

MENS ALS
EIGENDOM

Europese kolonisten en handelaren maakten
van mensen objecten. De ervaring van

HUMAN BEINGS
AS PROPERTY

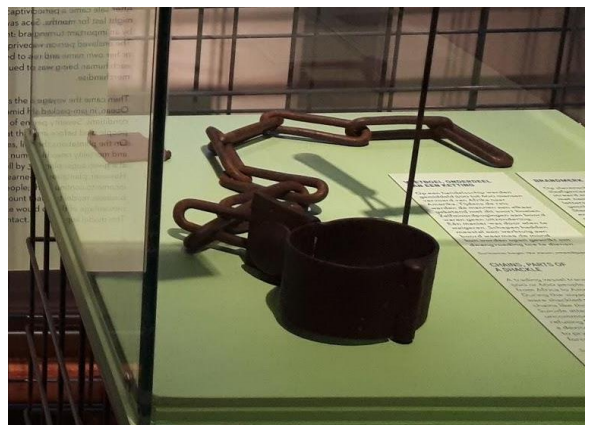
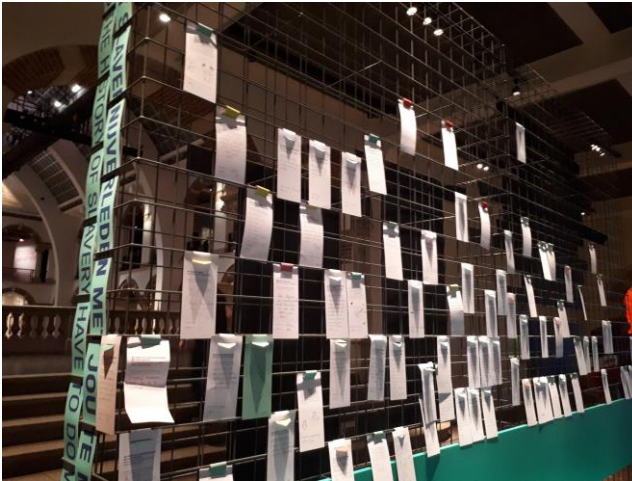
European colonialists and merchants
people into objects. The experience of
the enslaved consisted of a success

HUMAN BEING
AS PROPERTY

Dealing with the colonial past: public perceptions of slavery in museums.

A case study of *Afterlives of Slavery* at the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam

By **Jacoline Buirma**



All photos on the cover are of displays at the *Afterlives of Slavery* exhibition, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam. All photos made by author.

**Dealing with the Colonial Past:
public perceptions of slavery in museums.
A case study of *Afterlives of Slavery* at the Tropenmuseum,
Amsterdam**

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1. Introduction

1.1. On the topic

In 1926, queen Wilhelmina opened the newest, largest building of Amsterdam: the Royal Colonial Institute. This institute likewise housed the Tropenmuseum, whose collections had been built up since 1864. Its aim then was to encourage scientific research on 'tropical' products, in order to encourage trade in the Netherlands and its colonies, as well as educate the Dutch people on aspects of life in the tropics (Woudsma 2004). It was therefore well embedded within the colonial project. In 1950, after the independence of Indonesia, the institute changed its name to Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (Royal Tropical Institute, or KIT). Despite the fact that colonial is no longer in its title, its colonial history remains evident in both its collections and the building itself. The museum has been trying to find ways in which to best address this past. For example in 2015, an initiative called 'Decolonize the Museum' went around the Tropenmuseum: a group of fifty people with a variety of racial, gender, sexual and class identities that went around to provide a critical gaze on the way things were exhibited (Warsame 2018). It is by no means unique in this effort: many public institutions in the Netherlands are struggling with ways to address their colonial past, and that of the Netherlands at large, and are under close scrutiny from a wide range of people to do so (Schoonderwoerd, 2018). Furthermore, this situation is not limited to the Netherlands alone: questions of how to deal with the colonial past are prevalent around many other European countries, and a range of activities in European museums has recently occurred to encourage this debate. To name a few examples: the Africa Museum in Brussels recently reopened after a large refurbishment that aimed to take away its colonial perspectives (Pontzen 2018); Macron proclaimed that he wants to return many objects to Benin and other African countries (Vermaas 2018); and the German government allocated millions to research museum acquisitions from the colonial period (Hickley 2019).

These actions are surrounded by wider debates not just on how to represent the history of colonialism, but more significantly on how this past relates to the present. Such debates are often centred around "whose voices have a right to be heard when this

relationship is discussed, and about the implications of all of this for understandings of nation, community and identity” (Cubit *et al.* 2011, 1). Museums often perform a significant role in these debates, not in the least because for many, (part of) their history and collections find their origin within colonial times. However, what exactly this role is or should be is often unclear, as there exist certain “uncertainties both about the social role of museums in contemporary society, and about their relationship to established narratives of national identity” (ibid., 1). This thesis aims to discuss this role of museums within society, particularly when dealing with contested histories.

1.2. Main research questions

The question is then, should museum embrace controversial topics within their displays, or shy away from it? What kind of role can and should they take within a wider societal debate on contested history? These are big questions for museums, and ones that do not have a clear answer. I therefore will not claim to be able to answer these within this thesis. However, in order to enhance this debate and further the understanding of the role of museums within society, this thesis wants to research what kind of impact exhibitions have on visitors and to what extent that can be influenced by the way exhibitions are created. Having a deeper understanding of this will hopefully aid museums in knowing how they can deal with contested pasts, and understanding if, and in what way, they can be suited places to discuss controversial topics. My main research question is therefore:

What is the impact of an exhibition on visitors and does the process of the creation of an exhibition have an influence on that?

In order to research this, I will take an in-depth look at the *Afterlives of Slavery* exhibition in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, and will try to answer more specifically:

What is the public perception of *Afterlives of Slavery* in the Tropenmuseum?

This question is divided in three subquestions:

- How do visitors react to the *Afterlives of Slavery* exhibition?
- How do different media comment on this exhibition on slavery?
- Do the aims of the creators and what they wanted to achieve within the exhibition play a role in the way the exhibition is received by the public?

1.3 A word on definitions

In the Netherlands, there has been some recent controversy on language in museums, and more specifically about whether to change or keep certain terms or titles (Teuwissen 2018). When working on these topics, both within academia and within the heritage sector more broadly, it is worth being aware of these discussions on language. Partly in response to this, the Research Centre for Material Cultures (RCMC, the research centre connected to the National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW)) published a book 'Words Matter: an Unfinished Guide to Word Choices in the Cultural Sector' (Modest and Lelijveld 2018). Although not exclusively about colonialism and slavery, these subjects feature significantly in it. This is not the place to go into an in-depth discussion (see *Words Matter* for that), but it is worth highlighting a few terms that regularly feature in this thesis. When quoting direct comments however, the language is kept as it was written, or translated as closely as possible to the original words. When this is the case, this is always clearly marked.

Most noticeable, within this thesis the term 'enslaved' is used rather than the word 'slave'. This term is standardised now within the NMVW, because "using 'enslaved' instead of 'slave' acknowledges enslavement as an act of power and dehumanization rather than simply referring to the person within a social category" (Kofi 2018, 63).

Race and racism are likewise terms worth clarifying here. Again, the definitions as proposed by the NMVW are used here: "While race is not a biological fact, it has social consequences, for example in discrimination, prejudice and inequality. Racism, therefore, should be understood as a form of prejudice and discrimination based on the presumed superiority of one group over another" (Modest and Lelijveld 2018, 135).

Within this thesis, the term history is used to indicate the past and past events, rather than the discipline of the study of the past. The fields of heritage and museum studies are not regarded as separate, but rather as very closely linked, since heritage is understood as multi-faceted, following Graham's explanation: "Heritage does not engage directly with the study of the past. Instead, it is concerned with the ways in which very selective material artefacts, mythologies, memories and traditions become resources for the present" (Graham 2002, 1004). Following this definition, the same processes take place on heritage sites as well as in museums, both in their management and in and onto their visitors. They are therefore used interchangeably here.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In the next chapter, I will first lay out a theoretical framework which will contextualise this research. For this, I will start by discussing Foucault's theory of the museum as a heterotopia, in order to understand what kind of processes take place, or can take place, within a museum space. Secondly, I will discuss the theory of considering heritage as a performance, which aims to understand the active role visitors play within these processes that take place in museums. Thirdly, I will aim to understand the societal context of the way colonialism is dealt with in the Netherlands, in order to be able to contextualise the exhibition and understand the public perception of it. For this, I will use the theory of collective memory and colonial aphasia.

