persist. The history textbooks under investigation, thus, do not reflect in the same way the wider societal debate and developments on race(ism) and discrimination, confronting Dutch society with its racist discourse and praxis.

Future research could contribute to the field by examining the illustrations used in the textbooks and analysing additional teaching materials, such as workbooks and/or online content. Alternatively, use could also be made of a bigger sample size, which entails including textbooks from a wider range of publishing houses.

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