In 2002, a national slavery monument was unveiled in Amsterdam by the Dutch Queen Beatrix. Some consider it a commemoration of the victims of Dutch slavery. Others see it as a celebration of the abolition of a horrific system of oppression.¹

Two terms are used to describe the historical process by which the system of slavery ended: *abolition* and *emancipation*. At issue here is whether these terms partake in the same historical canon in the Netherlands, or if they belong to different discourses reflecting the ethnic identities of the authors. Are these two terms interchangeable? Are they complementary? Are they mutually exclusive? Is one Dutch or European and the other Caribbean? Or is one white and the other black? It soon becomes clear that simple dichotomies are not applicable. Moreover, Dutch historiography is dominated by legacies of colonial history. A 'subaltern' discourse is therefore needed to work on a more open, multi-voiced historiography. This chapter shows that until quite recently this subaltern discourse, as far as it existed at all, was found among those historians who preferred to use ‘emancipation’. In academic historiography and textbooks the end of slavery was almost exclusively termed ‘abolition’. In my view, this represented a Eurocentric canon, which marginalized the agency of the slaves themselves, and which only recently began to change.

The high-school history textbook I grew up with taught: ‘Around 1860 slavery was abolished, first in the East, then in the West.’² That was all it said about Dutch slavery. It seemed that Dutch slavery had no history; it only ended ‘around 1860’. The same book, however, devoted a sizeable paragraph to slavery and its abolition in the United States. In previous years, students may have learned more about Dutch slavery, but it is unlikely to have been substantial. Many Dutch are still surprised to learn about the role of the Netherlands in the transatlantic slave system. At the
same time descendants of the enslaved often complain that their story is omitted in standard history textbooks and that (white) historians have never shown any interest in their past. A quick review reveals that until quite recently this claim is certainly true regarding high school history textbooks. Elementary school history books have a longer tradition of paying at least some attention to the history of Dutch slavery, albeit in a rather biased form.

The first studies of Dutch slavery appeared in the 1930s. However, these essays did not really break the silence, since they did not bring Dutch involvement in slavery to public attention. Neither did they prevent the descendants of the enslaved feeling left out of the historical discourse. We may therefore wonder whether an exclusivist, Dutch (white?) scholarly canon still exists, and whether over time a (black?) counter-canon has emerged.

The Dutch connection with slavery is now recognized as significant by historians, museum curators, publishers, journalists, teachers and politicians. A much wider audience has become aware of slavery. This change is the result of a postcolonial emancipation process in which scholars and non-scholars have attempted to liberate themselves from the colonial discourse. A major impetus for this has been the encounter between Caribbean migrants and Dutch people in a postcolonial setting and the emancipatory force of the diaspora discourse. Yet the new postcolonial historiography of Dutch slavery is still in its infancy and the colonial heritage is still substantial. Nevertheless, in 1951, a scholar of Dutch West Indies history, Johannas Felhooen Kraal, concluded in an essay on slave brand marks in the Tropenmuseum collection in Amsterdam:

'It is necessary for us to realise the degree to which the memory of slavery in the Caribbean is still a living part of today's culture. Should we see this in the same way as for instance Alva and Napoleon are living notions for the Netherlands... Or should we consider the after-effect of slavery as a personal tradition of individuals within a family context... Slavery has cut so deeply into the lives of many generations that an unconscious impact of its influence must be taken for granted.'

Felhooen Kraal, who had travelled widely in the former slave colonies of the Caribbean, was well aware that her view was not widely shared. In the same essay she pointed to a conscious silence surrounding Dutch slavery among Dutch historians who 'prefer not to revive all those horror stories.' She also showed an awareness of differences between black and white historical legacies, influencing the way the past is perceived today and resulting in different versions of history. Her essay was published three years before the first edition of my old school textbook, but Felhooen Kraal's view would not be out of place in the context of today's postcolonial discourse.