In the third chapter I will discuss my methodology. In it, I give a brief introduction to the data set that is used, which consists of three subsets: visitor comments, exhibition reviews and interviews with the curators of *Afterlives of Slavery*, and will discuss the methods used to analyse this data.

In the fourth chapter I present my data. I will first give an introduction to the case study, including information gotten through the interviews that show the aims of the curators for the exhibition and the collaborative processes that were a part of the creation of the exhibition. I will then show the results of the analysed visitor comments and afterwards show the results of the analysed reviews on the exhibition.

In the fifth chapter, I interpret this data, connect the different data sets and see to what extent they correspond with my theoretical framework. I will discuss the way the collaboration process works as a self-critique for the museum; the way visitors are active

agents through their emotional reactions to the exhibition; and the way the exhibition is encouraging an active rhetoric in the visitors through the invitation to a discussion. I will then discuss the extent to which the history of slavery is understood as having an impact on society today. Consequently, I will compare my findings with a large visitor study that was done in the UK in 2007 by Laurajane Smith (2011). Lastly I will discuss the limitations of my research and my data sets and room for further research.

In the sixth and final chapter I conclude my thesis by arguing that museums are a good space for encouraging dialogue on contested histories, and that this is an important aspect of the role of a museum within society.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Introduction

When studying the way exhibitions about the colonial past are perceived by visitors, a theoretical framework is needed that analyses both the role of a museum and its impact on visitors. This chapter is divided into three main sections discussing three main theories: the first in order to understand the processes that take place within museums, particularly when dealing with dissonant histories; the second to understand the role of the visitor when on a museum visit; and the third to understand the wider societal background in dealing with difficult pasts.

It will first aim to deepen the understanding of the processes at play within a museum by applying Foucault's theory of heterotopias, literally 'other spaces', to museums, and seeing how visitors can be challenged to a critical discourse through exhibitions. Understanding the spatial role of a museum within society can highlight the potential of the story its collections can tell, as well as the impact it can have on visitors. This leads to the second theory, in which heritage can be understood as a performance. In this approach, visitors are active agents in a process of learning through an embodied experience. The way an exhibition is perceived, then, is not only driven by the way it is displayed by the museum professionals, but is also due to the personal socio-cultural context and experiences of the visitor. Thirdly, the chapter will discuss collective memory in order to understand the way difficult pasts are regarded within society. It will discuss the theory of collective amnesia and collective aphasia, particularly about the colonial past, to understand more of the social context in which visitors regard exhibitions on colonial pasts.

2.2. Museums as a heterotopia

2.2.1. What is a heterotopia?

In order to understand the effect museums can have on visitors, it is useful to first understand what a museum is in terms of space. According to Foucault, we live in an 'epoch of space', in which the specific meaning of space becomes increasingly relevant to the way we understand and act within a (Western) society (Foucault 1984). For this reason, he introduces the concept of heterotopias in his influential lecture *Les Espaces Autres*, given at the Cercle D'études architecturale in Paris in 1967. A heterotopia is literally an 'other space', and a museum can be understood as such a heterotopia. According to Foucault, there are different types of spaces within a society; space should be seen as heterogeneous and relational to society. To demonstrate this, he juxtaposes utopias and heterotopias. These, for him, are two types of space that exist specifically in relation to and dependent on their surrounding society. A utopia, on the one hand, has no physical space, but exists as an inversion or as a perfected form of society. A heterotopia, on the other hand, is a physical space; it has a locality but is situated outside the rest of societal space (*ibid.*). Though often mistakenly seen as marginal, they are frequently central and semi-public spaces with collective and shared aspects, but with a special relation to the rest of space (Dehaene *et al.* 2009). They are 'counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites (...) are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault 1984, 3). The real sites in this context are the sites that are more common societal spaces.

Foucault lists six main characteristics, or principles of heterotopias (Foucault 1984, 4-9). The first is that they exist everywhere in the world, and in every society, though their form varies. Here he defines two main categories, namely crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation, both of which are places meant for people that are, temporarily or permanently, different from the rest of society. The second principle is that heterotopias can change function over time, or can be regarded as having a different meaning depending on the culture it is part of, whilst not losing their status as heterotopia. The third principle is that within a heterotopia, a juxtaposition of a multitude of places and spaces can be found, that normally would be incompatible but now come together in one space. The fourth characteristic is that heterotopias can also be heterochronies, that is to say that they are outside of the normal flow of time; they

can either accumulate time or reveal time as fully transitory, or both simultaneously, but they are different from traditional time. The fifth principle is that although they are outside of normal space, they are accessible, with an often clearly marked entrance and exit. Finally, the sixth trait is that it functions in relation to the rest of space, representing it as either a heterotopia of illusion that exposes the normal space, or as a heterotopia of compensation that shows a perfected form of the remaining space.

2.2.2. The museum as a heterotopia

A museum then can also be understood as a heterotopia, most obviously in the aspects where it collects in one place a multitude of times and places. This is particularly true of the 19th century understanding of museums that through its objects aim to collect and preserve a totality of places from different heterochronies. A museum in this way is a double paradox: "It contains infinite time in a finite space, and it is both a space of time and a 'timeless' space" (Lord 2006a, 3). Ethnographic museums furthermore can be seen also as heterotopias of deviation in their attempt to show 'the other' as different from the 'western norm' (Sudradjat 2012, 31).

However, it is not just this spatial and temporal aspect that makes a museum a heterotopia. More importantly, it is the concept of the museum as a space of difference, in which a museum is understood as more than merely a place that houses collections and objects, but which emphasizes the relation between the objects and their concepts and meanings (Lord 2006a, 4-5; 2006b). The role as 'other space' is *expressed* in the spatial and temporal characteristics, but these do not form its *essence*. Rather, it is its role to represent, contest or invert society whilst remaining outside of it, and as such it becomes a 'space of representation', thus producing meaning through language (Foucault 1984, 3; Hall 2013, 14). The objects within are displayed not only because of their diversity, but '*in their difference*' (Lord 2006a, 5, emphasis in original). They are decontextualised and re-interpreted, and a gap is created between '*les mots et les choses*', the words/concepts and objects (Foucault 1970, 130). This gap is also called the paradox of the ageless object: the materiality of the object remains the same over time, but the interpretation or perception of its meaning is transformed depending on the subject that is regarding the object (Molyneaux 2003). Simultaneously, within the museum as an institution, an attempt is made to bridge this gap through interpretation and language, thus making it a space of representation (Lidchi 2013). These interpretations are made within a conceptual framework, and are discourse dependent

and historically contingent; they are the 'systems of representation between words and things' (Lord 2006a, 10).

Museums then, understood as heterotopias, also have the ability to be disturbing and to destroy the 'syntax which causes words and things (...) to 'hold together'' (Foucault 1970, xix). They have the capacity to perform, in Foucaultian terms, a discursive analysis: they can challenge the discourses that maintain the discrepancy between the concepts and the objects. Although it is impossible for the museum to completely get rid of these discrepancies, to completely bridge the gap, they should nevertheless aim to display these systems of representation that re-contextualise the objects, rather than merely the objects alone. When this is done well, they have the ability to represent to the visitor the contingent nature of the discourses that form the interpretations. Visitors, in turn, are encouraged to critically consider the accuracy of the proposed link between things and concepts. The museum as institution, rather than showing a uniform historical narrative, will be able to expose 'the philosophical problem of the nature of the relation between things and concepts' (Lord 2006b, 86). They can thus challenge the visitor to a self-critique of their known discourses by showing them the historical conditioning of their ways of thinking and acting. This capacity of a museum to encourage self-critique (which for Foucault is more self-reflection rather than criticism) is particularly relevant when dealing with contested pasts or power relations and their historical context. Museums, thus understood as a heterotopia, can act as a 'collective mirror' of a society, showing essential aspects of a culture and equally able to 'distort, magnify, or in some other way transfigure cultural self-discourse' (Saindon 2012, 26). They can reinterpret the 'lines of making sense' of a culture and as such aid the visitor in a process of confronting unchallenged values (ibid.).

