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The logo for the International Institute of Social Studies, featuring the word "Erasmus" in a stylized, cursive script.

UNDERSTANDING DUTCH POLITICAL APOLOGY IN A
POSTGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION
CONTEXT

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List of Acronyms

ISS – Institute of Social Studies the Hague, an affiliate of Erasmus University Rotterdam.

SR – Scholar Respondent

PG – Postgraduate

PA - Political Apology

Keti Koti – translates to ‘breaking the chains’, a language of the Dutch Surinamese that marks Emancipation Day in Suriname. It is an annual celebration every 1 July and in 2022 marked the commemoration of 150 years of liberation from slavery.

Victims & Non-victims. Victims in this writing refers to descendants of slaves mostly Black Dutch while non-victims are the Dutch citizens whose forefathers were not slaves.

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the perceptions of members of the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) community on the Dutch political apology on slave crimes. It also encountered some randomly interviewed Dutch Caribbean citizens during the Keti-Koti festival, to know their thoughts and meanings they give to the Apology. The research methodology adopted combines a mix of ethnographic writing and knowing with others, from a decolonial approach.

The concept of political apology considered in this apology is specifically related to state apology (government) towards past wrongs done to a victim group. This research finds that the meanings interpreted are complex and varied, and there are many factors that influence the respondents' perceptions of political apology such as identity, historical consciousness, responsibility of the citizens and societal disconnect, which considerably hamper the relevance of political apology to each group.

The analysis in this research is centred on decolonial framework to encourage diversity, reconciliation, and inclusion, in addition to a theoretical framework that expresses broader understanding of political apology, to encourage peaceful co-existence.

Relevance to Development Studies

“We cannot ignore the effects of the past on the present” are the words by Prime Minister Mark Rutte on the 19th of December 2022 (Government nl,2022).

The absence of discuss on the recent Dutch State Apology for crimes of slavery, in the ISS community, has raised questions on the significance and meanings it may have, especially an institution known for its diversity and knowledge sharing on developments studies. The speech by Prime Minister Mark Rutte sparked an interest, prompting me to view this apology as seemingly worthwhile and meaningful topic for ISS.

I considered it an opportunity to discuss such a topic that connects us through history, a theme that reminds us of colonialism, from which the decision to build development institutes emerged. A time when the Netherland had to offer policy-oriented studies to students from developing countries after a renegotiation with its former colonies (George, 2014 p.178). Though, this apology was offered to a specific group (Dutch people of Caribbean descent considered in this context as victims), it should not be exempted from igniting mere conversations amongst ISS student, staff, and non-staff, which would foster better understanding of each other, reconnection, and reflections via the learning of others' histories.

The chosen methodology – a decolonial approach and ethnographic writing, would impact the development of this research, by guiding me to encounter, hear different perceptive and clearly understand the inputs, meanings, and reactions this political apology elicits. This research serves as a platform to bring attention and to understand the meanings Dutch apology holds for ISS.

Keywords: Political Apologies, Responsibility, Decoloniality, Historical Consciousness, Reconciliation.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Journey

I made the decision to venture into this research, after a decolonial lecture, that stimulated my curiosity in decoloniality and slavery. Having grown up in a country that experienced colonial structures from the British metropole and still experiencing effects of coloniality especially in the social and political fabric of its style of governance. Whereas British colonialism formerly ended in 1960 (Fatola, 2009, p1), coloniality as a complex structure of management and control of power, knowledge, subjectivity, and gender remains.

I therefore wondered if an apology from the British government would help to positively impact my country's Democracy, national orientation, and institutions of learning. It entails studying how a change can be made possible, how taking perceptions of intellectuals and researchers into account would make a difference. It is for these reasons that I became interested in the Netherland's apology towards the descendants of the enslaved people of Dutch Caribbean and Surinamese. Having identified ISS researchers/PG students as a target group because ISS is a development institution modelled to encourage diversity in learning; therefore, their perspectives in my research will make it worthwhile.

However, it came with unanticipated challenges which I thought I was prepared for, while encountering people during my fieldwork. Most especially people whom I thought were of my kind (the Afro-Caribbean/Suriname). They were rather sceptical of my presence, and some have projected their pain towards the ancestorship which I thought we shared, as supposedly filled with betrayers who were compliance to the slave trade in sixteen hundreds (Postma,1990). This discovery did not only set me aback, in terms of knowing exactly what/how to react. Instead, I found myself on both sides of the coin, that of the European descent who had felt guilt and blame, while discovering more apologies and remediations that are still needed to be done between Africans and Afro-Caribbeans/Surinamese, at the course of finding meanings of Dutch apology.

Therefore, having understood the principles of my methodology, knowing with others (a decolonial approach) was a support system that facilitated a reciprocal conversation instead of engaging in an endless argument. I was allowed to encounter the *place* in which the pain and hurt is projected rather than the individual themselves, which made me appreciate these new experiences and discoveries.

Ejeh (2021): "If the African is to win his current battle for progress and development, or hopes to overcome his psychological, social and political predicament, he must equip himself with genuine self-knowledge and self-understanding" (p.1).

1.2 The Promise (Background)

“We cannot ignore the effects of the past on the present” are the words by Prime Minister Mark Rutte on the 19th of December 2022(Government.nl,2022), at the National Archives, The Hague, when he apologized to the descendants of the enslaved. Some of them are still burdened by the 250 years of Dutch slavery and still feels the consequences of what happened to their ancestors. They often feel stigmatized, targeted, and unwelcome as evident in apparent racial and institutional imbalances that affect migrant populations of Dutch Suriname and Caribbeans, as well as ethnic profiling by law enforcement agencies, which often leads to a desire for concrete social change, beginning with a demand for an apology. According to Statistics Netherlands research (Statistics Netherlands, 2022), Dutch people of colour or migrant background have smaller housing, worse educational attainment, salaries, and poorer health compared to their white counterparts (ibid).

Furthermore, the recent speech by Prime Minister Rutte appears promising, as immediate steps were assured to explore appropriate redress options to mitigate the present-day effects of slavery as felt by the affected victims, starting with acknowledgement of grievances, apology and reparation initiatives; such as “the governments’ intention to dedicate €200 million to awareness raising projects and €27 million for a museum to preserve The Netherlands’ slavery and slave trade history” (HRW 2022, Government.nl, 2022). Moreso, a subsequent Apology from the Dutch Monarch; King Willem-Alexander on July 1st, 2023, marking the end of 250 years of Dutch slavery appears as a gesture of sincerity to heal the past hurts.

The chronicle of colonial history was a voyage to Africa that began in the 16th century, when captive black people were deemed to be socially and ethnic inferiors. According to Postma “the migration from Africa was unique in that the emigrants were forcibly transferred, as slaves and were looked upon as social and racial inferiors by their European counter parts” (Postma, 1990). As a result, it was simple to submit them to all forms of work, resulting in a tremendous increase in global trade and income accumulation, as well as the expansion racial and cultural stratification of western society as early as 1663. Till present times remains a racial struggle in America that the Netherlands is not immune from (ibid, p.1).

There was an increased number of slaves in the Caribbean Island when the Dutch held monopoly over the asiento slave trade in 1667 (Postma J,1990, p.35). The Netherlands were considered in seventeenth century a nation that was not more than a population of 1.5 million people but was able play an outstanding role in transatlantic slavery. In collaboration with other western traders, by the year (1658-1674) the Dutch Imported about 44,488 African slaves, which “were dispatched to various Island that had become the Suriname, Curacao, and Caribbean Islands and some numbers of slaves were unaccounted for.” (Postma J,1990, p.35).

To better understand the context of this research topic and its historical ramifications, I took a visit to the Netherlands present day one of the most popular museum. – Haags Historisch Museum. In my visit to this museum in the Hague, I learnt about the life of slaves who settled in Suriname and Caribbean regions and was governed by Johannes's van den Bosch. He was the then governor-general of the Caribbean region but did not rule for long. Although he managed to justify slavery as part of Christian faith (Haags Museum), his government

regulations were to ensure that the enslaved people receive Christian education. Thus, the complexity of Christianity as part of slavery became a debate for both supporters and opponents of slavery, which opens another interesting perspective (Haags Museum).

Chasing History and Discovery

In the century before Johannes came into power, Jacobus Captein an African theologian who was once sold off as an eight-year boy to a Dutchman in the Hague, later gained admission to study theology at the University of Leiden. He wrote a paper where he asserted that ‘slavery can also co-exist in Christianity’ which gained him popularity amongst the supporters of slavery and was obviously good for business for the fact he is an African who is an apologist for slavery. (Haags Historisch Museum).

I find it intriguing, that Jacobus may have acted out of his own will, or was he under duress considering the nature of the colonial era and had felt he may endanger his life if he disappoints his Master Dutchman? Including, how the fate of then slaves hanging on to that hope or truth crumbled.

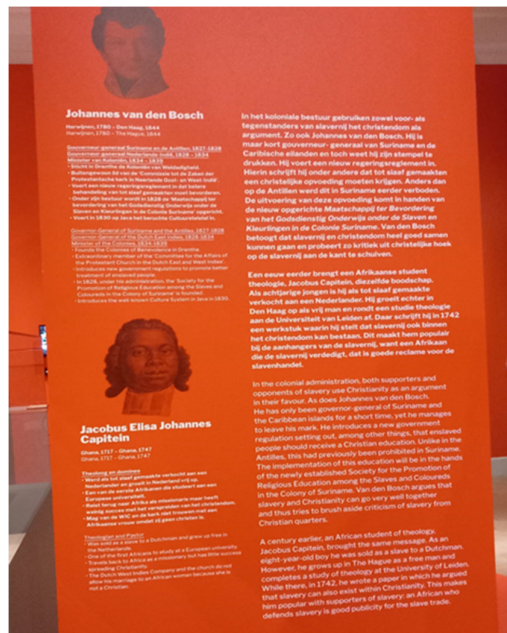


Image 1: A picture showing: Haag Museum (2022) an exhibition depicting the story of Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein - an African student of Theology. (Photo taken by this researcher with the approval of the Museum instructors). Capitein was a student of theology that defended slavery as something right and acceptable.

1.3 Why ISS?

As a result of second world war and decolonization the Netherland in agreement with its former colonies. The Netherlands had to redefine its connections with its former colonies and other developing nations by offering policy-oriented coursework in the social sciences to those involved in development work and development studies, as result has a created school with a nature of island distinct from Dutch society (George,2014, p.178).

ISS had since then remained a diverse, inclusive, dynamic, global university institute with researchers and students from all over the world and alumni in over hundred countries. The establishment of the ISS has created a platform for talents, culture, knowledge, and personal development. This inclusive effort to allow a shared knowledge from all parts of the world, has helped a lot of scholars to make sense of the world through their various multiple interpretations. For example, I have witnessed in essay writing that one student can explain why they believe modernity threatens the original essence of their nation, while another explains why modernization enriches their society. As a result, each student confronts and interprets modernity differently depending on the meanings given to modernity.

I foresaw that ISS as a research institute would be interested in understanding today's relevance of Dutch political apology and its limitations. More about ISS respondents' selection ranging from students of MA/PhD including academic staff is highlighted in chapter three. This is because I consider the ISS as a melting pot of social scientists and researchers from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds, with different knowledge and perspectives.

However, what I encountered in the field was a shift from the anticipated interest to realistic opinions and discoveries. Where student expressed that political apology was a missed opportunity to learn about how the past empire and colonization connects to the present and how disconnected they had felt despite living in the Netherlands.

Thus, engaging the respondents in the meanings and their perception of apology as a discourse, strengthens their interest in history, acknowledging the stories and identity of others through the meaning-making concept that I presented. According to a survey by Tallavaara & Rautiainen (2020) History nurtures appreciation for one's own and other cultures (p.236) and political apologies cannot be visited without first learning about the history behind them.