A brief review of the historiography of the terms 'abolition' and 'emancipation' in relation to slavery in Suriname demonstrates the complex and circuitous development of this canon. Abolition is the term generally used to describe and analyse the socio-political process experienced by the Dutch elite which started in the late eighteenth century, reached its climax in the 1850s and culminated in 1863. Emancipation is mainly used to describe and analyse a process of (self)liberation in the Caribbean by the black lower classes. In this process 1863 represents a milestone known as Emancipation Day. However, the process did not stop then, and still continues today. The choice between the terms seems to depend on whether the writer asks 'What happened to the system?'

Most studies have focused on abolition, not emancipation. Even so, almost every scholar has used both terms, albeit in differing ratios. Although all authors seem to employ strict parameters outlining the difference between these two terms, amazingly few have tried to define or describe the criteria they applied. Rudolf van Lier, a Surinamese sociologist and historian, in his dissertation implied a kind of definition when he used the two terms in the same sentence: 'Despite all the agitation in favour of the abolition of slavery, emancipation of the slaves took a long time.'

Here the two terms show the difference between the legal end of the slave system and the liberation of the enslaved people. Eugene Waaldijk, another Surinamese scholar, who focused on the role of the Dutch press in the abolition process, used the same implicit definition, as did most scholars after him.

However, it was another Surinamese historian, Jozef Swipersad, who first supplied a formal definition. In his dissertation on the Dutch abolition policy he stated: 'the idea of emancipation, [can be] understood as a formal and complete granting of equal rights to slaves at a certain point in time'. According to Swipersad this meant in the British
case ‘an immediate and complete granting of equal rights to blacks and whites alike’. However, in the case of Suriname, he observed a much slower process of liberation, in which emancipation should be considered ‘the result of an extremely prolonged development’. Finally, it was the Dutch historian Cornelis Goslinga in his magnum opus on the history of the Dutch in the Caribbean who explicitly defined both terms. ‘While abolition has a single concept: that of ending the slavery system, emancipation has a double meaning: that of the development in the rights and freedom granted to a slave – a process that may take centuries – and that of granting of his total freedom from forced labour which can be recorded on a certain day in a certain year’. So, the different terms were now defined as indicating different time dimensions, as well as different subjects. Since then, however, no one has accepted or rejected this definition. This may be because none was needed in the absence of a debate. A glance at the historiography seems to confirm this, since the two terms appear to belong to different worlds, referring to different versions of history.

**Historiography of abolition and emancipation: ending colonialism**

Between the late 1940s and early 1980s a handful of academic articles and chapters of books as well as five scholarly volumes were published on the end of Dutch slavery. All of these, with one exception, focused on the abolition process in the Netherlands. Only Van Lier dedicated more space to developments in Suriname. Abolition was the term applied most frequently. The exceptions, unsurprisingly, were two Surinamese historians, Waaldijk and Siwpersad. They frequently employed the term ‘emancipation’ instead of ‘abolition’. Despite their focus on the political and media processes in the Netherlands their – and particularly Siwpersad’s – use of the term ‘emancipation’ indicates that they were concerned with the subjects of the slave system in Suriname. The other authors, equally unsurprisingly all Dutch, concentrated on the actors in the abolition process. At first, these were mainly sought in academic and religious circles in the Netherlands. Later, a few individual Dutch officials and politicians, even in Suriname, were included. This approach is also taken in a 1992 dissertation discussing the petit histoire surrounding the main political players in the abolition period in the Netherlands and Suriname. These studies were based on Dutch documents such as letters and speeches, parliamentary and government papers, and colonial reports. They focused on the characters in the Dutch political drama, while the subjects of abolition never really entered the story. Actually, it was Dutch history, plain and simple, and it had hardly anything to do with Suriname, except for its historical consequences.

So, for many years the historiography of the end of slavery was Dutch national history defined by the structural use of the term ‘abolition’, since ‘we’ abolished that horrific system. Only their Surinamese colleagues spoke of ‘emancipation’ and paid (some) attention to the enslaved in Suriname. Clearly the main division seems to have been geographical. There was no real debate about the agents and processes of abolition. Each of these historians, white and black, located these in the Netherlands.