When dealing with contested pasts, such confrontation can become particularly evident, and how to achieve this in a good way remains a big challenge for museums, and heritage more broadly. The interpretations made within museums are just as much part of wider historical and social context, and the narratives that are told are equally constructed (Crooke 2005; Molyneaux and Stone 2003). It follows then that museums and heritage sites need to be more than a reflection or relic of a previous generation; rather, they should engage themselves in a self-critique and discursive analysis, just as much as they encourage the visitor to do so. A good example of such a practice is the

recent publication of the national Dutch ethnography museums 'Words Matter' (Modest and Lelijveld 2018). In it, a range of sensitive words and terms are discussed and analysed, many from colonial pasts or colonial narratives, and advice is given on if, how and when to use them. This self-critical analysis is also applied to their exhibitions, in for example the changing of words on labels, or adding explanations on certain terms. This emphasizes the value of a constructive dialogue with surrounding cultural values when facing these challenges (Saindon 2012). The way in which this is done can have an impact particularly when dealing with contested pasts, since it influences the ways in which that that past, and the sense of guilt, inclusion and exclusion that are accompanied by it, are understood by a range of involved communities and groups.

2.3. Heritage as performance

2.3.1. The intangibility of heritage

As shown above, museums as institutions, as well as museum professionals, play a large role in creating and presenting the interpretations connected to objects, and as such in representing its meaning. For a long time, it was only the museums and museum professionals making these interpretations, and heritage was mainly understood as monumental, static and universal. This notion is still heavily embedded within many institutions, and has been called the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), a term introduced by Smith (e.g. Smith 2011; 2015a; Smith and Waterton 2012). She strongly criticizes this, often heavily Western, approach to heritage that focuses on the materiality, and instead argues that heritage is multi-faceted: it carries within it layers of meaning that it has accumulated over time. It follows the same argument as Appadurai's influential theory on 'The Social Life of Things' (Appadurai 1988), in which he explains how objects have a social biography: their meaning goes beyond the physical materiality and the meaning it was given upon creation. Instead, value and meaning can change over time, depending on its context, thus adding layers of meaning to an object. This is particularly true for most museum collections, which often have long histories, and which objects tell stories that include who has owned them and how they have been used since their creation (e.g. Françaço 2014), as well as objects that have a different meaning for different people (e.g. Manders 2010). This is what Molyneaux calls the paradox of the ageless object: the materiality remains the same, but its meaning is

constantly transformed by the surrounding society (Molyneaux 2003). It is this intangibility that Foucault refers to as the concept of a thing, and it is equally applicable to whole heritage sites, not just objects. In this way, all heritage has an intangible aspect that shapes its value and has become as intrinsic to the object as its physical manifestation. It is through this intangible value that heritage can link people to space, creating 'social networks and relations that themselves bind, generating a sense of belonging and identity' (Smith 2011, 23-24).

2.3.2. Audiences as active agents

In emphasizing the intangibility of heritage, the role of the visitor becomes more significant. The last couple of decades have already seen a movement away from seeing the visitor as a passive recipient and towards considering them as an active agent (e.g. Crooke 2008; Shanks 2012; Smith 2015b). Falk and Dierking show the influence of the agency of the visitor on how they perceive an exhibition in a large visitor study, in which they demonstrate that the way visitors learn at an exhibition is dependent on their motivation of coming to, and the role they adopt when in the museum (Falk and Dierking 2000). This study, focused on science and natural history museums, aims to understand how visitors learn, and emphasizes the experiential side of learning, in which a museum visit is considered an experience. It shows that the process that the visitor goes through in a museum, and what they learn from it and remember later, is determined by a large variety of factors, such as the identity the visitor assumes, his or her motivations and expectations of the visit, and his or her personal, social and physical context when coming to the museum.

Learning and education have long been regarded as one of the, if not the most important process that happens within museums, as well as one of their main goals (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill 2006). Although this is unquestionably a very important aspect of museums, it has also been argued that this role needs to be expanded on in order to enable museums to take on a wider role in society, engaging more with for example diversity and communities (e.g. Ashworth *et al.* 2007; Cohen 1985; Crooke 2008). Particularly when considering a wider range of museums and heritage sites, including ethnographic, historical or cultural museums, learning as a main framework when studying museum visitors is insufficient in trying to understand the social, cultural or political impact of heritage sites, the link between the past and the present, as well as its

impact on identity (Smith 2015b). For this, it is necessary to recognize other factors playing a role in heritage visits, such as feeling and emotion (e.g. Poria *et al.* 2003), and the impact of heritage as an embodied experience (e.g. Crouch 2002).

In this way of understanding the role of the visitor, heritage has also been called a performance (Healy 2008; Shanks 2012; Smith 2015b; 2011). That is to say, it involves an active process of cultural engagement, a set of cultural practices that uses the past to construct meaning in the present, rather than just a site or object that needs preserving. Given that heritage is not about a fixed moment in the past, but also includes duration from then to the present, it invites 'not just commentary but action, making new pasts-in-presents' (Shanks 2012, 68). As seen above with Foucault, meaning within heritage is created through the interpretations that are being made, and visitors play an active role in this process. A large visitor study by Laurajane Smith (2015b), during the bicentenary celebrating 200 years of abolition in the UK, demonstrates how museum visits can be about reinforcing identities of gender, class, race, or nation, showing how visitors use the history told in the exhibitions to create their own meaning in the present. The museum visits involved a "subjective political negotiation of identity, place and memory" (Smith 2015b, 460). The interpretations made within a museum visit are thus determined by the context of the people, communities and institutions, and in this way heritage and its meaning is continually reassessed, remembered or forgotten based on social, cultural and political contexts. Heritage as a performance is thus understood as a process consisting of a range of activities, making heritage "an embodied set of practices or performances" that involves a constant renegotiation and reinterpretation of social and cultural meaning (Smith, 2015b: 459 – 460).

When heritage thus goes further than the AHD, and actively engages with audiences through its intangible layers, there is an affective connection that is made between the object or site and the visitor. Therefore, in order to understand the complex process happening during visits, it is important to look beyond learning as the only goal of museums, and to understand the performative nature of a heritage visit. The meaning that is created through a heritage visit is not necessarily learned, in the conventional sense of the word, but also created or reinforced. In this way, heritage, rather than being about the past, is a resource that is always interpreted according to the present

(Graham 2002). Understanding heritage as a performance emphasizes the active process of heritage-making that it involves.

2.4. Collective memory and cultural aphasia

2.4.1. Collective memory

In order to apply these processes to a visitor study on the perception of difficult pasts, and to understand how the colonial past is dealt with by visitors in museums, it is necessary to first understand this past within a wider societal context. As objects and heritage sites are physical witnesses of the past, and just as they have a social biography, the same can be said for the past itself: “There are then two pasts: the temporal one that passes and is gone and the metaphorical 'past' that is memories and traditions of a society and its surroundings” (Molyneaux 2003, 2). Such a past, as a cumulation of events, traditions and ideas, is often referred to as the collective memory of a society (e.g. Bijl 2012; Stoler 2011; Van Vree 2013; Waterton 2011).

This term was introduced by Halbwach in his 1925 essay *Collective Memory*, in which he links memory to time, space and symbolism. He argues that memory is a social construct, since it is the relations within a group that enable institutions and traditions to create the physical space that allows memory to be reproduced (Halbwachs 1992). Furthermore, it is also the relation within a group that allows memory to be transmitted and reproduced (Buciek and Juul 2008). Memory therefore exists as a narrative that is embedded within a physical and social space, consisting of for example artefacts, memorials, traditions and institutions. Collective memory, then, is an active social process that involves a reconstruction and reproduction of the past, rather than being a fixed account of past events, and heritage is the social frame in which this process takes place (Waterton 2011). As such a social process that relies on relationality, it is able to create an affective link to the past, making memory different from history through “an embodied living connection” (Hirsch 2008: 111). This process necessarily involves a selection of what is included and therefore remembered, and equally what is excluded and therefore forgotten (Buciek and Juul 2008).