1.4 Research Objectives

A few research objectives are targeted. First, to investigate if members of the ISS community are interested in the recent Dutch political apologies through decolonial approach (knowing with others) and semi-structured talks to learn about people's views on slavery that happened in the past and the possible ramifications today. Therefore, my core objective was to learn about the many perspectives/meanings on Dutch political apologies and the possible influences of personal identity/roots, ideas, and historical thinking. As defined by Tallavaara and Rautiainen (2020) historical thinking is a type of reasoning that allows one to identify cause and consequences of human actions and reasons behind those actions (p.231).

Secondly, I also wanted to put in perspective the role of ISS as a higher institution of learning to champion social change discourse that can bring healing while decolonizing the past. Therefore, by exploring these apology meanings at ISS community, I could better assess if improvements or re-awaking to her core its role as a development school.

Lastly, to have a strong reflection point of the meanings of the apology outside ISS sphere, I intend to embark on an ethnographic and decoloniality approach in search for answers to understands the meanings that victims/non-victims give to the Dutch apology, what they think of the way, centring the apology was presented, gauge the emotional effects, guilt, pain or discontent it arouses in the 'streets' To achieve this, I have chosen a special slavery memorial festival – named keti-koti. Also, I embarked on museum expeditions to understand the historical contest of Dutch slavey past in conversation or stories; much better.

1.5 Research Questions and Anticipated Limitations

What does Dutch apology mean for members of ISS community, as an international institute of post-graduate education?

Sub-questions:

- What sense does political apology make to members of the ISS and how does this meaning vary with responsibility, historical awareness, and personal ideologies.
- Are such topics considered a taboo to be discussed in institutions of higher learning? If no, in what ways can we maximize the potential of ISS as an agent of social change through frank and open intellectual discourse?
- In relation to research methods, how do we best research these meanings of political apology in a decolonial and inclusive way?

Research Limitations

I am quite aware that I may not have physical access to Historians and Human rights activists who may have wider perspectives of the recent apology from a deeper historical perspective or the hurts that the victims have borne in recent years. Due to the exigency of time limitations, it was not possible, however insights from museum curators and history books consulted to contextualize this research work.

Secondly, I experienced language challenges because I am not a Dutch native speaker, and as a result some of my resource materials/sources needed a translation. Furthermore, I had few regrets that there are some interviews and national debates that would have contributed immensely to this work. If I could speak and understand Dutch language, would have fruitfully enhanced my research. Thankfully, with the help of google translate language tools, I was able to access most important Dutch resources in English, including the translated Prime Ministers' apology and other relevant history sources cited in this work.

Thirdly, I did not encounter some students and lecturers physically because this research was being conducted during the active summer holiday period. This robbed me of visual cues and body-languages that enriches interpersonal interactions in my quest for answers, knowing that online tools do not provide this added advantage if compared to face-time discussions. This is because, in ethnography, non-verbal cues are as important as spoken words. Alternatively, I opted to use online meetings in the few cases where I am left with no option of physical contact.

1.6 Ethical Choices

Considering my positionality as a student of ISS, I have always wanted to produce research that tilts towards unity and accountability, and such impacts my research choices and ethics. I have prepped my questions to be more concise and clearer while interviewing. To avoid discomfort from the students, staff, and some Dutch community, who had given me the opportunity to steal their busy schedules and lend their thoughts.

I ethically chose to thread more carefully at the kind of information I might produce. It is my intention to encourage more togetherness at the ISS academic space rather than disunity through my work. I acknowledged the need to be more accountable to non-disclosure agreements and protect their privacy, especially in my status as an insider made it easier.

1.7 Layout of Written Work

Chapter one introduces the concept of political apology, background, motivation, research objectives, anticipated challenges, and ethical choices. The interest in this chapter is to find out the meanings the students and Dutch community might have given to the current Dutch

apology, how historically aware they are especially on the part ISS community and how responsible they feel towards creating awareness for such a topic as political apology.

Chapter two carries out a critical review of academic research work and literatures on political apologies and meaning makings, while exploring decolonial perspectives that helps to understand the issues, as well as the bridging role of higher education institutions like the ISS in burning social issues. This Chapter raises a question of taboo and the absence of discussing political apology as a topic in ISS and not merely to be viewed as a sensitive topic due to past slavery to incubate social change.

Chapter three describes the methodology used to carry out this research highlighting the strength and these chosen methods limitations of each option considered viz-a-viz the limited time duration for the thesis. It explores the research tools used in this work including: 'knowing with others and ethnography observation.

Chapter four presents the research findings and makes a critical analysis using three main discussion themes: - responsibility, historical awareness, decolonial lens highlighting the prism through which respondents understood political apology, their expectations, opinions, contribution, and suggestions, while raising some open questions.

Chapter five summarises the entire work and draws own conclusions based on findings made in the quest for meaning making of Dutch political apology in the academic space of ISS and outside ISS. It also opens perspectives for future research work.

CHAPTER 2: POLITICAL APOLOGY & MEANING-MAKING

This chapter sets the framework to understand the different meanings and positions of authors on political apologies, from perspectives of slavery (history), consequential social gaps, and decoloniality concepts. It briefly introduces other researcher's conceptualization of political apology, involvement of development schools, discusses the rationale behind responsibilities, acknowledgement, and quality of the relationship between victim and non-victim groups and their responses.

2.1 Political Apology – Multiplicity of Views, Meanings and Perspectives

Thompson (2008) defined political apology as a formal apology offered by a state actor towards victims or their descendants(p1), presented in form of a state speech made towards the aggrieved. While Cels (2015) describes political as an act that places a symbolic offender in a position to seek for moral redress which would positively impact the offended (p.352). Thompson (2012) emphasized that, political apology can also be regarded as “meaningless or morally suspect”(p216). She claimed that to shield political apology from such suspicions, it is essential to gratify questions about responsibility, as to whether citizens should be burdened for past historical wrongs(ibid).

Zoodsma & Schaafsma (2021) asserted that the inclination of political apology can be traced to the widespread of discourses on human rights after World War two, thereby, giving rise to the evolution of restitutive actions and redress, specifically since 1960 (p2). These definitions of political apology seem to indicate a ‘state speech’ of which Cels (2015) explains that a state is not expected to give only speeches but a “Dramaturgy” referring it to a performance that invokes emotions or forgiveness (Cels S. 2015, p. 357).

In the work of Meier (1998) apology can be relational to peoples' everyday living, of which most of the time people offend each other and express regrets: ‘I am sorry’ inferring that those apologies are rarely comprehensive (Meier, 1998 in Blatz et al, 2009, p.221). In addition, Smith (2008) analysed apology as an act to which we are individually tied, practised between families, lovers, and friends and which we sometimes struggle to communicate to people we may have offended or who may have hurt us (p.15). However, Smith's definition of apology cannot be compared to political apology that addresses human rights defiance such as slavery, which makes the slavery more comprehensible than the family affair (ibid).

Zoodsma & Schaafsma (2021) while studying various sources that have reported government apology overtime, coded that slavery is a human right breach (p5). Thus, confirms that apology has been a movement for ages, it is right to note that this is an age of apology, in which countries remain accountable for past wrongdoing and attempt to repair human rights crimes by delivering apologies (Zoodsma & Schaafsma, 2021, p.1).

Despite the popularity of political apologies, its potential significance in society, raises a debate as to its genuineness (Thaler, 2011 in Zoodsma & Schaafsma, 2021, p.1). It seems that the word apology is undervalued each time it becomes a statement like ‘political apology’. Thompson (2012) has also raised a pertinent question stating: “can apology, which we generally think of as a personal act, be translated into the political arena without loss of meaning?” (p.216). This disconnect or loss of meaning enables us to see why Mouffe argued that being political is a practice, (a form of thinking) that enables clear conversations instead of attacks and aggression (Mouffe, 2005, p3) while for Smith (2008) it has always been a state culture (p.6).

It appears that a political apology seems to suffer all types of criticisms due to its political technicalities or simply waved off as a government way of life, creating lack of trust. No wonder Zoodsma & Schaafsma (2021) expressed that some critics view “political apologies as a cheap way of wriggling out of obligations of reparation” (p216), so these reasons could have been the cause of societal lack of interest or trust in apologies.

Meaning-Making - Political Apology

Kurzman (2008) views meaning making as a social movement which includes “moral understanding of right and wrong, perceptual understanding of like and unlike, social understanding of identity and difference” (p.5). It is also important to clarify if there are differences or similarities between meaning making and perception, and if one overrides the other. According to Kurzman (2008) by identifying that a person is in misery and interpreting that suffering from different perspectives such as, viewing from the lenses of poverty, classism or looking at steps to relieve the person's misery, is dependent on the meaning associated with it (p.6). Hence, shows that meaning making and perception are similar components.

Kurzman (2008) buttresses this by referring to meaning making as a concept in which human beings continually strive to gain understanding into the world around them thus influencing the multiple interpretations/responses they give (p.10). For example, it can be inferred from the nuanced political apologies definitions given above. Thus, to some extent, meaning making has created a research angle of understanding political apology as possibly a social movement, from a perspective of addressing past wrongs done to a victim group which is a social problem. Further, would initiate authenticity and versatility in knowledge production, which is expected in respondents' excerpts (chapter 4) highlighting nuanced perceptual understandings.

Political Apology as a Burden

In one of Cels writings, one meaning-making that stood out was burden, guilt, and forgiveness which can be felt amongst victims and non-victim (Cels, 2015, p.354, Blatz, 2009, p.222). Since political apology produces various meanings and is understood in various ways both by the victims and non-victim groups. It is important to identify these meanings, Blatz (2009) highlighted that political apology has moral meanings, psychological meanings, political meanings (p.222).

Psychologically political apology creates guilt and act of responsibility for the non-victims. However, can mean forgiveness and healing for the victims (Lazare, 2004 in Blatz et al, 2009 p.222). For politically it is legitimately a government assigned responsibility that psychologically relieves the victims of any blame to not be perceived as making a case where there is none (Blatz et al, 2009, p.222). Cels (2015) emphasized the significance of political apology as a performance, where, and how it is made is vital (p.351), highlighting its significance for victims and the need for an apology, to accept them as equals and improve their wellbeing (Cels, 2015, p.353). Cels (2015) clear argument that the ‘meanings’ of a well-prepared apology can be justified by how morally, and psychologically responsive it can positively be, to those whom the apology is directed. Hence, this can make the burden of grief to shift from how well the apology was presented to the victims to their willingness to forgive (ibid). However, it is in the position of this victims to either refuse or accept the motion of apology (Cels, 2015, p.354). Thus, it can be said that with no approval, the apology stays unfulfilled (Smith, 2008, Thompson, 2008 in Cels, 2015, p.354).

In moral meanings of apology: Smith explains that children learn morality through apologies, which helps them think about their actions and integrate into society. As adults, apologizing helps them reflect on their moral convictions, denounce wrongdoings, and potentially relieve feelings of guilt (p.19).

Blatz, on the other hand, emphasised the significance of the government’s duty to formulate apologies in ways that reduce rejection and grudges from the non-victimized majority (Blatz et al, 2009, p.222), because there is a propensity for one side to bear the brunt of the blame and guilt (Tavuchis, 1991 in Cels, 2015, p.354). Opinion analyses proves that majority of the public sometimes strongly disagrees with the government's position on past wrongdoings (Blatz, 2009, p.222). Blatz (2009) added that oppositional majority may resist reconciliation due to guilt, responsibility, and fear of their taxes as a means of settling past injustices., potentially leading to division (Blatz, 2009, p.222).

Wekker's (2016) concept of "the act of not knowing and not wanting to know" (p.17). May have significantly influenced the meaning of opposing apology, as it may seem to be a matter of not wanting to feel responsible for others when not connected to them.

2.2 A Brief History of Dutch Slavery Past.

The author Anton de Kom (1934-2022) in his book “Wij Slaven van Suriname” delved into the Surinamese view of what suffering, resistance, and dehumanization of people of Suriname was like in the past. He also gave a clearer understanding of Surinamese people; some were indentured workers from Indonesia (mainly from Java) and the East Indians known as the Hindustanis in Suriname - were also disadvantaged like every other ethnic group during the colonial days. According to Meel (2009), “after their contract had expired, they tried to make a living in their new homeland in subsistence farming and the production of foodstuffs for the local market” (p.256). Despite slavery abolishment in 1963, De Kom (2022) most slaves and contract labourers were unemployed and earned less, they still had to resort to the menial job to serve their colonial masters (P.1).