Colour, or native origin, does seem to have prevented historians taking this history beyond its narrow and traditional socio-political confines by focusing on the subjects across the ocean, the enslaved and others. For Surinamese historians, Suriname was obviously and understandably more than just the exotic background of major events in the ‘mother country’. Yet their publications still belong to the realm of colonial history, since these represent history from above, focusing more on the colonizing elite than the colonized. Both Waaldijk and Siwpersad concluded that no potential opposition force, such as the press, including the Surinamese press, nor the enslaved, had any significant impact on the abolition process. The only clear alternative to colonial history is found in Van Lier’s consistent Surinamese perspective. He dedicated two pages to the abolition debates in the Netherlands, before returning to his historical subject, events in Suriname. Yet his description of the calm and respectful behaviour of the enslaved during the emancipation celebrations on 1 July 1863 and after, and his emphasis that the fears of the planters did not materialize show a colonial need to prove the ‘civilized’ level of the colonized.

The main difference between black and white historians seems to have been one of perception and geography, as well as in relation to the historical actors. However, apart from Van Lier, it was only a difference in degree. And again Van Lier was the exception in avoiding the focus on events and discussions – then as well as now – in the Dutch world. Van Lier was inspired by the work of the famous Brazilian sociologist and historian Gilberto Freyre on Brazilian slavery, as well as by a Freudian approach to history in general. None of the other studies compare Suriname with other slaving societies. Nor do they refer to the wider debates on the abolition of slavery in the Atlantic world, such as debates about the Ragatz thesis on the economic decline of Caribbean sugar plantations, the Williams thesis on the incompatibility of industrial capitalism and slavery, or Seymour Drescher’s econocide thesis on the economic irrationality of abolition.
Post-colonial beginnings

In the second period, the Dutch concept of abolition was dislodged from its parochial historiographical context for the first time since Van Lier’s pioneering work. In a number of articles and books, the end of Dutch slavery was now analysed in the context of international developments and contemporary debates, particularly the British debate. Yet this was still Dutch socio-political history analysing mainly top-down processes from a Eurocentric perspective. Even though Surinamese independence in 1975 and a full-blown military dictatorship with anti-Dutch revolutionary rhetoric in the 1980s made it clear that the colonial days were over, the impact of these developments on the historiography of abolition was minimal.

However, during this period, a small group of Surinamese social science PhD students in the Netherlands started to lay the foundations for an alternative discourse by introducing a neo-Marxist approach to slavery studies. They were inspired by Eric Williams’ Capitalism and Slavery (1944), and even more by Immanuel Wallerstein’s world system analysis, while they also followed in the footsteps of Andre Gunder Frank, Walter Rodney and other dependencia theorists who turned to history to analyse the phenomenon of underdevelopment. They tried to apply these ideas to the history of Suriname, and even started their own, short-lived, scholarly journal, Caraibisch Forum.

These were sociologists, not historians. Their descriptions and analyses were mainly based on secondary sources and there was hardly any interaction with Dutch historians. Their principal contribution to historiography, apart from the historical research itself, was the way they linked the history of slavery and its abolition to broader economic and ideological debates, and shifted the focus away from the Netherlands to global economic trends and their effect on the colonized periphery. They specifically opposed the prevailing Holland-centrism. It remains questionable whether this was genuine post-colonial history with its own identity, or history derived from the colonizers. In their analyses these scholars replaced the Netherlands with the market, or global capitalism, leaving the former colony as no more than a tropical background for larger structures and developments. It was not the kind of history with which descendants of the enslaved could easily identify. To these Surinamese neo-Marxists abolition was a consequence of the transition of commercial capitalism to industrial capitalism in the Netherlands. Not surprisingly, therefore, they all employed the term ‘abolition’. For example, Ruben Gowricham concluded that abolition was a consequence of retarded industrialization in the Netherlands which resulted in a rate of technological innovation on Surinamese plantations which was too slow to consolidate Suriname’s competitiveness on the world market.\footnote{17}