2.4.2. Collective forgetting

In memory studies, this social forgetting is often referred to as social amnesia and can occur in a variety of ways and for many different reasons. Two of the most dominant explanations are the paradigm of hegemonic memory and the paradigm of traumatic memory (Van Vree 2013, 1). The paradigm of hegemonic memory is also sometimes referred to as the intentionalist perspective (Bijl 2012, 441). It puts memory construction fully within the political sphere, and refers to memory being actively created or repressed by a dominant power. An excellent, though fictional, example of this practice is the 'Ministry of Truth' in George Orwell's 1984, in which the past is constantly actively changed for political purposes, illustrated in the famous line: "who controls the past (...) controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell 1949, 88). Memory and the past are thus made into an active ideological tool. The paradigm of traumatic memory refers to the forgetting of traumatic memories, both by the victim who is disabled to speak about it through the trauma, and by the perpetrator who fails to acknowledge any such events ever occurring (Assmann 2013, 14). These paradigms both work under the assumption that as long as a more complete narrative of history is told, a group that has collectively forgotten will 'unforget'. There are however problems with this, because although these two paradigms can be true in certain cases, there are many other factors that can cause social forgetting. It is a dynamic and complex process that requires a move away from the binary thinking of remembering or forgetting in order to fully understand (Bijl 2012). Furthermore, the notion that people will 'unforget' when they are told a certain story has proven to be problematic. Bijl (2012) notices this, when discussing surprise amongst researchers about the lack of reaction on their, sometimes controversial, histories they were telling: "The expectation of the critics was that people have to see things in order to believe them, but people also need to believe things in order to see them" (Bijl 2012, 447). Another good example of this is the above-mentioned study by Smith in which they found that visitors overwhelmingly reinforced their preconceived ideas, rather than change their point of view, after seeing the exhibitions on slavery (Smith 2015b).

Forgetting and memory making as social processes are therefore more complex, and there is a need for a more layered approach. For this, it is useful to look at Halbwachs theory of the 'social frames of memory' (Halbwachs 1992). These social frames are cognitive structures consisting of a collection of narratives, values and representations

through which meaning-making occurs and which define our perception of reality, by filtering and organizing information and experiences (Van Vree 2013, 7; see also Goffman 1974). A memory or event, in order to be meaningful, requires a social and discursive space in which it is placed and through which it is understood. When, then, there is a lack of such a social frame, or when a memory is not compatible with the existing one, it remains, using a term of Van Vree (2013, 7-8), an 'absent memory'; it lacks meaning, even though the event itself is not necessarily forgotten. This is what Bijl calls the 'memorability' of the past; not to what degree is a past remembered, but to what degree it is easy to be remembered. The issue is not "*if* there is memory, but *how* there is memory" (Bijl 2012, 444, emphasis in original). Using such an approach, a gradation is created within the memorability of the past, understanding collective memory as functioning within a social framework, rather than as a dichotomy of forgetting or remembering.

When, then, there is an absence of a meaningful social frame, there is an issue of producing a memorable past. In order to understand this, Ann Laura Stoler (2011) proposes the term aphasia, rather than amnesia. Using aphasia emphasizes that the issue is not ignorance or a willful denial of a past, but rather a difficulty in making connections that create meaning and understanding of the conceptual aspect of words, or memories in this case: "At issue is the irretrievability of a vocabulary, a limited access to it, a simultaneous presence of a thing and its absence, a presence and the misrecognition of it" (Stoler 2011, 145). The problem is not the lack of memory, but the lack of a meaningful social and cultural framework in which memory operates. Such aphasia disables a community or society in dealing with a past, not due to an absence of the knowledge or of a willful ignoring of the past, but due to a lack of language and frame that would enable a group to handle their past.

2.4.3. Colonial aphasia

Stoler introduces the concept of cultural aphasia in order to understand the role of the colonial past in France, and calls the situation one of colonial aphasia (Stoler 2011). The same notion can be used when discussing or trying to understand the colonial memory in the Netherlands, as well as other countries such as the UK. Bijl (2012), expanding on Stoler, notices the same paradox as described above, namely that the event of colonialism itself is not forgotten, but it lacks a sense of meaning: "In a kind of Orwellian

doublethink, these Dutch (...) seem to be able to hold two contradictory beliefs in their mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them; that is to say that they know and do not know about their country's colonial past" (Bijl 2012, 442). There is a certain compartmentalization of history, in which the history of the Dutch (and English) empire is treated separately from the national history (Bijl 2012; Edwards 2016). As such, the violence of colonialism is not treated as part of the rest of the national history that took place in the metropole, but instead it is treated as temporally and spatially 'elsewhere' (Edwards 2016, 56 – 57). The temporal elsewhere is to see the colonial history as something only from the past, without any relevance to today. The spatial elsewhere is two-fold: firstly it is regarding the colonial history as happening somewhere else in the world; secondly, it is that the acknowledgement of colonial history happens in an 'other space', as discussed above, and thus remains outside of the normal public sphere (Foucault 1984; Lord 2006a). The elsewhere is thus a conceptual safe space in which something, in this case colonial violence, can be safely acknowledged but simultaneously regarded as something from long ago and far away. In this way, disturbing narratives can safely be told in museums: "Oppositional discourses are still boxed off (...) and confined to places where they can be acknowledged (...) but not cause us to rethink the building blocks and foundations of the rest of our knowledge" (Naidoo 2005, 39). Thus a confrontation with the dominant discourse is avoided, because the narrative told can be seen as separate from a more "utopian and celebratory narration of a nation" (Edwards 2016, 16).

An example of this distancing and dissociation can be seen during the bicentenary events in the UK, celebrating 200 years abolition of slavery. One of the big critiques to many events and exhibitions was the reinforcement of the 'abolitionist myth' (Cubitt *et al.* 2011; Kowaleski Wallace 2006; Wood 2000). The abolitionist myth views the history of slavery 'backwards' (Cubitt *et al.* 2011, 3): it focuses largely on the abolitionist movement as it happened in the UK. In doing this, it distracts away from the role Britain played in the slave trade in the first place, and on the economic impact of the profits of slave trade for Britain. Furthermore, it reduces the role and agency of the enslaved Africans and their resistance, and instead focuses on the heroism of a small group, consisting mainly of white, British men (*ibid.*). Museums struggled in displaying both these positions, trying to appeal simultaneously to their largest audience on the one hand, consisting of predominantly white, middle-class museum-going audience for

whom this myth was persistent, and on the other hand aiming to be more inclusive, telling a more complex story and trying to appeal to African- and African-Caribbean British audiences, which some managed better than others (Cubitt *et al.*, 2011).

Museums, then, are increasingly politicized, showing a move away from the notion of a museum as a strictly neutral place. An example in the Netherlands recently was the Mauritshuis deciding to make some changes in part of its exhibitions, and moving a copy of a statue of Maurits away from the entrance hall into one of the exhibitions, thus aiming to tell a more nuanced story of the life of Maurits. This resulted in a large mediastorm and even the prime-minister tweeting some strong comments (Schoonderwoerd, 2018; NOS 2018). The museum had clearly gained a political dimension through its actions, and museums are increasingly taking these kind of stand points. The museum has recently (April 2019) opened the exhibition *Shifting Images*, discussing specifically the image of Johan Maurits from different perspectives, in order to engage with this debate and place it in a wider context.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary, using Foucault's theory of the museum as heterotopia helps in understanding the processes at play within a museum, as well as the potential of the role of museums within a society. As an 'other space', it has a special potential of using its collections to challenge known discourses by reinterpreting the concepts attached to objects. They can thus perform a discursive self-critique, and invite visitors to do the same. Within such a process, visitors become active agents, and the way they make these interpretations are dependent upon their social and cultural context, as well as their motivation. Heritage can thus be understood as a performance, which emphasizes the active role of the visitor.

This understanding of the process of a visit to a museum or heritage site is relevant when aiming to understand the way difficult pasts are treated within museums. As shown, difficult pasts, and here particularly the colonial past, are often partially forgotten within collective memory. If, then, heritage sites and museums want to make a difference in a state of aphasia, they have to do more than merely tell the story,

assuming that the visitor will listen and forget. Instead, understanding that visitors are active participants within heritage-making should lead to a dialogue that challenges the meaning made by visitors.