These slave populations were all regarded as the Surinamers and lived in Farmington (known as freed people's land), whereas most of the slaves who bought their freedom settled in the street of Paramaribo. According to De Kom, the slave settlers built themselves simple homes and learnt trade while their women did laundry for their white slave masters and light skinned noblemen who were in control of power in the Dutch colony (De Kom, 2022, p11).

This group of Surinamers supported the De Kom because as a self-made Surinamese historian, he had challenged the cruel acts of the masters and poor wages that were awarded to both indentured laborers and slaves. He addressed in his book: "we slave of Suriname, under the tree past my table, files a parade of misery. Pariahs with deep sunken cheek. Starving people. People with no resistance to disease. Open books in which to read the story, halting told of oppression and deprivation" De Kom, 1934, p.203 in De Kom, 2022, p.10).

Nevertheless, on first of April 1933 while on a campaign to protest grievances, alongside a supporting group towards the ruling province, De Kom was arrested on suspicion that he had attempted to dethrone the then government, and was later banished from Suriname (De Kom, 1934, 2022, p.10-11). According to the De Kom, his actions having 'added fuel to fire', costed lives, and some slaves considered disobedient were punished and burnt alive (De Kom, 2022, p.11). In addition, Meel (2009) saw De Kom's effort as worthwhile stating that "De Kom demonstrated an intrinsic need for freedom characteristic of mankind and in that sense foreshadowed modern anticolonialism" (Meel, 2009, p.256). Although, its true significance is mostly symbolic, in *Wij Slaven van Suriname* De Kom does not want to suggest that modern Surinamers must resort to armed tactics to oppose colonialism (ibid).

Meel (2009) in his comments about the De Kom's book: *Wij Slaven van Suriname* posited that De Kom had two aims in mind: first, was to oppose Dutch Colonialism via historical evidence as well as own encounters as guidance to inspire members of his community and to begin the process of decolonization and reunification. The other was that He desired to raise awareness for the citizens to realize that wrong actions and rulings done by colonial authorities in Suriname has a continuous impact in the mental predisposition of the colonized (Meer, 2009, p.276). Finally, in 1980, Paramaribo De Kom's birthplace was replaced with Anton de Kom, in his honour (De Kom, 2022, p.11).

De Kom proved a different breed, a type who saw through injustice and a need for total freedom, he confronted his Dutch colonial masters but fought and died while in the struggle against German oppression on the Netherland. Although, he was considered as a remarkable human rights activist and historian he was unfairly not recognised in the Netherlands in the 1960s among those who died in the war (De Kom, 2022, p.12).

The Lasting Pains and Defending the Crimes

Postma (1990) argues that the slave trade, from 1600-1815, bolstered European living conditions by exchanging slaves for precious metals and agricultural staples like sugar, tobacco, coffee, and cotton (p.2). According to De Kom (2022) "enslaved people were not seen as human beings but as possessions, while public massacres came to be considered to be normal" (P.16). The lasting effect of the past slavery is still felt among the black community in

terms of racisms and inequalities despites hundred and fifty-seven years of abolishment in 1963(De Kom, 2022, p.27).

Postma(1990) reveals that European apologists for the slave trade often defended African enslavement, arguing that slaves' gained from civilization and religion at such were saved from the curse of ferocious Africa (p.7) This may have prompted descendants of formerly enslaved Caribbean/Suriname to seek a more deserving apology, Blatz(2009) claims that a long overdue, implies that society has low regard for the victimized group(p.22). No wonder Smith (2008) argued that apology may seem outdated and not ideal in a speedy modern society like ours, but it still has “potent power” (Smith, 2008, p.15). “Technological shifts accelerate these growing pains because the connected world creates more opportunities to offend each other” (Smith, 2008, p.1). Smith (2008) seems to appeal that making sense of political apology, guides one to be more critical of the type of apology we get in comparison with apology we seek (p.18). He attempted to clarify the difference between ‘apologetic’ and ‘apology’, and then urges the consideration that being ‘apologetic’ simply elicits an expression of sympathy, so we should rather reconsider that we deserve more and seek worthy apologies (ibid).

Surinamese continue to face discrimination in the labor market, according to a report by the (European Commission,2020). Researchers like Intermediar and Nationale Vacaturebank are investigating if job applicants are scrutinized for reasons besides their jobs (intermediar, Netherland,2020) highlighting the lasting effects of past slavery is still felt among the black community in terms of racisms and structural inequalities (European Commission,2020). In other words, constant reminders of past cruel treatments may enable vengeance and hate, which is not ideal for social cohesion and inclusion. The act of seeking redress or remorse cannot be one-sided, therefore an apology must happen, preceded by acknowledgment of wrongs, and only then can immediate reparations and forgiveness become a follow-up process.

2.3 Bridging Social Gap – The Role of Institutions such as ISS.

The above brief history has been introduced to understand the reasons behind Dutch apology and the need to deliberate on the social gap and under-representation of history. The historical role of the Institute of Social Studies did not come by chance, it has always been an intrinsic part and parcel of the Netherlands because of its renegotiated relationship with its former colonies (George, 2014, p178).

The purpose was to recruit mid-career experts from all over the world mostly developing countries, without regard for language barriers, to exchange new ideologies and perspectives, which George defined as a "looseness of fit", which has become highly valued when compared to other European countries. (George, 2014, p178). Secondly, the foundational philosophy was “to offer policy-oriented education in the social sciences to those engaged in development work and development studies”(ibid). The ISS as a graduate school of development studies, is considered as the primary platform for propagating ideas that might enhance social life through worldwide discussions of intellectual voices (George, 2014, p.16).

Optimistically therefore, a debate on apologies and meanings may not only be a method for dealing with the past but also the present, because as Guni (2008), stated: “human and social development can be facilitated through civil interactions” (Guni, 2008, in George, 2014, p.16) a type of interaction that can clearly address societal issues.

ISS as an Agent of Social Change

To begin, steps must be retraced to remind ISS of its influence and the role development schools play in driving societal transformation and developing future leaders. Schofers defines sociology of education as where higher education fosters new forms of active social mobilisation over challenges such as environmental protection, human rights, gender inequality, and a broad range of cultural and religious ideologies (Schofers et al, 2021, p.6).

Astin et al, in his analysis on how higher education positively shapes leadership in a modern America society, highlighted professions such as law, medicine, business, science and many other advanced professions that have raised generations of leaders in the government (Astin et al, 2002, p.11). Astin (2002) explains that United States, though renowned for its best education, is facing challenges such as shaky race relations, economic disparities, materialism, declining civic engagement, and increasing government ineffectiveness. As a result, hampers the leadership growth of the country (p.12) he’s argument clearly states that when a society is falling apart, it is both an individual and institutional challenge, claiming that educational institutions produce leaders thus an ineffective government cripples the student’s perception of leadership (ibid).

In the context of ISS, what is gathered from Astin's study is that scholars rely on the ISS's leadership and guidance. They act in accordance with what is deemed crucial such as following up on core curriculum, understanding development of society, and engaging in open dialogue on current global concerns. Such access becomes a pillar through which students grasp the importance of social change by carrying out research where their voices can be heard. Astin emphasised that student’s hunger for a change can only be championed at the commitment and support of its institution (ibid).

Dutch Political Apology – Open Conversations or Taboo at ISS?

When a vital issue such as political apologies appears to be dreaded or ignored, it gives space for scepticism. In this context, Dutch slavery which resulted in an apology, may as well be considered a taboo. According to Savenije et al, (2014) “history of slavery is a sensitive topic in Netherland, because of its horrific aspect and the Role of the Dutch in transatlantic slavery” (p.517). However, post-colonial migration and the campaign to acknowledge the past slavery by descendants of the enslaved (Savenije et al, 2014, p518), led to building of National slavery Monument in 2002 and NINsee (Nationaal Instituut Nederland’s slavernijverleden en erfenis) founded in 2003; with the objective of facilitating research and imparting knowledge about history (ibid). Savenije et al (2014) further added that teaching the history of slavery is frequently paired with efforts to raise awareness (ibid).

Tallavaara & Rautiainen (2020) found history beneficial for students because the goal was to assist and foster their development into active members of the society that appreciates diversity (p.231). Knowledge of the past is utilised to educate students towards knowing the processes that led to the present, appreciating the worth of mental and material effort, and reflecting on future decisions(ibid). For instance, by general law- in every crime there is a course of action, therefore, to be able to prove that there are victims of slavery one must go through the root cause - which is the history.

Von Borries (1988) studied the rationales for German grown-ups' interest in history and discovered that the motivation might be intellectual or personal (p.25). Thus, at the end of this study, we would be able to gauge the interest of scholars in ISS which can be a determinant factor of the importance of learning or knowing histories in a development school like ISS.

Notions of Higher Education on P.A & Meaning-Making and Decoloniality.

This study seeks to comprehend ISS might create meanings of political apologies as a new body of knowledge. Mignolo points out that: "in institute of learning, we explore topics such as politics, racism, gender, sexuality, history, and power, all of which are components of knowledge" (Mignolo,2018,p.135), and "we sometimes get wrapped up in the idea that it is not knowledge that matters, but politics, race, gender, and all of the above" (ibid). Hence, there are knowledges that have existed before the ones we knew and the "fundamental task of decoloniality is decolonizing knowledge and (being) and to liberate knowing and becoming, what coloniality of knowledge and being prevents us to know and become" (Mignolo, 2018, p.135).

Mignolo (2018) then explains that Marx theory emphasizes the need to transform the world, 'to transform' a concept often misinterpreted by philosophers. It was adopted by Christianity and secular liberalism, however misused for dominance and control(p138). Historical repercussions such as race, racism, and social reconstructions, have impacted humanity at large (Quijano, 2000, p.218) For example, a dark side of history was produced by the desire for control, to inflict violence and control the less powerful, just as Mignolo noted that most of these constructions to 'transform the world' was originated via the process of theorising(ibid).Mignolo marries the idea of praxis to decolonizing knowledge and being, stating that to decolonize a certain knowledge one must understand what he or she is decolonizing (ibid). To achieve that, we must start by theorizing like the world changers and that is starting with meanings we give to social problems; in agreement with Rutazibwa (2020): "radical social change is inconceivable without anticolonial thought and practice" (p.38).

From a decolonial perspective, educational institutes can address apology by understanding the importance of history and the potential benefits of discussing it. Rutazibwa's (2020) work emphasizes the need for knowledge cultivation, a non-competitive logic that gives way for new insights to thrive (p.225). Hence, there is need to be conscious in reproducing knowledge, and being more psychologically and morally reflective in our research.

Juxtaposing this to the context of ISS, the knowledge we reproduce, or ideas we give meaning should be more reflective towards social issues that connects everyone and not dreaded. This

is well summarised in the work of Kunene (1968) - “by knowledge I do not mean just book knowledge, I mean that kind of knowledge that will make us realise that each one lives for all” (p.24).

2.4 What Purpose or Importance Does Political Apology Have?

Political apologies are considered significant and have been more prevalent in the last two decades. Professor Zoodsma and Schaafsma of Tilburg University ‘uncovered 329 political apologies from 74 countries’, demonstrating the importance of apologies as a technique or ‘essential step’ in dealing with the past (Zoodsma & Schaafsma, 2001, p.1) to reinstate justice. Therefore, if political apology has been proved to be this meaningful and useful for the states, and the state consists of the people as Thompson implied, then the action of the state determines the conduct of the people (Thompson, 2012, p.219).

Could it also be said that, while ‘strategic or essential steps to deal with the past’ is undermined and invisible in the eyes of people who oppose political apology, it probably implies that the state has not presented an apology that is convincingly meaningful to this opposing majority. Hence, the subsequent sub-section argues the ways government can possibly alleviate the scepticisms of majority, while still committed in providing justice the minority deserves.

