

Application form

Impact Explorer

The conditions from the call for proposals Impact Explorer apply to this form.

Project title:

Black Baptism Histories: Reimagining Early and Long-Term Black Christian Presence in the Netherlands

1. Administrative information

1.1 Contact details, applicant knowledge institution

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1.2 Contact details, Impact Partner

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Organisation Impact Partner:	Stichting Heilzame Verwerking Slavernijverleden (“Foundation Salvational Processing Slavery Past”)
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1.3 Projectnumber and title of initial project

Projectnumber: 406.21.FHR.016

Projecttitle: Church and Slavery in the Dutch Empire: History, Theology and Heritage

2. Public summary

2.1 Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Tot dusver is in religiegeschiedenis de geschiedenis van het zwart christendom in Nederland buiten beeld gebleven (Selderhuis), of alleen beschouwd als iets recent uit de twintigste eeuw (Van Eijnatten & Van Lieburg). Onderzoekers van het NWO-project Kerk en Slavernij troffen verrassend grote aantallen dopen van Aziatische, Afrikaanse en Amerikaanse christenen in kerken in Nederland aan in 17^e-19^e eeuwse doopboeken en kerkelijke tijdschriften. Met dit project willen we onderzoeken hoe we deze data kunnen gebruiken om te komen tot een (ver)nieuw(d) narratief over de geschiedenis van zwart christendom in Nederland. Een digitale kaart met dopen fungeert daarbij als gespreksstarter.

Max 100 words (99 /100 words)

2.2 English summary

So far, in religious history, the history of black Christianity in the Netherlands has been overlooked (Selderhuis), or perceived as a modern, twentieth-century, phenomenon (Van Eijnatten & Van Lieburg). However, researchers of the NWO-project Church and Slavery found surprisingly large numbers of baptisms of Asian, African, and American Christians in churches in the Netherlands in 17th-19th century baptismal books and church periodicals. With this project, we want to investigate how we can use these data to reimagine the history of black Christianity in the Netherlands. To do so, a digital map of those baptisms serves as a conversation starter.

Max 100 words (99 /100 words)

3. Appropriateness to programme objective

The history of a black presence in Early Modern Europe has been developing only recently with contributions from art historians and historians (cf., e.g., the books from Chater and Habib). It is clear that from the 15th century onwards in the south of Europe (Portugal, Spain, Italy) and from the 16th century onwards in the north of Europe traces of black lives and black communities can be found. The interest and body of knowledge on black presence in the Dutch Republic is growing too (see the publications of, e.g., Mark Ponte and Dienke Hondius). However, the presence of black people in Dutch churches has not been a separate topic of academic study before. Hence, in Dutch religious history black Christians generally are either missing (see, e.g., Herman J. Selderhuis' popular handbook), or limited to the twentieth and twenty-first century (e.g., the handbook by Van Eijnatten and Van Lieburg). This has also impacted the nomenclature used by scholars: formerly known as "allochthonous" churches, churches with a non-Dutch background nowadays are primarily known as "migrant churches." Both designations emphasize the otherness of "black" (African and Asian, but also Middle-Eastern and American) churches to Dutch society (for a relevant overview of these churches and their size, see, e.g., De Hart and Van Houwelingen, ch. 5), and their presence as a new and recent phenomenon. However, in the NWO research project Church and Slavery in the Dutch Empire: History, Theology and Heritage a cooperation of theologians, church historians, historians and social scientists from the Protestant Theological University, the VU, and the University of Curaçao, has led to the unexpected findings of numerous baptisms of black Christians in the Dutch Republic in the 17th to 19th centuries. For their book *Gids Kerk & Slavernijverleden* (2023) Dienke Hondius and Niek Hemmen found 118 baptisms of black (Asian, American and African) Christians between 1621 and 1843 in the Dutch Republic (cf. figure 1). In the church periodical *Boekzaal der Geleerde Wereld* Vincent Laarman and Martijn Stoutjesdijk found the baptism announcements of 45 African, Asian, and American Christians between 1748 and 1807. Both lists only partly overlap, and these first findings suggest that across the Netherlands many more cases can be expected to be found in the archives of local churches and population registers.