The issue then seems to be that museums as an 'other place' simultaneously have the power to challenge a discursive self-critique and to be a conceptual safe space to deal with difficult issues without being confronted by it. This is a large challenge for museums, one in which their own self-critique could play a large role in how they treat interpretations and narratives, and how much they challenge their visitors. In order to understand this impact on visitors, or to understand how visitors perceive exhibitions, it is necessary to regard them as active agents. It follows then as well that visitors understand heritage differently, and the same heritage can have different meanings. In order to understand how a difficult past is received by different groups of people, this study looks at how exhibitions on the colonial past are perceived by its audiences.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In order to study the way an exhibition on slavery can be perceived by the public, this study takes an in-depth look at the *Afterlives of Slavery* exhibition in the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam. The data set consists of three separate groups of data:

- comments written by visitors in the comment section of the exhibition;
- a range of reviews of the exhibition in newspapers and online;
- interviews with the creators of the exhibition.

The visitor comments are short and a way to understand the visitors immediate reaction to the exhibition, *during* their visit. The reviews generally are written by people with more expertise in the subject, and who have written a longer commentary on the exhibition *after* visiting it. The interviews are mainly aimed at understanding what the museum and the curators wanted to achieve through the exhibition, in order to be able to see the extent to which those aims have been reached.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1. Data set

3.2.1.1 Visitor comments

The visitor comments are comments written on small pieces of paper within the exhibition to a fixed set of open answer questions related to the exhibition displays (see section 4.1.2 for more detail on the questions). This comment section is part of the exhibition and the questions have been created by the curators. The comments that are used in this study have been collected during the period of October 2017 (the opening of the exhibition) to September 2018, and digitised by the museum¹. Only comments written in a latin script were recorded, if they were written in a different script (such as Arabic or Chinese), a mention was made of them in the digital files, but the contents could not be recorded. Furthermore, in this study only the comments written in the languages I could read confidently have been included. This was in order to ensure that the meaning of the comment was well understood, and no mistranslations would be

¹ Particularly by Robin Lelijveld, a very special thanks to her for this momentous task.

made. The comments used were most frequently in Dutch and English, but also include comments in French or German. Languages I could not read confidently enough, and were therefore excluded in this study, include Spanish, Italian, Danish, Swedish, and languages I could not identify. This has resulted in 96% of the total number of comments being usable in this study, a total of 3256 comments.

3.2.1.2 Exhibition reviews

The reviews have been collected online, and are all the ones that I could find. A total of 21 reviews are used, and they are written in Dutch and English. Only very limited reviews in English could be found, and none in other languages. The reviews have been subdivided into two categories: those not using text from the press release, and those that do. Of those that do use text from the press release, only those have been included that either made significant selections of the press release text or added own text to the press release. In this way, the selections and added emphasis are considered as a commentary on the exhibition and are therefore still worth including. They are shown as separate, because they include less original text and commentary on the exhibition than the other reviews.

3.2.1.3 Interviews

The interviews are conducted with Martin Berger and Robin Lelijveld, two of the curators of the core curatorial team who created the exhibition. Richard Kofi, who was the third member of that team, was unavailable for interviews. Wayne Modest, head of the Research Centre for Material Cultures (RCMC, the research centre connected to the Museum of World Cultures), was contacted but as he was not directly involved in the creation of the exhibition, he was not interviewed. The interviews are semi-structured consisting of open answer questions. They were conducted in Dutch, and they are transcribed in appendix 1 (Berger) and 2 (Lelijveld). They are kept in the original language for accuracy, and any direct quotations in the text have been translated by the author.

3.2.2 Text analysis approach

In order to analyse the texts from the comments and reviews, theme coding was applied based on a grounded theory research approach. Grounded theory is a systematic technique for finding patterns in a corpus of text. It is a method of inductive, or open

coding, in which the themes used for coding emerge from analysis of the data: it is 'grounded' in the data (Russell Bernard 2011). The data is first read and frequently recurring terms, subjects or themes are highlighted and written down. Based on these, themes are created and the text is then coded based on those. This results in a list of theme coded responses and corresponding frequencies as to how often they occur within the comments. These are expressed in a percent of responses and percent of cases: the total percent of responses is 100%, whereas the total number of cases can lie higher than 100%. This is because one comment (one case) can include multiple of the theme-coded responses.

This approach was chosen because it is very suited to research what the main themes are that the comments talk about without making prior assumptions. The coding is already an important part of the analysis and the theme-coded responses that emerge are already a significant part of the interpretive analysis of the data. For this reason, and to illustrate the wide range of comments, the tables presenting the data in the next chapters include not just the top four or five themes, but often more than ten themes.

3.3 Critical note on methods and data

3.3.1. Interpretation of visitor comments

Visitor comments, whether on little notes as is the case in this study, or in visitor books, are often not included in visitor research studies. Nevertheless, they are a rich resource for information on visitors. One of the main advantages of using visitor comments, instead of other frequently used audience research methods, is that a larger number of visitors can be accessed more easily than typically the case in audience research through for example interviews (MacDonald 2005). Contrary to most audience research methods (such as interviews or questionnaires), when dealing with visitor comments or visitor books, those involved in the study are unaware that they are being researched (see below for a discussion on the ethics involved). The comments are even produced independently of any studies. The advantage of this is that the visitor is less influenced by the researcher to say what they think ought to be said or what the researcher wants to hear, and the researcher has less influence on steering questions and answers. Nevertheless, the visitor often does have an imagined reader of the comments in mind,

whether that is the museum or other visitors (Macdonald 2005; Reid 2000). Reid (2000) therefore argues that comments should be seen as a performance, and it is futile to regard them as honest expressions of opinion. There is a certain preservation of role-performance at play (Reid 2000). Though this is a valid point, and one that needs to be kept in mind, her argument was regarding comments in the former Soviet Union, where a strict surveillance culture was present. Rather than dismissing the whole resource, then, it is more important to keep the cultural context in mind.

3.3.2. Limitations on data

One of the major limitations of using methods like visitor studies, and one that seems paradoxical, is that the public perception studied is limited to those that visited the exhibition. This is true for both the visitor comments and the reviews, which are written by people who supposedly also visited the exhibition. This selection bias is an inherent problem for visitor studies, and more extensive research on groups who did not visit the exhibition lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, what needs to be kept in mind is that the museum is in Amsterdam, and therefore attracts a different demographic of visitors than museums that lie outside a major city. Though not necessarily a problem here, it is worth keeping in mind. Lastly, there are little to none comparable exhibitions in the Netherlands at the moment. Although this is changing (for example, the Rijksmuseum is opening an exhibition on slavery in 2020; the Mauritshuis recently opened an exhibition discussing the different images of the colonial role of Johan Maurits (as mentioned in 2.4.3); and there are plans to open a slavery museum in Amsterdam), at the moment it is not possible to make a decent comparison in this study. An in-depth case study of this exhibition was therefore chosen.

3.5. Ethics and data protection

The comment section is situated right at the centre of the exhibition and is a clear part of the visitor experience as well as the displays. Nonetheless, it is a choice of the visitor to write down a comment or not, and therefore, the comments are made with the knowledge that others (the museum as well as other visitors) are able to read them. Many visitors are reading the other comments, and some are even commenting directly on previously made comments. What is more, the museum says in the exhibition text

that it will look at the comments and take them into account for the planned larger exhibition on the colonial past of the Netherlands. Nevertheless, in order to ensure the anonymity of all informants, numbers have been assigned to each comment, and those, rather than the names, are used here when quoting comments.

Many visitors have added their age to the comments, and these have been kept when using quotes from visitor comments. This was chosen because the age had been given voluntarily. Considering the age adds a significant detail to the data, and the assigned number was deemed sufficient to ensure anonymity.

Some have argued that it is unethical to have a research method in which those involved are unaware of being researched (see for example Mason 2002). However, this generally applies to methods such as observational techniques. Again, there is text in the exhibition that says the museum will look at the comments, and visitors are aware that others are able to read the comments they put on display.