Victim and non-Victim Reactions, Relationships.

Although monetary reparations are vital, it has even been argued that speech is of such importance that without it, “a social act cannot count as an apology” (Cels, 2015, p.353). Therefore, it is not necessarily the focus of this research to make emphasis on reparation, but to understand the meanings of political apology asides the act of giving back or restoration, and to recognise people's contributions, responsibilities, and perspectives on history to facilitate reconciliation. To put it another way, for an apology to be ethically and psychologically meaningful, it must rehabilitate the victims of the transgression, “as well as repair the moral standard that was broken” (Cels, 2015, p.353).

It appears that there are two types of reactions when apology is made by a state agent, which can also influence the effectiveness of government apology (Blatz et al, 2009, p.234). First, is the quality of the relationship between the victim group and non-victim group (people who are not descents of the enslaved), and the degree to which both parties are willing to reverence one another (Ibid). Second, is the relationship between the condescending group that do not want the apology to happen, and on the other hand, the group who demands that it happens (Ibid).

Thompson argues that, although the obligations of state institutions are pretty evident, it is however, not so easy to establish what a nation is accountable for, or what is necessary for it to offer an adequate apology. “What if some citizens remain unrepentant?” (Thompson, 2012, p.219). It seems in response to this, Blatz et al noted, that the government may defuse

any majority complaints by explicitly emphasising that the present members of the majority are innocent. By disassociating and condemning the actions of past governments, the current government shows commitment to justice (Blatz et al, 2009, p.223).

In other words, “by asserting that the minority is great but so is the majority”(ibid), this approach is derived from social psychological theorists which are Jost and Banaji, (1994) Lerner (1980).). It is noteworthy to emphasize that in a process of reconciliation, the connection between victim and non-victim groups might begin by looking beyond the apology and why it occurred in the first place and channelling emphasis on history and what can be done differently.

Blatz (2009) contended that apology with a given responsibility would alleviate the prospect of viewing victims as being problematic (Blatz et al, 2009, p.223). Thompson (2012) saw the need for apology to be in history books, which can become a citation point for citizens (p.220). Straaten (2016) argued that historical knowledge creates a path for people to learn personal experiences of others, even experiences not linked to each other in time are somewhat interconnected (p.488).

Doubt - An Apology Disabler

Doubts can hinder victim-non-victim relationships, as prolonged waits before an apology can raise questions about its genuineness. Blatz expressed that, “how do you forgive the people who enslaved or murdered family members?” (Blatz et al, 2009, p.234). Governments may also doubt the effectiveness of an apology in healing past injustices, potential resentment and demands for restitution. Thus, shows that an offender can also doubt if he can obtain forgiveness.

According to Thompson (2012) standard theories of collective obligations, therefore, challenges the practise of political apologies in two ways. Firstly, “doubting collective members' ability to apologise for what their predecessors did, and secondly, by doubting their ability to make responsibilities that their successors must respect” (p.221). To achieve this, Thompson (2012) then argues that a nation cannot be convinced to feel remorse because expressing regret does not require any form of taking responsibility or commitment (ibid). However, to remove any uncertainty, the government must over time, clearly explain to her citizenry with a sound justification of the political apology, by emphasising that, the unjust deed of their forefathers, has given the country a bad name which is still felt today amongst the victim group (Lazare, 2004, p.41-42). Therefore, the opposing majority is then required to agree on alternative ways to show compassion (Thompson, 2012, p.219).

In the context of the Black and White Dutch narratives of slave history, it could be understood that there are two descendants with separate stories of the Dutch slavery past, but distinct (experiences) of master-slave relationship. In the current times, (descendants of the slave masters *aka non-victims*) decide to tolerate the other (descendants of the slaves *aka victims*) of which the later believes they deserve much more than ‘tolerance’. According to Stripriaan (2020), campaign of tolerance expanded in the advent of post-colonial migration into the Netherlands in late sixteenth-century, tolerance manifested through the influx of religion to

supposedly create unity and was further introduced on the grounds that minorities are expected to keep up with laws, integrate, and become more Dutch or else they are not allowed to live in the Netherlands (p.188,189). This form of tolerance seems not to be about acknowledging the differences, but indirectly to keep one in check. Consequently, such ideology in this context may somewhat keep victims in doubt of how well accepted they are in society, creating segregation and suspicion (Strpriaan, 2020, p.185).

No wonder Virta (2001) believes that being historically conscious creates understanding of the other, and human egoistic nature may calm down a bit (p2-p5). Likewise, Molgen argued that “to achieve a more adequate and more emancipatory understanding of difference, we must insist upon the centrality of history in our analyses” (Molgen, 1997, p.204 in Wekker, 2016, p.33). Therefore, it cannot be over-emphasized that “history makes a frame of reference and helps us to understand our place in a broader temporal and local context” (Virta, 2014, p.5). People feel the need to be free, through seeking for closures, and quest for apologies /reconciliation.

Discovering Others While Making Meaning of Apology.

In making sense of political apology from narrative theory perspective is deemed as derived from humanities, where person's emotional state is linked to their ability to tell a clear story, which is crucial and connects to their personal identity (Rudd 2007, in Castrellón, 2010, p.4).

An apology should be meaningful by involving deeper, genuine conversations between the victim and the apologizer, identifying underlying harm caused, and revealing the extent of the apology's impact (Smith, 2008, p.19). Many authors have argued that – political apology is seen as an essential step to reconciliation and healing (Blatz et al, 2009, p.224), despite all the meanings it had conveyed. For some reason, it seems to have also succeeded in instilling thoughtful reflections in people's hearts such as self-discovery, meaning-making, rejection, and the desire for coexistence, which to some extents have sown a seed of historical consciousness.

2.5 Chapter Summary

To summarise, the author(s) have emphasised the significance and meanings that political apology conveys, whether as conducted by the apologizer (the government/state) or the complex impressions the people (victims and non-victims) may have of it. On the one hand, it raises the question of how beneficial apology is to society, whether it is ethical or tactically perceived as something rare and delicate that needs to be performed with care in the context of taboo. On the other hand, what if the present-day generation is not prepared to feel remorse or accept what they believe they have no relationship to? What other probabilities can convince a nation that apology is one way to repress pride and save a nation from clutches of war and conflicts. It seems therefore refutable, due to the way human perception varies. Of course, it is relevant to emphasize that opinions/meanings may vary in same way as cultural, religion and social identities, and can be influential to human inputs.

“Apologies can also speak directly to our character and integrity” (Smith, 2008, p.16). People may recognise, assess, and engage with similar perceptual 'submissions' in completely different ways, depending on the meaning we attach with these submissions (Kurzman 2008, p.6). As a result, such disparities in inputs may continue to reproduce never-ending arguments and disagreements. One seemingly striking aspect of this literature review is the sense of care and the amount of conviction each author strives to impart while putting out diverse interpretations and techniques to make sense of apologies. Such as: the importance of having a well-prepared speech-carrying all citizens along to remove doubt, the act of responsibility both with a government and its people, establishing relationship through historic self-discovery and that of the others. Convincingly, the state's apology has become a depth of many nuanced meanings.

This might also project political apologies as a more delicate, tactical strategy in which each, if not well expressed, jeopardises its usefulness, and becomes more implicating if not philosophically analysed. Cels therefore emphasised “how complicated it is to have a poorly composed apology and yet a powerful dramaturgy that can send a positive signal to the victims” (Cels, 2015, p.358) which seems really complicated.

One crucial message this research attempts to convey is that studying political apology refers one to history however, it may not ensure complete peace due to its complex meanings. Nevertheless, in Tallavaara and Rautiainen survey (2020), human conduct is best understood by learning from their history. Learning the genuine nature of racism, gender disparities, and colonial wounds, for example, might aid in the readjustment of negative notions and then question the social constructs that generated these stratifications or stereotypes. As Mignolo (2018) already pointed out that to decolonize, one does not require a physical fight but by theorising, unlearning, and re-learning through a place of enunciation (p.136). For example, in Castañeda (1992) ‘Women of color and rewriting of western history -decolonization of history’. “understanding the history of gender roles and experiences before ‘contact’ is crucial to learning about how those experiences evolved with conquest and colonialism, and why women behaved and functioned in diverse situations and relationships the way they did” (p.514). It is also critical to understanding how they “maintained, adapted, and transformed their own cultural forms while resisting, adopting, adapting, and affecting those of others”(ibid).

Hopefully, this literary review presents an opportunity to not view political apology as neither a taboo or an outlawed topic, but a way to honour different meanings it possesses and probably see it through a positive light.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explores possible research methods or approaches to this work, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each. It explores how to research the meanings of political apology in a decolonial and inclusive way (knowing with others). It explains in detail the chosen method, respondent selection criteria, questionnaire design, ends with a justification of the researcher's position.

3.1 The Quest for Methods

To investigate the perspectives of Dutch political apology in the context of international postgraduate education and to contextualise the meanings of apology to ISS scholars, the opinions/perspectives of a handful of non-ISS people was required to have a broader and more situated perspective of the apology from the 'victims & non-victims' group. Several approaches to study and understand these meanings were considered, and weighed based on fit-for-purpose, resource limitations and time availability to carry out an extensive study. Two relevant methodologies stand out: (a) Anti Colonial Decolonial perspectives aka 'knowing with others or dialogue across plurality of perspectives, and (b) ethnographic observation.

Thompson and Blatz et al had implied that political apology connects us to history, care, responsibility, reconciliation, while adding that "an apology should aim to be an event inscribed in the history books, a watershed in the history of a nation that its citizens take as a reference point for their actions (Thompson, 2012, p.220). It is for these reasons that I sought an appropriate method to connect to the plurality of perspectives via ethnography, while searching to understand the meaning of apology in a higher education setting.

Hence, ethnographic observation became a mechanism through which I could navigate around the corners of ISS observing how students relate to current information from inside the Netherlands and the reactions they exude when news or current affairs hits home, whether it is the popular Myanmar protest, headline climate change events, 2023 Turkey earthquake or student mini ceremonies. In the same vein, I wanted to know their views and the meanings they give to the recent Dutch political apology to redress the Netherlands' participation in past slavery. To deepen my reflection point and understand the hurts of the victims, I also extended my ethnographic observation to a few Dutch Caribbean at Keti-koti slavery commemoration event, so that I can have a broader understanding of the meanings or worth they give to the same slavery apology.

Knowing with Others – A Decolonial Toolkit

An aspect of decoloniality referred to as 'knowing with others' focuses on continuous search for knowledge and human relations just like every other approach engaged with coloniality. First, this knowledge or knowing is used in contrast to the current method of scientific knowledge that focuses on naming an object and drawing conclusions based on its findings.

One of the basic principles of knowing with others “requires a transition from observation to understanding and moving from the external to an internal point of view” (Galdino, 2009, p.17). This implies looking beyond scientific understanding of objectification but immersing ourselves and mind in the world of the individual we are researching, to understand and make sense of the world with them. Therefore, if this approach is not well considered, the quest for understanding can come across as merely an exchange between someone who poses as more knowledgeable and the known subject they are researching. According to Galdino, this new way of knowing which strives for the known subject to be both an active part in the cooperative construction of knowledge, while being totally respected, does shadows nor denies presence in knowledge transmission processes (Galdino, 2009, p.23).

Solera (2022) explained that knowing with others can be seen as a flexible form of knowing that allows us to discover that there is knowledge that exist in ‘non-verbal ways’, for instance, in dance, music, as well as creating feelings of ease with these unwritten actions between the researcher and the researched (Solera, 2022, p1).

For example, Kush (2007) analysed unspoken method used by native black origins of Mestizo during their freedom struggles, which included dance languages used in form of decolonial thoughts, wherein “senses are evoked through the movement of bodies, the rhythms, the gazes, the cadence, and the energetic swishing of handkerchiefs”. (Kush, 2007 in Solera, 2022, p.1). It makes sense therefore, to consider using this approach in understanding the meaning the white/black Dutch people of Caribbean descent gave to the recent Dutch political apology and understand their nuances, feelings, grudges, contentment, or dissatisfaction with it.