Furthermore, as a result of their class analysis based on dependencia and world system theory they focused on the dominant classes, since that was where the motor of capitalist (under-)development was to be found. Accordingly, the subaltern groups or classes remained anonymous victims of global exploitative structures. The analysis of these authors could be defined as anti-colonial and subaltern, but their historical focus was in a way far more Eurocentric than they might have hoped, and therefore, paradoxically, still under the spell of colonial history. In any case, the work of these Surinamese social scientists remained isolated and did not become part of the abolition canon. This may have to do with the fact that the Caraibisch Forum group were not historians and their archival research not especially impressive, or because Wallerstein and his colleagues soon lost favour among Western historians.\footnote{18} Their forceful critique of colonialism and racism may also have made them less acceptable to Dutch mainstream historians.

Meanwhile the – mainly white – historians and anthropologists studying Dutch slavery at that time showed no interest at all in research into the way the slave system ended. In those years they concentrated on plantation slavery and marronage. This in itself, however, stimulated the decolonization process towards a post-colonial history of slavery, since the historiographical focus began to shift away from the Netherlands and Europe to historical developments in Suriname. Abandoning the exclusive focus on the metropolitan ruling classes, historians now looked for changes at grass-roots level in colonial society. Abolition history, with its focus on the Netherlands, did not fit into this new Suriname-oriented approach. The abolitionist movement in the Netherlands had never been substantial enough to attract much interest from historians. There were no Dutch equivalents to the work of Roger Anstey, David Brion Davis\footnote{19} or Drescher, and no Dutch contributions to the international abolition debate. The Dutch abolition canon therefore remained more or less unchanged.

Two widely read and much cited books underscore this unchanged, Eurocentric use of the term ‘abolition’. In 1994 Jur van Goor published a history of the Dutch colonies which was reprinted at least three times.\footnote{20} In this work he dedicated no less than seven pages to the abolition (!) of slavery. Although he alternated the terms abolition and emancipation, his description is largely Dutch history, in which the subjects of the slave system have no voice of their own. His opening question is whether the Dutch might not have maintained slavery for an ‘unnecessarily long’ time...
He eventually concludes that the ten-year apprenticeship system which followed abolition 'functioned favourably, because the slaves remained at the plantations'. This is colonial history in the post-colonial era. And this is not the last example. In his reprinted popular study on the Dutch slave trade, Piet Emmer devoted an entire chapter to abolition, focusing solely on developments and debates in the Netherlands. Emancipation is not part of his vocabulary.

One Dutch historian, Goslinga, although firmly rooted in the colonial tradition, connects to post-colonial developments. A stay of several years as a history teacher on Curacao, followed by a career in the United States, probably gave him sufficient distance to move beyond the Eurocentric canon. Although the title of his magnum opus, The Dutch in the Caribbean, suggests a traditional perspective, he gave the substantial chapter on the end of slavery the title: 'Emancipation without a Vision', rather than 'Abolition without a Vision'. Obviously, developments in the Caribbean formed an important part of his critical analysis: The Dutch Abolition of Slavery constitutes an episode in the history of this "peculiar institution" of which the Dutch have little reason to be proud. Yet according to Goslinga, abolition and emancipation both formed part of the inevitable progress of civilization, granted to the enslaved from above. Emancipation of the enslaved in Curacao, for example, is described as a process of (religious) education by Dutch missionaries.

Though colonial in perspective and analysis, Goslinga's work introduced 'emancipation' as a serious subject in Dutch Caribbean historiography. Meanwhile, this field of history became generally more internationally oriented and gradually shifted its focus to Caribbean and world history. Nonetheless, it was still tied to colonial history, due to its top-down perspective, its privileging of colonial sources, the prominence of Dutch historical actors, and a common assumption that abolition had been an externally driven historical phenomenon. The enslaved did not seem to have played any active part at all, it had merely happened to them. The main difference between black and white scholars in this respect was the anti-colonial tone of the first and their attempts to link Dutch colonialism and particularly the Surinamese case to international subaltern debates, as well as the lack of interest in the abolition/emancipation theme among white historians.