4. Data from *Afterlives of Slavery*

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Introduction to the exhibition

Afterlives of Slavery is an exhibition at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. This museum is one of the four museums that together make up the National Museums of World Cultures in the Netherlands (the others are the Volkenkunde Museum² in Leiden, the Wereldmuseum³ in Rotterdam and the Afrika Museum⁴ in Berg en Dal). The exhibition focuses on the legacy of slavery and its impact on society today, centred particularly around the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and its relation to the Netherlands. The exhibition itself is semi-permanent, and will remain on display until the museum opens a larger exhibition on the colonial history of the Netherlands, planned to open in 2021. *Afterlives of Slavery* consists of three rooms. Visitors can enter via either of the three; one starts with the creation of the exhibition, one with the discussion section, and one with Ketikoti (the 1st of July, the day where abolition is remembered and celebrated, see section 4.2.3) and the impact of slavery today. The two rooms left and right both have a spoken-word performance video by Dorothy Blokland and Onias Landveld talking about slavery and the way it impacts them (figure 4.1). During their performance they walk around the Tropenmuseum's main hall; symbolic of the way the museum first was built as an advertisement for colonialism, and now tries to actively change the perception of that period. The room in the middle has the comment section, and four video portraits of key figures in the contemporary debate on the history of slavery: Gloria Wekker, Karwan Fatah-Black, Amade M'charek and Marian Markelo. A limited number of objects from the museum's own collection are displayed, such as a receipt for a 6-year old girl, tools to measure people's heads and a branding tool, alongside many written or spoken stories on several themes. The curatorial team of the exhibition includes Martin Berger, Richard Kofi and Robin Lelijveld. A consultation group aimed at the creative process of deciding what the main themes of the exhibition would be consisted of a mix of intellectuals, activists, artists, rappers and designers, among who Aspha Bijnaar, Mitchell

² Ethnological Museum

³ World Museum

⁴ Africa Museum

Esajas and Karwan Fatah-Black. Another advisory group consisting of Hodan Warsame, Simone Zeefuik and Phoenix, read most of the drafts of text for the exhibition. The exhibition was designed by Devrijervandongen.



Figure 4:1 Spoken word performance by Dorothy Blokland, with many Keti Koti flags hanging from the ceiling. Photo made by author.

4.1.2 Aims of the exhibition

One of the main aims of the exhibition, as expressed already in the title, is to show the current day impact of this history by creating a space that encourages a dialogue on this contested topic (Tropenmuseum 2017). This is done by giving the centre stage of the exhibition to the personal stories of the enslaved and their descendants. By doing this, the exhibition aims to not tell the story as merely an historical event, nor from the point of view of the successful ‘Golden Age’ of the Netherlands, as it is often told (Berger 2017). Rather, it wants to illustrate the impact of slavery (and by extension colonialism) on the people it affected, show the way enslaved people tried to maintain their dignity under the inhumane and oppressive circumstances, and provoke questions about the shared history of slavery and its effects on current-day societies. As the museum states in the press release for the exhibition:

“For many Dutch people, the link between the country’s historic involvement in slavery and present-day society is unclear. But for large groups in our society the legacies of slavery can still be felt today. For Dutch black people, the links between slavery and inequality, racism and discrimination are painfully obvious. White Dutch people may not have the same daily experience, but this common history is just as much about them.” (Tropenmuseum 2017)

For this reason they wanted to create an exhibition that would be accessible to both people who are already familiar with this history, as well as those that know less about it: “That both [these groups] could visit the exhibition and recognize something in it, specifically recognize something about the way this history shapes their own lives, and the world in which they live.” (Berger, appendix 1). This idea that it should not be an historic narrative, but that it should be linked to today, was much embedded within the curators: “That is why it is called *Afterlives of Slavery*, because we wanted to use our historical collections to show contemporary problems” (Berger, appendix 1). Simultaneously, they did not want to merely point out these links between the past and the present, but wanted to emphasise the personal link for people, and wanted to actively make people think about what it means for them:

“Very often in debates in the Netherlands arguments are used like ‘it is not *our* history, it is *your* history, it is from there, and not from here’. There are so many people who are just not conscious of the way this history lives on, and the way that that has an impact on this system in which they operate. So I think that that was the biggest goal.” (Lelijveld, appendix 2)



Figure 4.2 Talk to us display. Photo made by author.

One of the ways they wanted to achieve this was by inviting visitors to a dialogue with the museum (see also figure 4.2): “Because it needed to be an activating exhibition, the voice of the visitor is very important. We wanted to start a conversation with people, and wanted for the exhibition to be a platform for discussion and dialogue” (Lelijveld, appendix 2). Berger expanded on the same subject explaining that precisely because it is quite an emotional subject, it is good that there is a place in which people can comment or critique (Berger, appendix 1). Both curators thus emphasised that showing the relevance of this history today was one of the most important aims of the exhibition, and they wanted to encourage an active reflection on this personal and societal link in the visitor by inviting them to a dialogue.

4.1.3 The collaborative creation process

The curators started the process of creating this exhibition with a conscious notion that this history was not just their story to tell, it was the shared story of many different people. Everyone involved in the exhibition realised that a museum is never neutral, and therefore they did not want to be the authoritative voice in this story (Lelijveld, appendix 2). This resulted in the inclusion of many different people, such as academics, artists, activists, and independent museum professionals in the creation process (Berger 2017). Berger exemplifies the benefits of this approach with a small example:

“We have a small piece about Maroons, these are people who fled the plantations, so escaped enslaved people who created their own communities in the jungles. One of the famous persons within that context is Conny, one of the leaders of the Maroons, and what we discuss is the conquering of Fort Buku⁵. First, I had written that Fort Buku was difficult to conquer, but in the end the Dutch succeeded, upon which one of the activists says that if you truly want to show a different perspective you should not say ‘Fort Buku was difficult to conquer’, but rather ‘the fort was strongly defended and only lost when x and y’. And those are very small things in which you really notice the difference in perspective: do you write from the point of view of the Dutch colonial government, or from the point of view of the people resisting that violence?” (Berger 2017)⁶

⁵ Fort Buku is a European built fort where the Maroon community resided for several years.

⁶ The final text in the display is ‘When the German colonists sold Fort Fredericksburg to the Dutch West India Company (WIC), Conny occupied the fort and held it for seven years.’

Lelijveld has similar stories, and notices similar values in such a collaborative approach. It provokes a self-reflection on how embedded this gaze is, even within the curatorial team who was already very conscious of the history and the structures presented (Lelijveld, appendix 2). Both of them agree that this process has shaped and influenced the exhibition in a positive way.

4.2 Data results comment section

4.2.1 Introduction to the comments section

The displays within the exhibition are divided into five main themes that each pose a specific question to the visitor.

The first of these is: 'Is Ketikoti relevant to all Dutch people?'. Ketikoti is a large annual festival that celebrates the abolition of slavery on 1 July. It originated in Suriname, and literally means 'the chains are broken'. It is now widely celebrated within particularly the larger cities of the Netherlands, with lots of music, dance, and food. Nevertheless, many Dutch people are not aware of the festival at all. The display deals with questions of 'dealing with the past' and 'shared histories'.

The second display is: 'What makes you a human being?' Within this display, the artificial creation of race as a power structure is discussed by showing how disciplines such as physical anthropology attempted to justify the slave trade by claiming the inequality of the races, and particularly the white race as superior.

The third one is: 'What do you refuse to accept?' showing the way certain modern-day stereotypes were established through the limited job opportunities given to people arriving in the Netherlands from Suriname and the Antilles, and showing modern forms of resistance against for example racism and ethnic profiling.

The fourth one is: 'What is the price of freedom?' and talks about ways enslaved people could buy themselves or others free, about the different ways enslaved people resisted, revolted, and created Maroon communities, as well as about physical and intellectual resistance over time.

The fifth one is: 'What gives you strength?' This display shows the different ways people on the plantations moulded their own lives through music, stories, and art and created their own culture, language, religion and traditions.