Ethnography Writing

Ethnography writing and observation involves carrying out research while living or sharing the same space with the respondents. According to Emerson, after observing and taking fieldnotes, a researcher is required to end writing and go through the written records obtained from the field, which allows the researcher to identify behaviours and organize a story of it. (Emerson, 2011, p.171).

A researcher while reading through her fieldnotes, can work with coding which appears in themes or memos, side notes, or comments (Emerson, 2011, p.172). In this work, coding will be visible in my written observation at keti Koti, it allows the reader to easily identify what a particular story is about. However, as Emerson stated ethnography writing/observation requires long period of field work (Ibid, p.171) which seemed not feasible to be used in a short period of master’s program as it requires a lengthy observation to get to understand or observe a group more intensely. Therefore, I did not consider it viable on its own but can be partially combined with knowing with others while at the keti Koti.

3.2 My Methodology - A Unique Mix of Ethnography & ‘Knowing with Others’

Having highlighted the advantages of knowing with others and the additional benefits of ethnographic observation in the previous section, I opted to combine the two methods as my research approach, because while knowing with others allows me to encounter the people, the ethnographic approach makes one present in observing and interacting with the respondents. In the context of seeking meaning of apology at ISS, these two approaches when combined helps me to interpret their responses without losing meaning as an insider, while taking detailed notes and non-verbal cues.

Hence, on the one hand, an extensive use of ethnography with notes, memos, pictures were used to understand the ideas of non-ISS Dutch citizens present at Keti Koti festival and the King’s apology speech, while an extensive use of knowing with others was deployed while seeking meanings at ISS. Although, it can be rightfully said that a bit of a mix of both methods were at play in each case study. This makes this combination seem unique because there is no clear boundary of the two methods.

3.3 Respondents Selection

In this work I interviewed, sixteen ISS scholars which composed of lecturers and postgrad students, as well as eighteen non-ISS respondents made up of white and Black Dutch citizens. It is my view that sampling apology meanings among these thirty-four respondents will give me a clear indication of the meanings the Dutch political apology had and what factors (whether personal identities, responsibilities, ethnic background) may have influenced it. Although, it is not my aim to understand the factors influencing it but the meanings they give to it.

I wanted to draw my samples from a broadened background taking into cognisance a fair gender mix, nationality mix and ethnic background mix, to reduce research bias as much as possible. Structured interview sessions were planned with selected ISS respondents while interview responses from non-ISS people (mostly Dutch people of Caribbean descent/white Dutch) were a random conversation. Hence, one of my research interests on the sidelines, was to understand if there are trends or patterns of answers, or, if their perceptions are influenced by gender or nationality.

For information privacy reasons, I generated consent documents for all respondents and offered meeting time alternatives, online or in person, at their choosing. As expected, most requested their names off the chart except surprisingly the Black Dutch people of Caribbean descent aka victims’ descendants.

In my approach, I first encountered a few Caribbean Dutch and White Dutch at an open slave memorial festival event, before going through the formal interviews with the student respondents.

Overview of Respondents by Group, Gender, Function and Ethnic Diversity

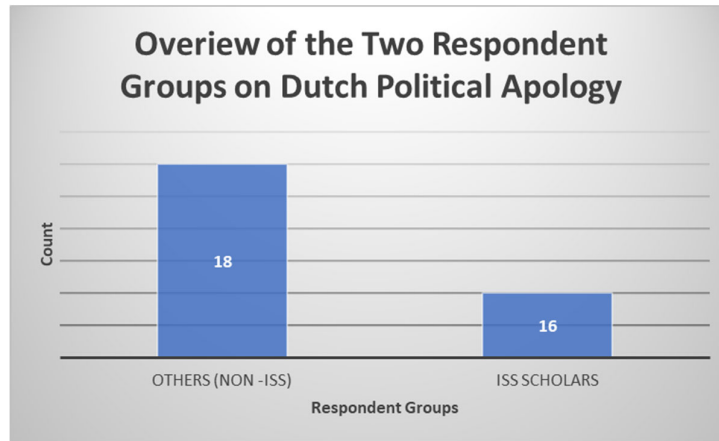


Fig 1: Graph showing the total number of respondent groups used to study the perception of Dutch political apology. Here, 16 ISS scholars were interviewed with a functional mix of lecturers, staff, and postgrad students. The other 18-respondent group are tagged as “others” and comprises of (i) black Dutch Caribbean citizens affected by slavery and herein referred in this work as victims and (ii) white Dutch citizens referred in this work as ‘non-victims’.

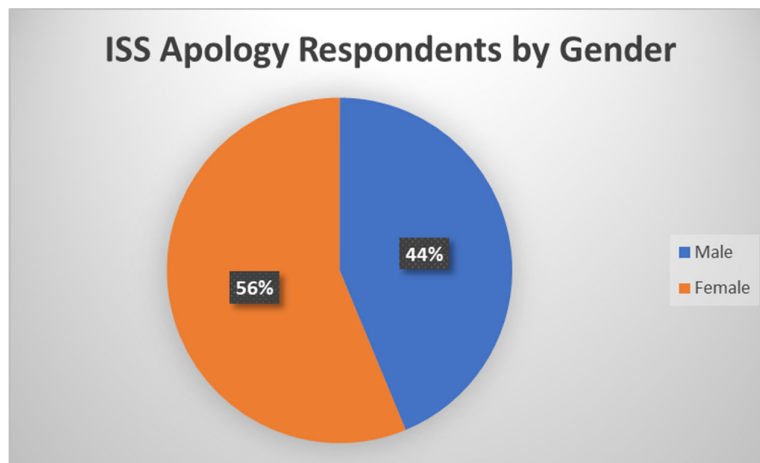


Fig 2: A graph showing ISS respondents by gender. It is seen that about fifty-six percent of scholars interviewed were female, while forty-four percent were male. The sampling rational was to neutralise any possible gender bias in the respondent’s selection and outcome of the research. The aim was to have a fair mix of male and female voices.

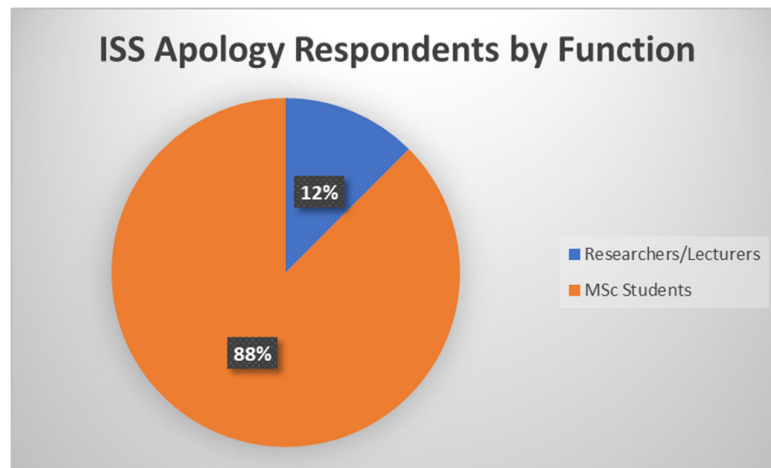


Fig 3: Depicts the ISS respondents by Functionality. It is seen from the above that most respondents are postgrad students, while a handful are lecturers/academics. It was the intention of this research to target postgraduate students of ISS from diverse backgrounds to get a comprehensive perspective with global colouration.

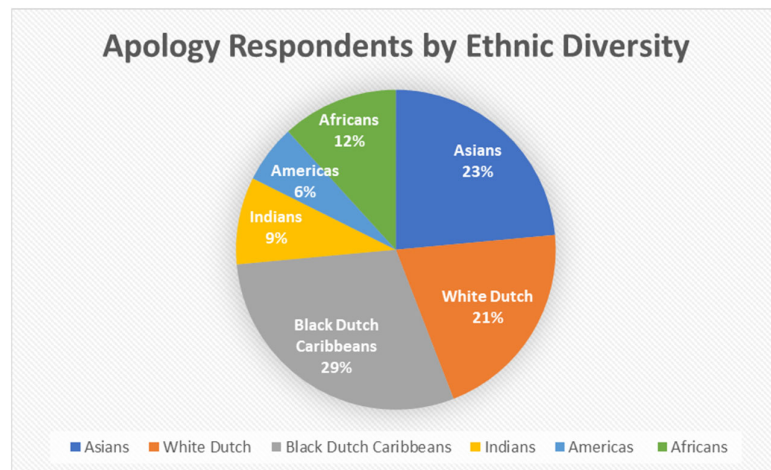


Fig 4: A graph showing all the 34 respondents by ethnic diversity. This comprises both ISS and non-ISS respondents consulted. It is seen from the above chart that majority of respondents have Caribbeans, and white Dutch backgrounds mainly encountered during the keti-koti slavery memorial festival. It also the intention of this research to sample a wide representation of ISS scholars from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds to explore if peculiar identities influence meanings they may make of the Dutch apology. This diversity depicts ISS is a citadel that reflects a rich scholastic diversity background.

Questionnaire Design (Visiting the minds of the intellectuals)

To get reliable data from each of my respondents' groups, I carefully designed my interviews, paying attention to personal opinions and feelings, importance of healing and dialogue, level of historical awareness, effects of responsibility, gender spread and racial diversity, as these could influence outcomes (Mignolo, 2018, p.14) on the meanings of Dutch political apology.

I carefully selected a diverse respondent group, both the ISS and non- ISS groups, without censoring ideas because none were superior to the other and paid a lot of attention to the information they provided on their knowledge, experience, and inexperience with Dutch society. The sixteen ISS scholars interviewed consisted of male and female and the eighteen Dutch people of Caribbean descent and white Dutch included resident families, professors, and other members of Dutch society. It is noteworthy that a few people interviewed were not interested in having a recorded conversation. It is important to note that the interviewees are very much unlikely to be fully representative of the entire university or entire Dutch community. Of course, some ISS respondents have also indicated that they want their names kept anonymous while some consented to allowing some of their personal identities to reflect such as, gender, colour, age, country, employment status.

3.4 Knowing the Victims and Non-victims @ Ketu Ketu Festival.

Ketu-ketu means breaking of chains, in the language of the Dutch Surinamese. On July 1, 2023, the Netherlands commemorated 250 years of Dutch slavery that caused centuries of untold misery, and 150 years of liberation from slavery. Therein, I deployed my first ethnographic research tools, with a mix of knowing with others.

At early hours of Saturday morning in July 2023, it was a *cloudy weather* and relatively at twenty degrees. I made an important decision while packing my writing notes and pen into my brown bag, to add an umbrella to the collection due to the cloudy morning. The ketu ketu event was scheduled to start at 13:00 uur according to the program of events catalogue program in my hand.

The cloudy day.

Finally, got to train station heading towards Amsterdam. I noticed that the train on track was crowd-ed with people, and I wondered if they were heading to the same ketu ketu ceremony located at *Museumplein*.

Apparently, the king will be giving a speech at 15:00 uur and it was important. After about an hour, we arrived in Amsterdam, and I had to find a tram to the Museumplein. While seated in the tram I observed that most people were dressed in beautiful *colourful costume*, a specific lady caught my attention, she had her full black afro hair richly designed with multiple-coloured gemstones, such as a mix of silver, red, green, yellow. Her long white gown flowed gracefully with traces of red flower weaved around her waist. I felt convinced that this lady could be going for the same event. I was right, when I started a conversation with her "*I'm Martha, today is important day for us, it brings in memories of the past and need to appease our ancestors, they will rest in peace*" she said. We both came down from the tram and walked towards the Museumplein, I parted ways with Martha.

The Colourful dresses.

People were arriving to the arena I **met** two elderly women (Raina, and Annamarie) in their late sixties while standing on a queue to collect the Surinamese food called *Heri Heri*. I had a little indecision on how to present myself as a researcher or say nothing at all about why I was there.