Maturing post-colonialism

In 1994 Drescher published an influential essay on the lateness of the Dutch abolition of slavery. He argued that this was not due to the relatively late industrialization of the Netherlands, but rather to a lack of new forms of social mobilization and new notions of 'human rights'. This stimulated debate among historians in the Netherlands and, as a consequence, for the first time the notion of abolition was structurally linked to the emancipation process in the Caribbean.

This joined two research traditions. Marronage and slave resistance, particularly in Suriname, had been studied intensely since the late 1960s and early 1970s by Dutch, Surinamese and American anthropologists and historians. They have marshalled a wide variety of sources to tell the story of what Eric Wolf has called 'people without history'. Plantation archives, personal documents, colonial archives, missionary records and archaeological finds are combined with oral history and oral testimonies in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century written sources. The results of these combinations of sources and the (ethnic) variety of the researchers proved far more post-colonial than the history of abolition had ever been. It was a less elitist and more inclusive 'history from within', focusing on the lives of the people that abolition actually affected. This interdisciplinary approach resulted from contributions by anthropologists and linguists, including some from outside the Netherlands who were not burdened by the Dutch colonial legacy. Post-colonial historical anthropology of slavery and marronage at 'grass-roots level' based on extensive field-work found its way into the 'history from above' story of abolition through good old archival research. This led to an entirely new approach to the process of abolition. Historians now wanted to know whether it was fuelled from both sides of the Atlantic, and what exactly it was that was abolished.

In the 1980s the canon still held that during the nineteenth century 'slave owners were not confronted with heavy pressure from the slave population'. Later research based on a variety of sources revealed that at least one-third of all Surinamese plantations experienced some form of rebellion among the enslaved during this period involving ten or more slaves and military intercession of some sort. Twice, in 1848 and 1856-57, slave unrest and revolt had occurred nationwide following rumours of emancipation. Although these figures were new, indications of a link between rebellion in Suriname and the abolition debate in the Netherlands had always existed, particularly in the press. A clear example is the following, from a correspondent in Suriname in 1848:

The [plantation] director, who used to have moral power over the slaves, is now being treated by the slaves with disdain. The subordination is completely undermined. Now the servitors are beginning to
of Amsterdam and both funded by the state. Afro-Dutch emancipation has now become the issue, rather than the celebration of the abolition of slavery, which the Dutch government declared ‘national’ in 2000.

So is emancipation black and abolition white? Obviously, the two historical discourses are more interconnected than this simple dichotomy suggests. There is, for example, a gender dimension in the abolition/emancipation link, which confuses the white–black opposition. Recent research reveals that, as in Britain although on a smaller scale, Dutch women contributed substantially to the abolitionist cause from the end of the eighteenth century by connecting it to their own emancipation. Until now abolitionists had always been characterized as bourgeois liberal and pious Protestant men. Now it turns out that hundreds of women, mainly from the middle and upper classes were actively involved in the struggle.

Even more than their male counterparts, they managed to overcome religious and political differences in their joint efforts. They started their own initiatives, to the occasional chagrin of their menfolk, who were not always amused. Women abolitionists transcended their parochial worlds and worked together on a national and sometimes even international level to create networks for activities and communication. These activities enabled them to enter the public, male, domain on their own terms. Thus women’s emancipation unconsciously echoing the emancipation process of the enslaved helped force the abolition of slavery.

It makes no sense to maintain that abolition is white and emancipation is black. Both contain dimensions of the opposite colour. ‘Abolition’ dominated because it was a conveniently arranged history of (white) progress towards a victorious end that fitted easily into the standard view of the nineteenth-century progress of civilization in the Netherlands. Clearly also the enduring popularity in the Netherlands of Uncle Tom’s Cabin reflects a culture that discouraged the Dutch from examining their own historical involvement in slavery. Until the 1960s, ‘abolition’ was little more than a footnote to the Dutch historical canon. ‘Emancipation’ held even less of place in the Dutch canon, a distant story of people trying to liberate themselves from a subordinate status in a colonial setting. Moreover, since the 1950s the Afro-Surinamese emancipation process had become the driving force behind a more general Surinamese anti-colonialism, and this hardly encouraged its introduction into the Dutch historical canon. Later, however, the emancipation process migrated overseas to the ‘mother country’. There, starting in the 1950s and 1960s it began to link with the African nationalist and African diaspora discourse. As a result, Afro-Surinamese emancipation history became the field of black activists and nationalists as well as sociologists and anthropologists, rather than
of historians of Dutch society who probably considered this field too politicized and ethnicized. Emancipation was a black subject, just as women's emancipation was a women's subject.