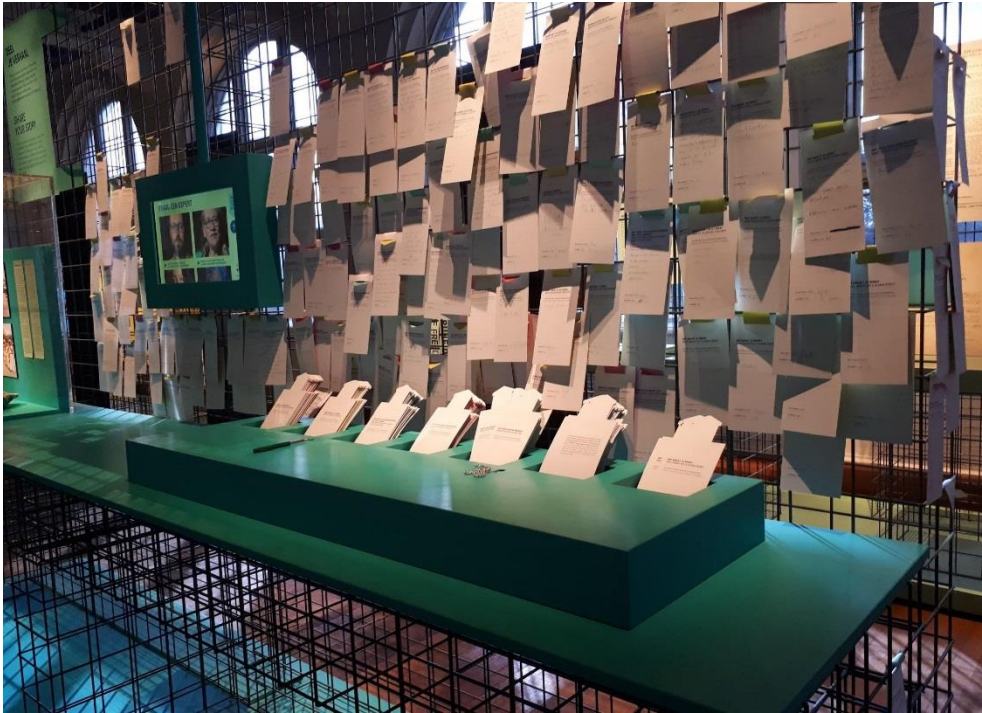


Figure 4.3: Comment section display. Photo made by author.

There is a large display at the centre of the exhibition dedicated to visitor comments. The questions asked within the displays, as described above, are printed on little pieces of paper, and two more are added, namely: ‘What does the history of slavery have to do with you?’ and ‘What are you missing in the exhibition?’ Visitors can write answers or comments on these pieces of paper and hang them up on the display (figure 4.3).

The dialogue that is the aim of the exhibition is therefore constantly encouraged; by asking the questions within the displays, encouraging people to actively think about them, and by asking them directly for their comments and opinions. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the analysis of these comments made on the notes.

4.2.2 Demographics

4.2.2.1. Age

On the pieces of paper, people could leave their comments, as well as their name and age. This means the only (limited) demographic information on the visitor group is age. What needs to be kept in mind is that this is the age of visitors who wrote their age on a comment, not the age of the overall visitor group to the exhibition, as not everyone wrote down their age on the comment, and not every visitor wrote a comment.

What is immediately evident from table 4.1 is that by far the largest age group is those aged 19-34. This means that either the exhibition attracted many young people, or that the younger people were more likely to write down their comments. No numbers of the national average of museum visits of this group are available, however of this group, only 8% has a Museumkaart⁷ (Museumvereniging 2017, 18). Although it is not fully representative of the museum visits of that group, it gives an indication. Also those under 18 are well represented: 33% of the total comments. This is higher than the national average, where 1 in 5 visitors are under 18 (Museumvereniging 2017, 3-4). Although many within this group would have come on school trips or family trips, and are likely to have been encouraged to write something down, their comments are mostly serious. It is fair to say therefore that both of these age groups show a high level of engagement.

Table 4.1: Number of respondents per age categories

Age categories of total number of respondents		
Age Category	Frequency	Percent
0-11	557	17,1
12-18	530	16,3
19-34	910	27,9
35-59	519	15,9
60+	226	6,9
Total	2742	84,2
No age given	514	15,8
Total	3256	100

⁷ Museum card: this is a card that costs € 64,90 per year and gives free access to over 400 museums (Museumkaart, 2019) and which accounts for 28% of total museum visits (Museumvereniging, 2017: 18)

Table 4.2: Factors of percentages of age categories divided per question.⁸

Relative distribution of age categories						
	0-11	12-18	19-34	35-59	60+	No age given
What are you missing in the exhibition?	0.65	0.50	0.70	1.58	1.97	1.43
What makes you a human being?	1.15	1.23	0.91	0.82	0.67	1.08
What does the history of slavery have to do with you?	0.63	0.79	1.26	1.15	1.65	0.73
Is Ketikoti relevant for all Dutch people?	0.91	0.74	0.95	1.29	1.42	0.98
What do you refuse to accept?	1.04	1.15	0.98	1.06	0.81	0.86
What gives you strength?	1.29	0.82	1.06	0.92	0.61	1.01
What is the price of freedom?	0.96	1.23	1.04	0.71	0.90	1.08

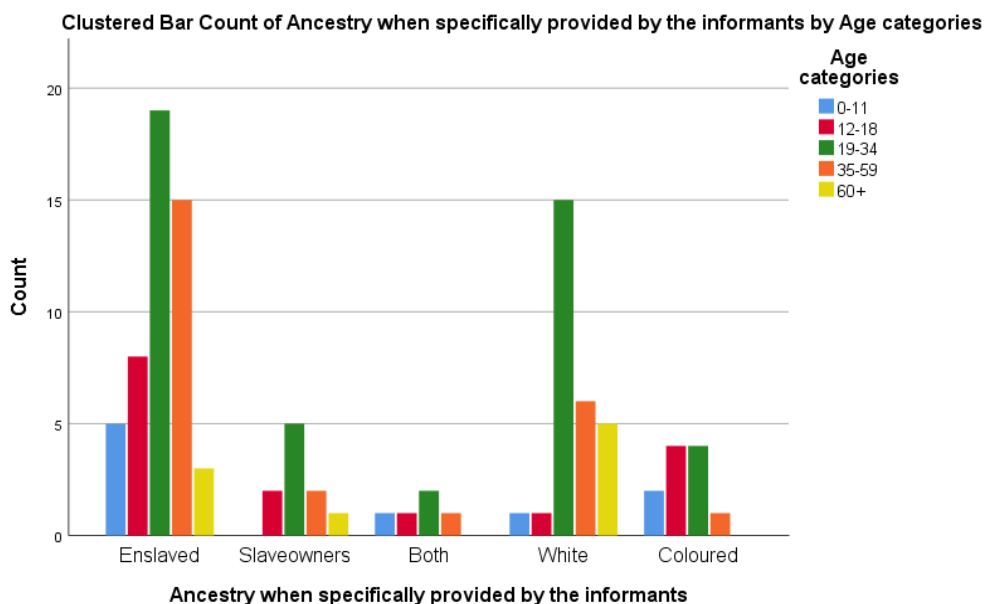
Table 4.2 shows the relative distribution of age categories across the questions. A couple of things become noteworthy when viewing these. It shows that visitors over 35 relatively more often answered the question about what was missing in the exhibition, and those under 35 relatively less often. Next to that, those over 60 had a clear preference for the questions about the history of slavery and Ketikoti over ‘what makes you human’ and ‘what gives you strength’. A similar trend, albeit less obvious, can be seen with the 35-59’s. This means that they both had more critique on the exhibition, and engaged with the personal impact of the history.

⁸ This is calculated by dividing the percentage of the number of respondents of an age group in a question to the percentage of the respondents of an age group of the total number of respondents. The closer a factor is to 1, the closer the percentage of respondents to that question is to the overall percentage of respondents in that age category, and therefore the closer to the expected distribution.

The age group 19-34 only had a slight preference for the question about what does slavery have to do with you, and a lesser interest in what was missing in the exhibition, but the distribution across the other questions is fairly equal. This shows that they had less critique on the exhibition, and had a stronger connection with the personal link to the history of slavery. Relative to the older age groups, even less criticism and personal link with the history is prevalent in the under 18's. They had slight preferences for the questions about personal identity, such as what makes you a human being. These results show that age does play a role in the way the exhibition is approached and perceived.

4.2.2.2. Ancestry

Particularly as answer to the question 'what does slavery have to do with you', people frequently voluntarily provided their ancestry. Since this was 26.6% of the respondents to that question, a total of 112 respondents, it cannot be assumed that this reflects the full visitors group. Nevertheless, it provides an interesting impression of the background of the visitors, and what people knew about their own ancestry (see graph 4.1).



Graph 4.1: Clustered bar of ancestry of respondents

As can be seen from the above graph, the age group that by far the most frequently voluntarily provided their ancestry are the 19-34 year olds, not only when their ancestors were enslaved, but specifically also when white. A mention of being descendent of enslaved either was just that, so comments such as "I have an English surname, because my ancestors were slaves and their slave owners gave their surname

to my ancestors (because property)” (#SLA098, age 22), or had a mention of what kind of impact it had on them today: “As a black woman I still suffer from it in Brazil, here, everywhere” (#SLA118, age 26). The comments on whiteness were mainly along the lines of “As a white person I still profit from it” (#SLA117, age 19). It is also interesting to see that so many people knew of their ancestry, and emphasised their ancestors being enslaved more than themselves being coloured.

