

Reflections Dr. Nilda Arduin

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Introduction

I will address you today not as a scholar, but as an expert-friend. A friend you most likely do not have in your direct circle of friends. And as such I will share and reflect on challenges and opportunities as a citizen of the Dutch Kingdom, born, raised and living at the other side of the ocean.

Born in Curacao, one of the six Dutch Caribbean islands, and living for the past forty plus years on St. Maarten, I trace my heritage not further than Suriname, a former colony of the Netherlands, where my parents, their parents and grandparents were allegedly born. Possibly one of the last mentioned became a free laborer as she set foot on shore. According to the historical archives the slave trafficking, not slavery, was forbidden in the Dutch Caribbean colonies in 1804. Consequently, the load of clandestine trade ships could be seized by the governor of the territory, and the merchandize, the transported Africans, released upon confiscation, and freed. Considering my maternal grandfather's last name, who was born in 1870, his mother, whose surname he carried, probably became a freed laborer, after setting foot on the soil of Suriname, as part of a load of confiscated merchandize by the then governor. Suriname became an independent country in 1975, and since then the Caribbean part of the Kingdom counts six islands.

Considering this history, the **main question** I will reflect upon tonight is: **What can we do to structurally improve the relations and strengthen democracy within the Dutch Kingdom?**

Pitfalls of democracy

The apology of the Dutch King, which includes an Apology, Request for forgiveness and Acknowledgement that the slave trade/slavery was a crime against humanity, prompted me to explore new democratic perspectives and insights to repair divisions within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The journey from dehumanized people, enslaved African black humans, through a history of 300 plus years of institutionalized white supremacy, is not a black thing. The abolition of slavery in 1863 introduced freedom for the enslaved, but not equality to their white masters. The culture of the formal and informal rules of white supremacy continued after enactment of the Kingdom Charter in 1954, resulting in the everlasting democratic deficit between the European and the Caribbean part of the Kingdom.

New perspectives

Addressing the remnants of the Dutch Transatlantic Slave trafficking and the colonial 'past' is a shared responsibility of the descendants of both the enslaved Africans and the colonial masters. The cries of the descendants of the enslaved Africans/the blacks, are often met with indifference.... Until the apologies from the King they were greatly met with cynicism and fell on deaf ears in the European part of the Kingdom by whites.

I am of the opinion that the apologies provide the Dutch Kingdom new opportunities to make amends for its role in this crime against humanity. Opportunities to be at the right side of history; to heal the wounds that undermine the relationship and full democracy in the Kingdom.

Additionally, the apologies including the public acknowledgement that the transatlantic slave trafficking was a crime against humanity, present the opportunity to be a trendsetter on the European continent for others to follow, and get closer to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in global partnership. More so as democracy is increasingly under threat globally.

Improved relationships must be established on the basis of humanity's moral and intellectual solidarity. Addressing democratic, social, economic, educational and political deficiencies within the realm requires uprooting the historical culture of white supremacy to the principles of human equality.

Approaches

The apologies by the Dutch government and the King necessitates:

- Acceptance of responsibility by the Kingdom government to deal with the effects of this history; this cannot be left up to private initiatives.
- Invest in Kingdom-wide research projects on both sides of the realm, to identify the consequences and effects of the slavery past; financial, economic, educational, social, political, psychological and institutional.
- The Kingdom government should own the outcome of the various research projects and act accordingly in the spirit of cooperation, rather than reproach. Engagement can be executed in a positive or negative way; through mutual respect and dialogue, or demands.
- Increase knowledge and awareness throughout the Kingdom regarding the slavery past and the effects of white supremacy culture in today's societies; educating and structurally sharing the historical facts of the slave trade, starting on primary school level. Repairing today's remnants of slavery should be shared by those, who created white supremacy historically within the Dutch Kingdom.
- Respect for and none interference in the way descendants of enslaved Africans reclaim their squashed humanity and deal with the multi-dimensional recovery process, including but not limited to transgenerational trauma, stigma, imposed inferiority complexes and self-contempt.

I recall the story shared with me two weeks ago in Amsterdam by a dark blond young lady. While appearing to be white, she realized in her early twenties how the stories of her grandmother, whose mother was black, and the continuous efforts of her own mother to hide that she had black roots, traumatized and distorted her behavior and acceptance of who she is. This prompted her to seek psychological therapy to reconcile her slavery heritage and white privileges she learned to embrace and accept as norm.

- Breaking cycles is not a matter of academic learning; understanding, recognizing and feeling the pain and frustration of descendants of black enslaved Africans, who today are still being overlooked and by-passed based on the color of their skin is required to bring about meaningful change within the Kingdom.

- Incorrect narratives have to be corrected by white persons in-the-know; they have to step up and assist others to recognize, understand and deconstruct white supremacy culture and privilege, as well as the unfair effects of same.
- Willingness to share privileges in favor of equal opportunities for blacks is needed for tangible change.
- Finally, possibilities to exchange experiences and learn from each other should be created.

I present that these are just a few approaches to consider in improving relationships and democracy within the realm.

In closing

A new era started. Ownership of responsibility, a core principle of NIMD in promoting democracy worldwide, is key.

Structural and societal awareness campaigns, to promote equality, to correct historical white supremacy culture as a result of the slavery past, should be developed on all levels of the societies.

We are not responsible for the past, but collectively and individually surely responsible for the future. History will judge whether the Kingdom - and by extension global humanity - has been able, after the expressed apologies from government and the Dutch King, to undo the damage caused by its role in the transatlantic slave trade. It should be clear that the ability to adequately respond and address the history of white supremacy culture and privilege, plaguing the relationship within the Kingdom up to today, is a *conditio sine qua non* to strengthen democracy in the realm moving forward.