With the massive growth of the Afro-Dutch population since the 1970s the emancipation process remained a vital issue in the former colonial Netherlands. This involved an almost physical confrontation between the notions of abolition and emancipation. The dominant abolition discourse came under fire from the emancipation discourse expounded by black activists in the Netherlands who focused on a shared past that still had to be accounted for. Formal apologies, a national monument, a slavery institute, new texts on slavery in schoolbooks and similar demands entered the political agenda. Historians, white and black, who had been studying emancipation in Suriname, were now obliged to link these to developments in the Netherlands. From both sides, academic as well as political, black voices (not the same as black historians) started to enter the canon, thereby finally inaugurating its decolonization. This process can be observed in classrooms too. Not only is the number of black educators gradually increasing, more important is the increasing presence of black voices in textbooks and other educational materials. However, it is very much dependent on the individual teachers what is done with this information. In any case, the history of slavery is still a far cry from the historical and moral point of reference that World War II represents in the history programmes at school.

Conclusion

Obviously, black historians have always been more ready to include black historical experiences into historiography than white historians. But not all historians of the abolition discourse were white and not all historians in the emancipation discourse were black. Clearly, the abolition discourse is more Eurocentric or 'Holland-centric, whereas the emancipation discourse is more Suriname-centric or Afrocentric. The two extremes of these discourses appear similar, albeit in mirror image. This is not surprising, since Afrocentrism represents a counter-discourse to the long dominance of Eurocentrism and white racism in national and world history. The opposing historical schemes of good and bad, heroes and criminals, civilization and barbarism are part of the empowerment strategy of an emancipation process. At the same time they also play a part in the call for reparations, which requires a clear division between those who pay and those who receive in this confusingly interdependent world.

The most fertile attempts at post-colonial history therefore seem to be found in the contact zone between these Eurocentric and Afrocentric extremes. There, attempts are made to bring black and white voices together, without necessarily harmonizing them. This is a quest for a multi-voiced history. One of the earliest examples of this approach is the history of the Saramaka Maroons of Suriname, told by the American historical anthropologist Richard Price. In two of his books he uses different typefaces to symbolize the main voices in Saramaka history. One represents the Saramaka themselves, based on oral history gathered over many years in the field. Another is used for the colonizers, and a third for the missionaries who were part of the colonial project, but who also tried to represent the interests of their black converts. These latter two voices are based on archival sources. The fourth letter type represents the voice of the conductor of the choir, Price himself. Of course it remains history conveyed mainly through the filter of outsiders. At least it offers new ways of dealing with historical canons by integrating voices of 'people without history'.

Actually, all attempts at combining different historical sources and heritages, whether tangible or intangible, necessarily feature multiple voices and allow different perspectives to be linked. The first priority is to search for these different voices, for example black and white. The next and probably more important priority is to show how these voices have interacted and form a complex story. It is about the inclusiveness of the story, that there never is only one voice, one historical truth, one colour, one canon. The recent cry for a 'canon' in several 'post-multicultural' European societies, however, seems to point in the opposite direction. Perhaps it is history that needs emancipation.

Notes

5. Oostindie (ed.), Facing up to the Past; A van Stipriaan, 'Between Diaspora, (Trans)nationalism and American Globalisation: a History of Afro-Surinamese
7. Ibid.: 103.
18. Although in the 1990s Wallerstein and his colleagues made a spectacular comeback in culture studies and globalization studies.
21. Ibid., p. 244.
22. Ibid., p. 247.