Knowing that it would have been easier to connect if I spoke in Dutch, however, I decided to be myself and let them know why I was there, besides they have my skin colour and would easily identify with me. I first introduced myself as a student and told them that I am looking forward to including *keti koti* in my research. They were very welcoming and asked that, we stand on queue for collecting, *heri heri* from the food stand, take a sit and have a conversation before the event for king's speech began at 3pm.

Meeting the Elders

Anna seemed very willing but wanted to know me more, she asked about **my Nationality**, and I told her, she had a smug smile on her face and then said "*Do you know, you Africans sold us, because in every trade there is a seller and a buyer?*" it was almost like a whisper.

The identification

On hearing this, a strange feeling of disbelief engulfed me, because in as much as I read in Postma that "it was possible for African merchants to adjust the demand of internal slave trade to a growing demand of external slave trade" (Postma, p.6) became more of a reality to me than what I read in the book. "*I do not dispute this at all Maam, this is why I am here to share in your joy and find closure to awful things that happened in the past?*" I replied.

Do you think there will be a time were Africans and the Caribbeans will unite with no more blames on each other? I asked. She smiled tapped me on the shoulder and said the debate is still ongoing and you are also doing a good job with your research. Though this conversation a bit uneasy for me, I was relieved it happened though it felt **strange**.

Strange encounter.

It finally got to our turn to collect the food called *heri heri*, it was well packaged in a brown plate with translucent lid. Three of us walked towards a sitting area, a pathway that leads to the entrance of the event. The stone bench was almost feeling up with people, it felt like I have known them for a long time, as they were very receptive of me and urged me to join them on the bench and eat. "*heri-heri is our native food, meant to be served hot or warm, however I think serving it cold teaches us to reflect on what it was like for the slaves?*" Began Annamarie, I asked her if I could audio record our conversation or write on my paper, she said I can write it, I did not insist on the audio so as to create more feeling of ease.

"This is sweet potatoes, plantain and cassava, which gives a lot of energy, slaves in those days must have drawn their strength from it before plantation work resumes", Raina added pointing at the cube shaped white, yellow, and purple meal in description. When I scooped the food into **my mouth**, I understood how deeply connected we are as Africans, tears welled in my eyes.

Taste of *Heri Heri*.

It reminded me of what Solera (2022) wrote about different ways of knowing. Rather than looking at my research from the lens of modern logic, I based it on the culture of food, and began to make sense of why we were all made to know about the *heri heri*, queue for it and have it cold.

This strange encounter became more familiar, the *beri beri* also contained a specific food called yam. In my culture- yam is eaten and celebrated by our ancestors such as new yam festivals in Africa, celebrated every month of August. Though this revelation from **'my encounter'** showed that Surinamese of African descents distance themselves from identifying as Africans, I hold in my heart the knowledge of the *beri beri* as a connection through history; one part of a story that did not suffer any erasure.

Encountering

As expressed by Palermo (2012), "All those who keep alive indigenous languages up to the present are proof that knowledge can still survive when shared in non-written ways" (Palermo, 2012 in Solera, 2022, p.1). Food may not speak to us because it has **no mouth**, but reminds us at one glance and every bite, that we are part of a memory.

Unspoken words.

The conversation extended naturally to me asking how they value the event and what it means to them. "Raina shared *"I celebrate this remembrance but don't want to get carried away with jubilation, you see I have no costumes on. I want to hear what the King have to say and **hopefully** his words are put into action."*

Expectations.

"I am happy apology has come and today is the day we all eagerly waited for, what more would I ask out of hundreds of years of shackles and both invisible ones, so we are breaking it today". Anna said clapping her hands into the air.

A man and woman who seemed of Asian descent in their mid-fifties, sitting next to us, must have overheard Anna, and spoke to her in Netherlands. They also identified themselves as Surinamese. While they spoke in their indigenous tone, Anna turned to me in amusement and said, he asked if the food was lekker that there was not enough fish to compliment it we all laughed, it felt like family, but we all met this day.

Two Couples.

After the conversation with Raina and Anna we parted ways into the large, crowded field filled with people. There was a green banner hung on a huge band stage written UN DE. **The ceremony** for apology from the king was about to begin. As more people flooded into the large lengthy field, it was marvellous to see the turnout of people, it was massive. There were afro band canopy stands, and a variety of African costumes in mini shops stationed along the walkway towards the main field of the event. I realised that every part of the city (such as oosterpark) had set up same event and had mounted projectors in open spaces to stream the king's speech just like the arena where I was' in Amsterdam.

Ceremony begins.



Image 2: Heri Heri (food eaten by the slaves in the past)

When the king came up in the projector that seemed 10 feet in height, he began in Dutch language. I had to translate it, one of the lines that I find significant was his acknowledgement towards researchers “*Dankzij het werk van gedreven onderzoekers weten we steeds meer over het Nederlandse slavernijverleden*” (Thanks to the work of passionate researchers, we know more and more about the Dutch history of slavery). As the king spoke further it began to **rain**, I thought it will cause chaos and people will start scouting for shelter, but to my amazement no one moved, it was a great sight to behold that the crowd stood under the rain and sunshine in what seemed as solidarity, some with their umbrella and some without. I finally found my umbrella useful.

Rain without chaos.

It was not just ***Dutch people of Caribbean*** descents that were present and still coming, the ***white-Dutch and various European Nationalities*** were surprisingly present. Some of them even dressed in different African attires, and most of the Dutch Caribbeans arrived in personal drums and singing and performing indigenous dances.

Mixed crowd

A huge stage was set up with DJ’s and bands playing Afrobeat’s. People danced, laugh, and seemed joyous; the apology became ***ceremonious*** as if it were a long-awaited victory for everyone. I also had few interactions with some White Dutch and a lot more people from various nationalities. One specific conversation was with two white Dutch ladies (Eva and Julia) they appeared friendly and seemed to be in their mid-twenties, this time I did not want to mention my research adventure as ***we all moved our bodies to the Afrobeat streaming*** from the big boom box on the stage, right after the ceremonial apology.

Celebration without boundaries

How did you find the king’s speech I asked, “*it’s really important, I love it! I came to support my friend too, in solidarity*” Eva replied, “*it’s about time!*” Julia screamed with laughter. Afterwards, I met, a man named Lars who gave his opinion “*I think it is the right thing to do, we should not neglect that such wrong was committed in Dutch history, people think it something in the past. But it is an important step in recognising the role our ancestors played which opens way to more education about it.*” Lennart also added: The role of Dutch slavery is a lot bigger than people think, people think it is the role of the English, but the Dutch also have played a heavy role in it”.

3.5 Chapter Summary

What I found puzzling, was how people expressed their sceptical reservations on the apology from both the white-Dutch and Dutch people of Caribbeans descent; and yet were not limiting themselves from the jubilation. The ethnographic writing helped me to figure out from the side comments, how essential those moments turned out for everyone there in the field. From the attraction of the Afrobeat music pulling a crowd, to a mix of elderly and young dancing away, down to the joy of some who felt merely being present without a dance or costume still meant a lot to them.

My immersed presence through my decolonial approach allowed me to understand, and experience strangers bonding in music without any sense of distinction of race. Race as a social construct, brings me to Mignolo's words, "What '*there*' is depends on how we have been programmed to name what we know" (Mignolo, 2018, p.14), thereby giving an example that coloniality of 'knowledge and being' is founded by racism and sexism (ibid). Therefore, if truth is instituted by knowledge and such knowledge is used to devalue one below the other, then there is some force that encourages this devaluation and dehumanization, which is humans. In other words, decoloniality of being/knowledge liberates and exposes us to this truth (ibid), a proof that we are all one human race.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter examines the meaning of Dutch Slavery apology to the various respondent groups encountered, and highlights how responsibility, identity, and historical awareness influences these meanings. It also offers an analysis from a decolonial lens. Having sought the opinion of ISS scholars and non-ISS as well on the meanings of the Dutch Slavery apology, I will analyse my findings in the form of an open discussion while embedding the excerpts from each ISS respondent to buttress my analogy. These respondents are tagged SR1, SR2...up to SR16 to make cross-references easier. The analysis is thematically presented in three concepts or angles: responsibility, historical awareness and decolonial lens.

4.1 Responsibility or Lack Thereof

It can be observed that there are two sets of apologies in this research which are the state and monarchical apology. However, this concept of responsibility intends to address the responsibility of ISS as a body of the state. According to Thompson (2012) what people do is the reflection of the state and a nation consists of state, people, and institutions of which educational institutions are not exempted (p.219). Analysing the first respondents' account; it appears that there was an expectation of performance from ISS which was not forthcoming. Performance in the sense that ISS is supposed to be placing more emphasis on Dutch society, culture and interactions to bridge disconnect and help her students raise awareness on affairs of the larger society. It appears that I was not the only one who had such thoughts. In other words, I refer to the missing responsibility of an institution that represents social development and inclusion in addressing the issue of Dutch apology.

SR:1

*I think there is definitely **a missing link**, I recently had a conversation with a friend and my thoughts were that ISS feels like a Microcosm of the larger world and I think that what is **obviously missing** is more emphasis of Dutch culture and interaction. so even within the university I know maybe of one Dutch student or two, whom I do not know were highly representative, even my interaction with staff and professors has been fairly limited in terms of Dutch. So, both the student environment as well as the professors are so international that it feels a times like not really being in Netherlands because you miss out on the conversations regarding Dutch society. I got to know about the apology from my parents who sent me a news headline that had published about the Dutch apology, and my parents asked if it were **talked about** in the ISS and the response I gave was **'not yet'**. I was not sure if the apology meant anything to me due to the disconnect, however there was a harm caused to a race and it is right to redress it through the means of public apology.*

In line with Thompsons (2012) analogy above, it appears that ISS has all the power and knowledge to be a pillar through which the students operate. Thompson's argument implied that collective responsibility theory demands that people share responsibility for "what they had power to effect" (Thompson, 2012, p.221). Therefore, the question then is, what power does ISS have, what responsibility does it have as well? I cannot agree more with Astin et al (2002), that citizens will not commit to change-making in society unless the institutions they study in also drives that commitment (p.12).

Beyond the first respondent's perception, the next six respondents (SR2-SR6) apparently shared similar opinions; pointing out an opportunity that was missed by ISS in not publicising happening events in the Dutch society, thereby calling the Dutch State Apology on slavery 'a missing link' that would have attracted conversations amongst people in the institution. Some inferred that, it was difficult to connect with Dutch society while others saw it as a bit too international inside the ISS. It seems that there is a disconnect within the community as it may have influenced the silence given to political apology seemingly treats it as sensitive.

SR:2

*I have just little knowledge of Dutch apology and a little of its involvement in slavery. I think ISS being social international school it does take a lot of patience, and a lot of understanding of how to pass the information on Dutch apology. There are very clear opportunities to improve interactions within different races, ethnicities, genders what have you, so I think there have not been enough of focus to **bridge those divides** because Dutch apology is such a topical conversation.*

SR:3

As one of the student representatives, we missed the opportunity to discuss the historical legacy of slavery, which perpetuates inequalities in education, income, employment, and home ownership. To address this, we should start with foundational peace by bringing Dutch and Caribbean scholars and passionate individuals to the ISS and leverage their network of knowledge and resources. This conversation should involve leaders and advocates.

SR:4

*Students from formerly colonized countries often express their concerns about colonialism, which is an open wound for many people. The ISS community is outspoken and known to discuss burning issues on seminars, and social mediums. Apologies should be included in current events to enable students to understand the current situation in parliament and state affairs. **We had the apology on our fingertips** a very relevant conversation and **we kind of missed that opportunity** because it would have created a platform to discuss the historical facts around the nature surrounding this apology. Because it is one of the potential avenues of addressing the historical legacy of slavery, and you can see across the board take US for example, education, income, employment, home ownership, that there is a legacy that perpetuates inequalities across society in US drastically affecting primarily African Americans.*

Similarly, SR2-SR4 emphasises little awareness of the apology event, which underscores the role ISS should have played in boosting the awareness through a strong publicity drive, prior to the apology and after. This in my opinion is a missed responsibility on the part of ISS. SR4 saw the slavery apology and discourse about colonialism as a potential way of bridging divides in ISS despite due to the inherent sensitivities associated to such topics. Meaning that through such interactions on political apology, which ought to have been facilitated by ISS, members of the community can reflect on histories and tell their stories.