In the original project, there was no specific research foreseen with regard to the baptisms of enslaved or free black people in the Netherlands, as the focus of our research in the practical dealings of the church with slavery was on the colonies. However, when looking for sites in and outside the Netherlands in which aspects of the history of church and slavery were visible (= the third dimension of our original research project), we soon stumbled on churches in the Netherlands that had been witness to the historical baptisms of African, Asian, and American Christians. What made these sites of even greater interest, is that we often found additional information about these baptisms (motivations of those being baptized as well as the baptizing ministers, size of the crowd, use of bible texts etc.). From those descriptions and the statistical data, the following, rather striking, provisional conclusions can be drawn:

1. That these early baptisms are recorded in cities and villages all over the country, and with all kinds of different sizes and various (often no) access to sea ports (e.g., Hemmen, Bruchem, Gorssel, Roermond);
2. From the Bible texts used during these baptisms, as well as the paratexts, it becomes clear that, more than was known before, many Dutch ministers were critical of slavery and advocated a more open and universal attitude towards Christians of color – which is a completely new insight (see the research article by Laarman and Stoutjesdijk);
3. That getting baptized might have constituted for many black Christians a special moment of agency, especially as their legal status often was unclear: they entered the Republic as enslaved, together with their masters, but some were hoping or expecting that they would become free as soon as they hit Dutch (European) ground. In practice, however, they were often still bound to their (former) owners. Could becoming baptized have been a step towards citizenship in the dominant white and Christian society? Moreover – and perhaps because of this – the sources indicate that some black Christians had to defy their masters who did not want to see their (former) enslaved baptized (again, Laarman and Stoutjesdijk).

So, these data on the baptisms of black Christians have the potential to develop and deepen our understanding of a black Christian presence in the Netherlands, more particularly, to ground/anchor Africans, Asians, and Americans in the collective memory of Dutch Christianity.



Figure 1: Map Hondius en Hemmen, p. 18

In the proposed Impact-Explorer project, we want to open up the conversation about the self-perception, presence, and history of black Christians in the Netherlands. We do this in dialogue with Surinamese, Antillean, Indonesian, and white Christian communities. As a first step, we are developing a digital map, presented on a website, with all known baptisms of black Christians. This map is created using ESRI mapping software and is inspired by the VU project “Mapping Hiding Places.” The map serves as a conversation starter and will be used during community events, which will be organized by a knowledge broker. Our current focus is on Surinamese, Antillean, and Indonesian Christian communities in the Netherlands, for three main reasons: (1) Historically, most baptized non-white Christians originated from these three regions; (2) Today, these groups form well-organized diaspora communities in the Netherlands; (3) They often have their own churches, such as the Moravian Church (EBG) and the Gereja Indjili Maluku (GIM), with which our project already has connections. In addition, white Christians are also invited to take part in the conversation.

To make the history of black baptisms more tangible, we have selected a limited number of case studies of baptized black Christians about whom relatively extensive information is available (such as Jacoba Leijlard in Venlo). Preferably, the community events will be held in the cities or villages—ideally, in the churches—where these baptisms originally took place. In doing so, we invite today’s community members, both black and white, to reflect on whether this new knowledge helps them reconsider their history and identity, as well as to explore what more is needed to (re)shape the narrative of black Christian presence in the Netherlands through the centuries.

4. Project plan

The project plan consists of three phases:

Phase 1: three months: Preparing the Conversation Starter

In the first three months, the scholars involved in the project will gather all the data they have collected with regard to baptisms (names, dates, places, Bible texts used, other comments) and make the data presentable in a digital map on a website (sphere of control). A coordinator will assist in standardizing and entering the data. (To be clear, project members will collect no new data, and existing data will be treated in accordance with the Data Management Plan of the original NWO-project.) Expertise with regard to making digital maps, as well as presenting them on websites, will be hired through Dienke Hondius, who has developed comparable mapping projects before (see, e.g., the projects “Mapping Hiding Places,” and “Mapping Slavery”).

