

***The Trans-Atlantic slave trade: the apologies and the way forward***  
***Abolition: Proclamation versus Practice***  
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Bearing in mind the many activities planned in commemorating 70 years of the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, I consider a closer look at culture within the Kingdom essential. More so in light of the apologies offered with regard to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade by various authorities within the Kingdom, including His Majesty the King. The apologies, depicting a ‘comma’ and not a full stop at the end, suggest that more will be undertaken to create awareness for engaging the very difficult conversations that need to follow.

It is my opinion that in moving forward the apologies offer the possibility to analyze and fundamentally address the multifaceted contemporary effects and consequences of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, among which the marginalization of persons from the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom, as well as the much debated constitutional democratic deficit within the Dutch Kingdom. It is no longer acceptable to look away and ignore the inequalities - institutionally, socially, economically, financially, educationally and more - between North and South, the European versus the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom, as a result of a shared history and culture.

***Abolition: Proclamation versus Practice***

Taking a closer look at culture within the Dutch Kingdom as a result of our shared history, assisted by the Conflict Tree method. A method of going back to the root cause to understand the consequences and effects of a conflict in a particular situation.

***Culture*** (Oxford languages): are the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society. Culture is powerful, because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify.

With this in mind, let’s analyze the common culture within the Dutch Kingdom. Acknowledging the Trans-Atlantic slave trade as *the root cause* of the present-day relationship within the Dutch Kingdom, is a *conditio sine qua non* in looking ahead, as we address the continuous tensions within the Kingdom.

*The core problem* is that dehumanization of the enslaved Africans was not abolished with the proclamation of ‘freedom’ on July 1, 1863. Emancipation proclaimed freedom, but not equality of persons with a dark skin versus the rest of the population, the colonists and descendants of the colonial masters. It took some years before the enslaved acquired full citizenship. The intricacies regarding citizenship, nationality, the right to hold public office, and other civil and political rights, such as voting rights, to name a few, are topics for separate research and consideration. The culture of inequality, propagated during slavery to appease the conscious of the slave-masters, consolidated by the church, enforced a culture of ‘white supremacy’. Social polarization was a tool to prevent unity among the colonized. This culture was and remained the ‘norm’, with its counterpart a ‘black inferiority complex’; a deep rooted sense of inferiority, transferred generation after generation.

***The culture of ‘white supremacy’*** was institutionalized and perpetuated by rules of social and public order, aimed at exclusion and ensuring that the descendants of the enslaved Africans ‘knew their place’. People with a dark skin – the majority of the then population - were

presumed and labeled to be promiscuous and uncivilized. Their freedom and actions needed to be limited and controlled. This resulted in the first revolt in modern history within the Caribbean part of the Kingdom, the riots of 30 of May 1969 on Curacao, followed by similar actions in 1974 on Sint Maarten, coined as 'Friendly Anger' by the author Jose Lake jr.

### ***Transgenerational transfer of culture***

'White supremacy culture' expanded by the variant 'colorism' - the phenomenon whereby children born from a slave-master and a slave earned a higher status as a result of their lighter skin tone -, still exists today. This type of social behavior, a shared immaterial heritage rooted in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, generated a general democratic deficit within the communities, which often led to feelings of never being enough and or overcompensation for the color of one's skin. Attitudes today often disguised by diverse contemporary terminologies in the now much more complex societies. An evolution of characteristics of paternalism, now applied not just to persons of color, but to the wider population of the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom.

'White supremacy culture' is internalized at both sides of the ocean, being damaging to both people of color and whites.

- Behavior and attitudes adopted by the population in the Caribbean parts, resulting in dominance in the workplace by locals of 'their own' in like manner as treated by the colonial entities, known as the 'crab-mentality', became normative without one realizing the roots of such behavior.
- The signaling from a white male, summoning me that he wanted a cup of coffee and a glass of water, as I entered a meeting room as a young lawyer, is called male chauvinism today. But is it?
- There is no doubt that all attendees to this prestigious Governor's Symposium are accomplished persons. I wonder how many of you are familiar with the statement 'But you are different', often expressed by whites to qualify your skills and abilities? What does 'but you are different' really mean?

Racism as part of culture, consciously or unconsciously, has been part of our shared heritage no matter how much we would like to dispel this. And I speak from experience, as I am blessed with very dark skin, so I know!

### ***In summary***

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the transgenerational transfer of White supremacy culture are topics shunned within the Dutch Kingdom. It is however crucial to understand and acknowledge that White supremacy culture as a result of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade goes beyond racism. It is the norm that supported the dehumanization of the enslaved Africans.

And dehumanization is not just a matter of degrading a group of people, but it is the psychological process of depriving a person, or group, of positive human qualities, personality and dignity. Making them less than human, and hence not worthy of human treatment. This is the root of the culture within the Kingdom, which many are not even conscious of its normative nature today.

'Knowing your place' as normative behavior starts from the cradle by the way we educate our children.

- Using the belt on our children in like manner as the whip was used to impose authority and enforce obedience, was and somehow still is a tradition observed in the Caribbean parts of the Dutch Kingdom.
- Limiting the exploratory nature of youngsters on the playground, in stark contrast to European parents, who allow their offspring to run and explore as much as they want, are quite familiar scenes. They learn to go and explore the world.... because the world is theirs!

Abolition of slavery proclaimed emancipation, but in practice did not introduce equality of all persons within the realm. Democratic aristocracy, not just the more prevalent and discussed constitutional democratic deficit, is still part of culture within the Dutch Kingdom today.

I implore to be inspired and observe Emancipation Day on Monday, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2024 with mindfulness; scrutinize and reflect on the obscured culture within the Dutch Kingdom. The tide of time does not allow us to pretend that everything is dandy. Healing requires recognizing and acknowledging the symptoms in order to contend with the aftereffects of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade within the realm. They are real!

*July 2024*