SR:5

I don't know how to have conversation with someone who does not understand impacts of something like colonialism, when you have this 'anti-everyone besides us sentiment' that is direct legacy of colonialism, made me a bit reflective of the true intention of this apology and how tolerating they maybe of people like us.

SR1-SR5 did not explicitly state the meanings Dutch apology had for them, one thing stands clear – in my interpretation it seems that it means ‘connection’ and missed ‘opportunity’. They view ISS as place where the impact of colonization and slavery can not only be learned about as an academic theme but as an embodied experience.

4.2 Inadequate Historical Awareness and A Disconnect

The need for a centralized history in human thinking creates a path for people to learn others experience even without being linked to them Straaten (2016, p.488). Sixth respondent argues that the interest in integrating Dutch political apology into other schools as discourse may bring low energy, as ISS in contrast to other institutions is more diverse. Nevertheless, suggested it is should not be limited to only development schools.

SR:6

*Discourses on Political apology cannot be completely balanced, I think restricting **awareness** of political apology to only development schools as a result, remains a virtuous circle of knowledge that **never crosses over**. Well, I can say Dutch Apology is well understood here, because we can relate more with it Because it is a topic that **links us** all. Just consider Decoloniality course as the right platform to base all the concerns regarding Dutch apology and our histories.*

It can also be construed that some scholars have no knowledge of the Dutch political apology and got to know, when I approached them for the interview, but were very concerned and interested that its inclusion in the development studies will boost the connections with the Netherland historically, as he feels alienated from Dutch community.

SR:7

*The recent Dutch Apology, I got to know about it as very **new information**, I have never known of Dutch colonial History, until I browsed through it after you informed me. I have always thought the ISS is not representative of the Dutch society but when I go outside of ISS **It feels like a different world** and finding my roots in it.*

SR7 and S8, holds the opinion that the apparent social disconnect between the ISS and Dutch society may have influenced the little attention the apology got in ISS; and his interest in the apology was because of his Indonesian roots which suffered the same slavery fate and colonialism. Could it then be said that the moral justification of such historical connection is, that one is expected to give meanings to what links them or persuades them before they make sense of it, just as the case of Netherlands political apology?

SR:8

*I think I am lot more connected to ISS as a community, I **don't really feel connected** to Dutch society almost at all I feel like ISS plays a stronger role. I engaged a lot with Dutch society through ISS. In terms of obtaining legal things like permits and all of that, was through the facilitation of the school, **direct knowledge, or interaction** of/with Dutch community its government or current affairs is very distant. I know about the colonial legacy of the Netherlands; I did know much about the apology that they recently made and for some of that history I know I can remember briefly the apology made in December 2022 and it felt perfunctory.*

There seem to be a little twist as to the inside connection felt by SR 8 with ISS than the others who felt that it was too international. Consequently, does this suggest that political apology is obviously a sensitive topic, or does it tell the need to bring in apology as way of eliminating such disconnects?

SR:9

*I don't have to **necessarily relate** to the Dutch slavery, in order to **appreciate the apology**, so I find it very useful and important to the Indian population in Netherland because there are different land that are part of Netherland, the Caribbean island, the Surinamese, the Curacao' also the Dutch Antilles, while studying this year I was so surprise, we play cricket together at 'sporthal' and we really **don't know or talk about history**.*

SR:10

It was so easy to assimilate and meet people in ISS but it's so hard in the Netherlands. I know very little of their history with the Caribbean but I very conversant on that of the Apartheid in south Africa.

Further analysis of SR8 – SR10 responses, is a common mention of 'distance' and 'lack of connection' between the two worlds: - ISS and Dutch society, stating that, "direct knowledge or interaction of/with Dutch community, its government or current affairs is very distant (SR9). Could it be said that ISS is not connecting students to the present of colonial legacies in the Netherlands as part of what development should be? It could be further asked, why this disconnect between ISS and Dutch Society? How can it be bridged? What needs to change? It is not surprising on a personal level that SR9 just like SR8 were able to establish connections with the political apology because they shared a common wound that can be understood. SR ten's comment reflects on two different histories about dehumanization that share the root of domination and colonization, and that nonetheless are disconnected.

SR:11

*At the course of my interaction with Dutch society, where I live in the Hague. I have lots of Surinamese Neighbours and my direct Neighbour super nice, while sharing my first interactions with him, he asks "where are you coming from?" which he spoke in Hindi. I knew he just wanted to connect because he saw my skin colour and his skin colour as the same. I think he was wondering if I am Surinamese also, but my identities were more complicated because my parents were Indians, migrants, two different countries and now I am a migrant to another country. I felt some type of way because I could not speak Hindi and he wanted to identify with me, so when I explained my predicament. The response I got was "Even I speak Hindi as a Surinamese person" he was kind of shaming me a little bit, though I did not take it personal, but I did feel at that moment I had an identity struggle. My Neighbour became a Surinamese through effects of colonial history but still **held on to his Hindi language**, while I had **no full knowledge of Dutch colonial history** despite being Indian. I think there are cultural challenges being in between different identities, I find more solace in ISS which became clear to me how comfortable my Surinamese Neighbour would be living amongst themselves as a community.*

One striking revelation from SR11 the useful meanings she gave the political apology emanated from historical thinking, were she learnt about a part of her Hindi history through her neighbour. I recall how amusing it was for her however, she emphasised that the apology

meant a lot to her, because she had tapped into other side of her identity which was her colonial roots and her inability to speak Hindi. In other words, political apology seems to raise the importance of historical consciousness, could it be inferred that the Dutch apology literally has become a mirror that makes us reflect on our being and understanding of the world through history? I tend to agree with Virta (2001) that being historically conscious enhances mutual understanding and harmony (p2-p5).

SR:12

*I find the Dutch **apology very vital** because **it starts the conversation**, that slowly leads us into the knowledge about the **history**.*

Analysing the responses of SR12 - SR14, they laid emphasis on the importance of knowledge about history/colonialism in the school curricula and the importance of apology, which brings us to Moglen's argument that, history is needed for emancipatory understanding of our differences (Molgen, 1997 in Wekker, 2016, p.33). It can be deduced that sound knowledge of our history can help us disabuse our minds from coloniality superiority complexes and influences and help us to reflect on what our true identities are.

SR 13

*When I got to know about the political apology I tried to, you know **reflect a bit** on the **colonial impacts** we are not being delusional by **acknowledging** that the past still influences most of us in different ways. In terms of erasures still suffered in the present such as language superiority, loss of identity, and other **negatively inherited** colonial legacy.*

SR 14

*Indonesians have a history of slavery and colonization, with the Netherlands conquering Spain and then the Portuguese. They were forced into plantation work and exploitation, with the NS train line being part of their labour. Despite these hardships, the Netherlands has become a better country, receptive to others, and is working **to make amends** for past wrongs. Through the king's apology Its citizen is now **clearly aware of their ancestors' mistreatments** and severe harm they caused in the past.*

SR14 appreciated the Netherlands apology stating that Netherland citizens are now aware of their ancestors' mistreatments and severe harm they caused in the past. Hence, political apology means reflection, looking back on how the past has influenced us in different ways; whilst it means acknowledgement, solidarity, and recognition for SR15.

SR 15

*I just cannot describe it enough; I mean the relevance of this apology created an atmosphere that has not only **brought about recognition** but **changed the tone of interaction** between people. Political apology is a show of humanity.*

It can be inferred from SR14 - SR15 responses, that they are strongly opinionated about justice in apology. Also stating that it was a work in progress for the victims and for everyone.

Just as implied by Blatz et al, with the right acknowledgement and recognition assigned by the government, there is possibility of the two groups victimized/non-victimized group to coexist amicably in the future (Nadler & Saguy, 2004, in Blatz et al, 2009, 234), perhaps for economic or political reasons, despite their reserved opinions.

SR:16

“I think of slavery past when I think of political apology, it brings me to reflect on how much I have joined in promoting critical race theory. To that effect I have always been passionate about colonial legacies and need to fight its impact in the lives of the minority.

It could be deduced that historical consciousness plays a role when apology about slavery is mentioned. The seventh respondent buttresses “***the Dutch apology has really provided clues to my history in multi dimensions***”, while the sixteenth respondent was deeply reflective on how political apology brought back memories of graduate school, she had promoted race and culture, suggesting its importance in ISS. The sixteenth respondent demonstrated an example of a practice that might work at ISS but also of someone who could have been 'used' to raised awareness on the apology at ISS. An-other missing learning opportunity. However, the sixteenth respondent was not too positive about political apology and its feasibility in ISS due to the belief that society which it is situated in, influences the interest people may have of political apology.

4.3 A Decolonial Lens

This decolonial concepts argues the necessity to decolonize the mind from the idea of considering political apologies as a sensitive issue or subconsciously viewed as a taboo, which may have led to the silence and absence of political apology in ISS. Perhaps, can it be determined that its link to colonial history contributed to the alienation of such topic, hence the absence. Would it not be right for ISS to reflect on this seemingly dreaded topic, on how she may have encouraged disconnectedness?

By revisiting the purpose of the emergence of ISS as development institute, as an institution designed to right past wrongs done to its former colonies (George, 2014, p.178), apologies can instead be viewed as form of a memorial, instead of a taboo.

However, it is a ‘discourse opportunity’ some of the respondents considered was missed, which would have eased the scepticisms on political apology. Evidently, the overall conversations and excerpts from the sixteen respondents have demonstrated the varied meanings and perceptions they have of political apology without viewing it as sensitive but instead can be integrated into ISS.

Engaging with the few Dutch people of Caribbean descent at the Keti Koti festival, gave me room for reflections. I participated and heard the opinion of this group of Caribbeans not only from the meanings they had given to the apology but from the meanings I grasped from non-verbal movements and cultural displays, it appears that the festival promoted unity and diversity as most people dance in groups without segregation. Which confirms Mignolo’s

(2018) words that race, and class are the ways human minds has been programmed to think (p.14).

The meaning some of them had given to the apology came from a place of satisfaction and hope that finally came through. Such as, Anna, Raina, and the two couples, who expressed the peace and closure they had found which was more important to them compared to any promises the government makes or puts into effect. However, it was not all clear if the satisfaction with the apology was because of the presentation (how it was made, who made it), timing of the apology or just that the fact that the apology happened in their lifetime. They also found this research as a vital step for promoting reconciliation through history. Therefore, in line with Kurzman's (2008) arguments on meanings as a method in which human constantly seeks for answers (p.5), can political apology be viewed through the angle of social movement that tries to address past wrongs done to a victim group, which in turn promoted reconciliation and acceptance?

For the younger Black Dutch citizens and White counterparts encountered at the keti-koti, who had asserted that timing was of essence and that the apology was long overdue, had expressed being present in the apology event in solidarity with their friends and relations. Could this be considered another way of practicing decolonization besides theorizing as (Mignolo, 2018, p.136) had suggested?

Conversely, there were few opposing voices (from my second meetings) who passionately opposed this apology, although according to them they had thought that slave history is something past and should be forgotten. Nevertheless, they could not help but want to get beyond the shame and the silence of bearing the past hurts, instead had sought for the truth and ancestral closures that linked them to their roots and gave them hope. It can therefore be understood that they wanted more, they wanted an equal society where their children can work and earn without a sense of being marginalised, instead a society that coexists in a justified and deserved space. Can it be inferred that, despite the dramaturgical performance (Cels, 2015, p.351) for example, the date chosen for apology, place chosen for slavery apology (slave monument in Museumplein) and significant rain in which the king stood to apologize, did not matter at all?