In this phase also a suitable candidate for the position of knowledge broker will be hired, who should be someone who is knowledgeable of the different Surinamese, Antillean, and Indonesian Christian communities (preferably, someone from these communities), and is trusted by these communities. Aside from the always challenging task of finding a suitable candidate for the position of knowledge broker, the risks for this phase are very low. With regard to the position of knowledge broker, we can make use of both the network and expertise of the “knowledge center” (kenniscentrum) of the Protestant Theological University, and the network and expertise of the foundation Heilzame Verwerking Slavernijverleden, to find a suitable candidate. Together with them, and on the basis of our experience of the past few years, we have already compiled a shortlist of candidates.

Phase 2: six months: Reaching out and Starting the Conversation

In the second phase, the knowledge broker takes the lead. He or she selects a number of suitable sites for the community events and reaches out to relevant communities of local black and white Christians. After consultation with the local communities, (s)he will organize four community events in the six months of his/her appointment. Bianca Groen Gallant and the foundation Heilzame Verwerking Slavernijverleden will help the knowledge broker to identify the right key persons and communication channels, as they already have warm and extensive connections in the Surinamese, Antillean, and Indonesian communities. During the community events, we want to explore how the digital map contributes to changes in attitude regarding the history of Dutch Christianity and whether that offers starting points for “reimaging” the shared history of black and white Christians in the Netherlands.

The greatest risk of this phase is that we cannot find enough interested people for the community events. However, this risk is greatly mitigated through the foundation Heilzame Verwerking Slavernijverleden, which has a big network and has proven to be a reliable and enthusiastic partner. Moreover, the NWO-project also has built its own network of stakeholders, church leaders, and interested laypeople that can be activated.

Phase 3: three months: Passing the Baton

In the last three months of the project, the digital map will be transferred to the project’s website, which continuity has already been secured. The project as such is transferred to the foundation Heilzame Verwerking Slavernijverleden (sphere of influence). In this phase, new possibilities to help reshape the narrative about black Christians will be inventoried, and if possible, turned into (explorative) actions, such as grant applications. The foundation will be the owner of these new ventures, but (members of) the research project can advise on and contribute to impact products and processes. The PThU knowledge center is also to play a role in this regard.

The evident risk of this phase is that there will be no follow-up on the project after its termination. However, given the societal and ecclesial interest in this theme, as well as the expected growth of data concerning (the baptisms of) black Christians in the Netherlands, we see this as a rather small risk.

5. Project team

Our proposed project team consists of four types of team members. First of all, there are several members of the original NWO-project (a collaboration of the Protestant Theological University, VU, and the University of Curaçao) who have found and worked on the data with regard to the baptism of black Christians in the 17th-19th century. They are highly motivated to bring their knowledge into this project, as well as their (ample) experience with science communication and impact projects. They will remain involved in the project throughout its complete duration:

- Dr. Martijn J. Stoutjesdijk is a specialist on the role of the church in the Dutch slavery past. Amongst others, he was scientific advisor and text writer for the exposition Christianity and Slavery in Museum Catharijneconvent, and he is advisor on slavery history for the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) and the National Council of Churches (Raad van Kerken). He wrote several articles on the significance of baptism for enslaved people (2023, 2025 [in press], and 2025 [submitted]).
- Dr. Dienke Hondius is a specialist on the history of black presence in the Dutch Republic, as shown by her publications (e.g., 2008, 2014). In 2023, she published together with Niek Hemmen a guide on the slavery past of the Dutch churches, which included the first map of baptisms of black, (formerly) enslaved, Christians in the Dutch Republic/the Netherlands (pp. 18-27). She also works for the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam.
- Vincent Laarman, MA, is a PhD candidate in the NWO-project who has worked extensively on baptisms in Suriname and the Dutch Republic. Together with Martijn Stoutjesdijk, he wrote an article on the baptism announcements in the church periodical *Boekzaal der Geleerde Wereld* of black (Asian, African, and American) Christians in the Dutch Republic (2025, in press).