Finally, I was curious to understand via a decolonial lens, what it feels like to be let down, taken into captivity, wanting to be free, having children born into bondage who may have a different understanding of freedom which I yearn for. What it would have meant for the past victims who taught their descendants to be strong, brave, trust no one, which has created uneasy feelings to the extent that this lack of trust has subtly permeated the society, probably causing them not to trust my presence, despite being of my kind (black). Hence, the relevance of this apology, as a step to foster - reparation, acknowledgment, and healing on the one hand, and on the other a need for apology to be school history books for inferences just as suggested by (Thompson,2012, p220).

To conclude this discussion and analysis, these three lenses of analogy seem interwoven: - historical, responsibility and decolonial lenses. In other words, one cannot be expressed without reflection of the other. While the historical component gives us a reason for reflection, the responsibility aspect motivates us to act or contribute to change, and the decolonial lens empowers us to unlearn and relearn the way we view others despite our opinion of them and challenge ourselves to be concerned for others suffering in different ways. For example, by revolting against racism, inequality and stereotyping which are all a result of a colonial legacy.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter gives a recap of the framework, methods, findings, and positionality, while setting perspectives for future research work.

5.1 Summary

This research work set out to understand what the recent Dutch State political apology means for ISS community as an international institute of higher education. My motivation for this topic was to pursue courage diversity, acknowledgment, reconciliation, a form of reference for my country Nigeria and find out how such political apology can be a springboard for social change, reconciliation, and a sense of equality in a wounded society, through an open discourse facilitated in higher education institutions. By making use of theoretical frameworks such as decolonial concept, responsibility, and meaning-making theory to analyse the multiplicity of views about apology, I sought a broader understanding of political apology that encourages peaceful co-existence.

In my methodology, I proceeded with a unique mix of decolonial toolkit (knowing with others) and ethnography because of the unique benefits that each technique brings to my research work, knowing that I had only a short period for my work. One of my objectives was to explore how best to research these meanings of political apology in a decolonial and inclusive way? Hence, I had to devise ways and means to encounter and engage with targeted respondents (both inside the ISS community and outside ISS) to make sense of the Dutch slavery political apology. Seeking to understand these meanings among the victims and non-victims' group was intentional, designed to help me deepen and broaden the meanings they make of this slavery apology.

I was eager to see the current Dutch apology become a burning topic of relevant discussion in the school. However, its absence became a point of curiosity to understand why it was nowhere to be found in the general news, discussions or any slides elated on the walls of ISS. This made me wonder if it was a taboo to bring up such a topic as an apology. It was my expectation that such a topic should be at the front burner of an expert intuition such as ISS where dialogues that improve societal cohesion and inclusion are forged. As a result, inspired my search for meanings of political apology, using theories and methodologies that could guide me.

The findings were intriguing and calls for deep reflections. For example, there seem to be an apparent disconnect between the Dutch society and ISS, ISS failed to raise the awareness of the PM's apology and shirked in its responsibility as a facilitator of social discourse. Although some saw the apology as a means of reflection and looking back, some others opposed it as not necessary and past issues should not be dug up, for fear of hurts and divisions it may bring on society.

Though the results, I initially anticipated, surprisingly did not come as I expected. It became clear that there was a lack of bridge with local Dutch history which brings to question the level of historical consciousness of the members of ISS despite being an institution built on inclusion bases (development of global south) through renegotiation with former colonies.

The Dutch state apology elicited reflections where one is driven to think about oneself and their influence on others without being directly connected to that 'other'. In a nutshell, the apology meant many things to different respondents such as feelings of hope, a sense of closure for the Caribbean Dutch respondents, a long-overdue apology, solidarity, and apathy but questions its absence in the ISS.

Some outstanding suggestions were localizing apology in the curricula to create a platform for conversations and learning each other's stories through history, at such would enable more connection between diverse groups.

Furthermore, their interaction caused me to visualise two distinct worlds in one place, namely the ISS and Dutch society, that was when George's (2014) word struck me "Living in Netherlands and yet not in it" (p.178). How much they felt restrained to connect due to two most emphasised reasons, namely 'tight schedule in schoolwork' and 'connection with people in Dutch society,' both of which they expressed some difficulty in combining. So, it happened that, while in search for the meanings of Dutch apology, I found the disconnection of ISS to its locality, including local knowledge of Dutch history which the apology should have been the right opportunity to bring it into the learning space. Therefore, the findings shows that chances of achieving a connected ISS and Dutch society seems slim which may to some extent, have influenced the meanings they give to Dutch political apology.

5.2 Conclusion

Finally made sense!

In the beginning, I had a narrative of Dutch Caribbean shortcomings while living in the Netherlands, a place they called their home and still suffers structural and systematic racism due to colonial past. I was amazed to find out about this unfair treatment from the Dutch Caribbean respondents and quickly realized the importance of apology that has taken place. Despite the apology by the Prime Minister, I found that there was a significant percentage of scepticisms from people who seemed indifferent, while most of the affected victims (Dutch people of Caribbean descent) found it necessary to heal from colonial injustices.

By assumption I was hoping to excerpt all the meanings of political apology and weigh how it would benefit my country. However, from my findings I realised that the perception of the Dutch Political apology amongst the encountered respondents was heavily influenced by factors such as identity struggle, historical consciousness, ISS disconnection from Dutch locality, and local knowledge of history. In my understanding, apology is about recognition, expression of regret, acceptance, and peaceful coexistence that allows different identities to thrive in each society, cutting down on our classism as to whose ancestors were slaves or masters and avoiding policies that render others to be deserving poor or marginalised.

This conclusion will be incomplete without reiterating the limitations encountered, such as time limited number of Caribbean respondents and fewer white scholars, absent of some lecturers. For future work, I recommend that an interested MSc student researcher could expand the scope to investigate how varied identities influences perception of political apology especially in the context of shared history such as colonialism and racism.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Visiting a family of Four.

"That's my grandfather," he explained. He once told me, "Apology is never going to happen, and if it does, it will not be worth it." said Jo as he preferred to be called. As he pointed at a picture frame, a little weathered, the colour was in black and white background, and a young man sat on what seemed like a stool all smiles.

"What were his convictions?" I inquired. "Did you know that in the United Kingdom, certain descendants of colonial masters were still compensated for the loss of 'property' until 2018? What does this tell you? It simply shows how well informed all European governments were of the evil crimes of the past, as their government was always a part of the slavery business. They had sat and seen descendants of the slaves struggle through the times while the wealthy made things easy for themselves. Visit most Caribbean Islands, it is in bad shape so you cannot tell me a mere apology is meaningful. I do not think it is till I see a functioning black society, until I see a government that is paying back, creating more job opportunities for our young and pushing for an equal society" **Jo** concluded.

"I believe it is humiliating and disrespectful to be aware and complacent of what my forebears did in the past and continue to do so. In broad daylight, it's like a heist". **Mariska** commented as she placed a tray of tea on the table.

"During my school days I was normally reminded of not being Dutch but a half, I remember how that made me feel but not anymore. It is all because of the slavery which caused unequal treatment and mostly the way these ill treatments were endured, which gives room for more bullying. I was more protective and defensive of myself", **Jo's** daughter says. "The important thing is reparation; I am not concerned with the apology". **Jo's son** added.

Appendix 2: Other Meetings

"You can tell that demand changes with time, the original slaves who had the direct impact of hurt, rape, mutilation and anguish cried for freedom, but their descents in this time felt emotional and psychological impact so the new demand is no longer freedom but reparation". **Tim** says.

"Why do you want to research a country you are not part of, why not focus on your country as it has experienced colonialism and is filled with historic information? I do not think you will understand why the Caribbeans or Suriname want an apology or reparation as much as they do" **questions Pan.**

"The Dutch apology was not necessary, it only brings back bad memories, the world is moving forward, and people should be more focused on improvement than an apology. The victims should have demanded reparation, a good job, better housing, and specific benefits that focus on improving the lives of the victim," **Drew** said.

"I have a problem with the timing of the apology. It is too late, the government should be focused on special funds for the victimised, but they are instead giving speeches", **Lars** stated.

Appendix 3: The Slavery Freedom Symbol



Image 3: keti koti symbol of the Dutch Caribbean symbolizing freedom and breakage from bondage.

Appendix 4: List of Respondents used in this work.

Sixteen Scholar Respondents		Eighteen respondents Dutch Community	
1. Maya	9. Anonymous	1. Annamarie	10. Jo's daughter
2. Eli	10. Connor	2. Anonymous	11. Jo's son
3. Anonymous	11. Yan	3. Anonymous	12. Lars
4. Anonymous	12. Anonymous	4. Raina	14. Drew
5. Yan	13. Priscilia	5. Mariska	15. Lennart
6. Anonymous	14. Anonymous	6. Eva	16. Martha
7. Anonymous	15. Cam	7. Julia	17. Wan
8. Anonymous	16. Anonymous	8. Jo	18. Anonymous
		9. Tim	

**Anonymous means the respondent did not consent to his/her name being published. Names are redacted to first names only for privacy reasons.*

Appendix 5: Information and consent form:

Working Title: UNDERSTANDING DUTCH POLITICAL APOLOGY IN A POSTGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

Introduction:

Dear Participant,

I am Jennifer Adaeze Aguwamba, a master's student at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am currently conducting research for my master's thesis on the topic of -Understanding Dutch Political Apology in A Postgraduate International Higher Education Context - I would like to invite you to participate in this study, as you have been identified as a Dutch Citizen who is interested in history and need for a progressive society, which makes you the right fit for my research.

If you want to participate in the study, you can indicate this at the end of this form.

Purpose of the Study:

My research focuses on the opinions of ISS scholars and the outside Dutch community (black Dutch Caribbeans citizens or whites), on the meanings they give of recent Dutch apology on past slavery crimes. Why these two categories of respondents? Because the slave

history of the Caribbean/Suriname is a narrative, which I intend to present to the scholars viz-a-viz the apology to deliberate on. I seek to understand how the apology is received, the meanings given to it by both the victims (affected descendants) and non-victims and understand how the ISS can help be a voice of social change in this respect. The information gathered from this study will be used solely for academic purposes and to add to the body of knowledge about history and remediation efforts.

Your Participation:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will take part in an interview, either in person or via WhatsApp or Zoom, where you will be asked to share your thoughts, opinions, and experiences about the research topic. The interview is expected to last 20-30 minutes and will be audio-recorded for accurate data collection. Rest assured that your personal information and responses will be kept strictly confidential.

At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunity to comment on your answers. If you disagree with my notes or if I misunderstood you, you could ask to have parts of them amended or deleted.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent or terminate your participation at any time with no consequences or penalties. Your decision to participate or withdraw from the study will not affect your relationship with me, the International Institute of Social Studies, or Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Potential risks or discomfort:

I do not anticipate any risks or discomforts while participating in this study. However, during this study, personal information such as your name, educational background, profession, and migration experience to the Netherlands will be collected from you.

Confidentiality and Data Protection:

All data collected during the study will be kept strictly confidential. Your personal information and responses will be anonymized and securely stored. The data will be accessible only to the institution, and the information will be used solely for academic purposes. Any information presented in research reports or publications will be aggregated and reported in such a way that your identity and confidentiality are protected.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions about the study or your privacy rights, such as accessing, changing, deleting, or updating your data, please do not hesitate to contact me at +31613245559. Additionally, if you have a complaint or concerns about your privacy. Please email the Data Protection Officer (fg@eur.nl) or visit www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl. (T: 088 - 1805250).

Declaration of Consent:

I have read the information letter. I understand what the study is about and what data will be collected from me. I was able to ask questions as well. My questions were adequately answered. I know that I am allowed to stop at any time.

By signing this form, I voluntarily consent to participate and grant permission for the collected data to be used for academic purposes, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of my responses.

Please sign below to indicate your consent:

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution to this research study.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Adaeze Aguwamba.

Master's Student, International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)

Erasmus University Rotterdam.

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