The second category is that of our impact partner:

- Bianca Groen Gallant is a member of the daily board (“moderamen”) of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and president of the foundation Heilzame Verwerking Slavernijverleden. Next to that, she is an advisor of the EO with regard to the Dutch slavery past. She has an extensive network in and outside churches and is the initiator (together with the foundation) of many knowledge transfer activities about the involvement of the churches with slavery (e.g., a travelling exhibition, debate nights, webinars, etc.). The foundation Stichting Heilzame Verwerking Slavernijverleden that she represents is the offshoot of the first ecumenical initiative to put the slavery past of the churches on the agenda of the churches. The foundation functions as the linking pin between academia, national church leadership (e.g., National Council of Churches), and local churches, as well as communities of the enslaved. As such, Groen Gallant and her foundation are the ideal partner for this project: they have the trust of the communities (both black and white), a great network, and relevant experience.

The third category is that of our advisors:

- Dr. Coen van Galen has received nationwide recognition for producing online Suriname and Curaçao slave registers. He collected the data together with volunteers and made the registers available for genealogical research. As such, he has experience with both historical personal data (esp. in the context of slavery), as well as the best ways to bring these data to the communities involved.
- Dr. Jorien Holsappel is a knowledge broker at the Protestant Theological University and manager of its “Knowledge Center for Theology” (Kenniscentrum voor Theologie). Before that, she worked at the national knowledge center for Impact of Disasters (ARQ). Through her position and experience, she is well suited to assist us, together with foundation Heilzame Verwerking Slavernijverleden, in finding a capable knowledge broker for this Impact Explorer project. She can also advise on, e.g., methodology and the appropriate recording of results.

Finally, with the money from the grant, we seek to appoint a knowledge broker (the fourth category), who is able to bridge the gap between our academic project and the community of Surinamese, Antillean, and Indonesian churches and Christians. We feel that with the different expertise and backgrounds in this team, we can work to translate (=the knowledge broker) solid scientific research (=Hondius/Stoutjesdijk/Laarman) into events and a reimagining of the history of black Christianity in the Netherlands (=Groen Gallant). Finally, a small role has been conceived for a coordinator of the digital map and its website.

6. Short literature list

- Kathleen Chater, *Untold Histories. Black People in England and Wales during the period of the British Slave Trade, 1660-1807* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2009).
- Joris van Eijnatten en Fred van Lieburg, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006 [second, revised edition]).
- Imtiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- Joep de Hart and Pepijn van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland. Kerkelijke deelname en christelijke gelovigheid* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2018).
- Dienke Hondius and Niek Hemmen, *Gids Kerk en Slavernijverleden. Een eerste verkenning* (Edam: LM Publishers, 2023).
- Dienke Hondius, *Blackness in Western Europe: Racial Patterns of Paternalism and Exclusion* (London: Routledge, 2014).
- Dienke Hondius, "Black Africans in 17th century Amsterdam," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 2 (2008), 85-103.
- Vincent Laarman and Martijn Stoutjesdijk, " 'Many shall come from the East and West'. Baptism Announcements of African and Asian Reformed Christians in the Eighteenth Century Dutch Republic," *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 140:2 (2025), in press.
- Bente de Leede and Martijn Stoutjesdijk (eds.), *Kerk, kolonialisme en slavernij. Verhalen van een vervlochten geschiedenis* (Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum, 2023).
- Mark Ponte, " 'Al de swarten die hier ter stede comen.' Een Afro-Atlantische gemeenschap in zeventiende-eeuws Amsterdam," *TSEG - The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 15:4 (2018), 33-62.
- Herman J. Selderhuis (ed.), *Handboek Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis* (Kampen: Kok, 2006).
- Martijn Stoutjesdijk, " 'In openlijken strijd met den geest des Christendoms'? De kerk in het Nederlandse slavernijverleden," in Rose Mary Allen e.a. (eds.), *Staat en slavernij. Het Nederlandse koloniale slavernijverleden en zijn doorwerkingen* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 2023).
- Martijn Stoutjesdijk, "Een zwarte stem in een witte tekst. De totslaafgemaakte christen Isabella in het werk van Jan Willem Kals," *Kerk en Theologie* 74 (2023): 38-56.
- Martijn Stoutjesdijk, "Washing the Moor White. The Exegesis of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8) and its Colonial Entanglements in Early Modern Dutch Discourse on Christianity, Slavery and Race," *Journal of Early Modern Culture* (2025, submitted).