4.2.2.3. Language

Table 4.3 shows the number of respondents per language that the comment was written in, and table 4.4 shows the relative distribution of language per question. In comparison: museums in the Netherlands in 2016 had an average of 28% of foreign visitors (EGMUS 2016). However, ethnographic museums had only 4% of foreign visitors in 2017 (Museumvereniging 2017, 13), although foreign visitor numbers in Amsterdam can be assumed to be higher than the national average (Ibid., 14). Despite the fact that the language does not correspond perse to nationality, it does give an indication of foreign visitors, and shows that the Tropenmuseum is more along the lines of the national average, despite being an ethnographic museum. A possible explanation would be that this is due to its location in Amsterdam.

Table 4.3: Number of respondents per language

Language of total number of respondents		
Language	Frequency	Percent
Dutch	2335	71,7
English	818	25,1
French	93	2,9
German	10	0,3
Total	3256	100

Table 4.4: Factors of percentages of language divided per question.⁹

Relative distribution of language				
	Dutch	English	French	German
What are you missing in the exhibition?	1.10	0.76	0.59	1.33
What makes you a human being?	0.95	1.13	1.10	0.67
What does the history of slavery have to do with you?	0.98	1.39	0.59	3.33
Is Ketj Koti relevant for all Dutch people?	1.21	0.44	0.93	0
What do you refuse to accept?	0.99	1.03	1.00	1.00
What gives you strength?	1.09	0.78	0.72	0
What is the price of freedom?	0.85	1.35	1.62	1.33

The first thing important to keep in mind in table 4.4 is that the total number of German comments was only ten. Those percentages are therefore very small, and the factors not fully reliable. What is immediately clear from table 4.4 is that the question about Ketj Koti was relatively more frequently answered by Dutch speakers, and very unpopular amongst English speakers. This could have to do with the fact that the question asks specifically about the relevance to Dutch people, so that English speakers could feel less related to that question. The distribution of Dutch comments otherwise is fairly even. Another noteworthy thing is that the French speakers much preferred talking about freedom to talking about their personal relation to slavery or to anything missing in the exhibition. On the contrary, English speakers had a small preference for the personal

⁹ This is calculated by dividing the percentage of the number of respondents in a language in a question to the percentage of the respondents in that language of the total number of respondents. The closer a factor is to 1, the closer the percentage of respondents to that question is to the overall percentage of respondents in that language category, and therefore the closer to the expected distribution.

connection to slavery, as well as freedom, rather than a critique on what they were missing, or the personal question about what gives them strength.

4.2.3 Is Ketu Kotu relevant to all Dutch people?

Table 4.5 shows the theme-coded responses to the question about Ketu Kotu. Here, 76.4% of the respondents said yes, albeit for different reasons (see table 4.3). The notion that it is a shared past is the most prevalent amongst the responses. This idea is also suggested within the texts on this display, for example under the heading 'shared histories' the question is asked: 'How can we ensure that everyone in Dutch society comes to realise that slavery is a part of our shared history - the history of all Dutch people?' The importance of remembering the past is also quite frequent amongst the responses, and, given that Ketu Kotu is about commemoration, this too plays a central role in the texts from this display. The idea that it is still impacting society today was not specifically mentioned within this display, but it was part of the overall exhibition theme. Only about 11.2% answered with a clear no, of which about half of those answered that it was only for descendants of the enslaved. Interestingly, the fact that many Dutch people have this opinion was also mentioned in the exhibition text.

Two interesting comments to highlight here are:

"Yes. Celebrate the end of slavery TOGETHER. But quit the accusing of people who weren't alive back then" (#KET094, age 43)¹⁰.

Below this comment, another visitor put a reaction to his response:

"It is not about accusations, but about awareness that the power relations of back then unfortunately (unconsciously) still exist in everyone. And that is something you can do something about" (#KET095, age 28).¹¹

Such reactions show another level of engagement: with not only the exhibition but also with the other comments. The idea of 'it was a long time ago' will also resurface in subsequent sections.

¹⁰ Translated from Dutch by author.

¹¹ Translated from Dutch by author.

Table 4.5: frequencies in responses to the question 'Is Ketji Koti relevant for all Dutch people?'¹²

'Is Ketji Koti relevant for all Dutch people?'			
Theme-coded responses	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Yes, it is a place for dialogue and connection	13	4,2%	5,0%
Yes, it should be a national holiday, similar to the 4th and 5th of May	17	5,4%	6,5%
Yes, it is a past that belongs to everyone; it is a shared past	50	16,0%	19,1%
Yes, it is important to remember; we carry the history with us; we should be aware of this history	49	15,7%	18,7%
Yes, it is still impacting society today, because racism and discrimination still exist today; as does modern slavery	27	8,6%	10,3%
Yes, for different reasons	83	26,5%	31,7%
No, it is only for descendents; only for people who have a past with slavery	16	5,1%	6,1%
No, for different reasons	13	4,2%	5,0%
Not if you don't want to	6	1,9%	2,3%
Other	39	12,5%	14,9%
Total	313	100,0%	119,5%

¹² Percentage of cases can be higher than the percentage of responses, given that one comment can include multiple responses. The bigger this difference, the more comments had multiple responses.

4.2.4 What makes you a human being?

The main themes in the responses to this question are shown in table 4.6. Here, the biggest theme in the responses, related to feelings and emotion, was not immediately drawn from the texts of the displays. However, the second biggest, related to tolerance and equality is in a way related to the display, since the text talks about the artificial creation of race, as are the physical characteristics in a way, since the display talks about techniques such as skull measuring. However, the physical characteristics mainly mentioned in the comments were not to make distinctions but were things like “If you have a body and a skull and skin and bones’ (#HUM022, age 8)¹³ and “Head, 2 arms, 2 legs, 1 heart, red blood! Just like all other people” (#HUM283, age 55)¹⁴.

Table 4.6: frequencies in responses to the question ‘what makes you a human being’

What makes you a human being?			
	Responses		Percent of Cases
Theme coded responses	N	Percent	
Physical characteristics	59	6,5%	9,0%
Love; feelings; emotion	177	19,4%	27,1%
Family; friends	46	5,0%	7,0%
Freedom	74	8,1%	11,3%
That you can be yourself; be who you want to be	79	8,6%	12,1%
Tolerance; having respect for others; treating people as equals	136	14,9%	20,8%
Interaction or connection with other people	50	5,5%	7,6%

¹³ Translated from Dutch by author.

¹⁴ Translated from Dutch by author.

Empathy; compassion	93	10,2%	14,2%
The ability to think; be critical; make choices	95	10,4%	14,5%
Other	105	11,5%	16,1%
Total	914	100,0%	139,8%

4.2.5 What do you refuse to accept?

Within this question, the main theme that emerges in the answers is regarding inequality, all answers related to those form together 44.1 % of the answers (table 4.7). The text within this display focuses on the way certain stereotypes that still exist today originated in the past, and focuses on different protests against racism and on movements promoting equal treatment. Though racism and discrimination themselves are often mentioned in the responses, this idea of inequality has also been applied to broader, related problems such as sexism, homophobia and transphobia, sense of superiority and white privilege, or general inequality, as these comments illustrate:

“I refuse to accept discrimination and racism, because I think that everyone is equal. Large, small, white, dark, foreigner or not” (#RES542, age 14).¹⁵

“Being reduced to a continent” (#RES329, age 31).

This last comment also shows a personal effect, which is something that can be seen recurring in the comments on the other questions as well.

¹⁵ Translated from Dutch by author.

Table 4.7: frequencies in responses to the question 'What do you refuse to accept?'

What do you refuse to accept?			
Theme coded responses	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Discrimination	67	6,7%	10,6%
Racism	120	12,0%	19,0%
Sexism; inequality between sexes; pay-gap	36	3,6%	5,7%
Inequality without specifying	94	9,4%	14,9%
Prejudices; stereotypes	35	3,5%	5,6%
Ignorance; a non-critical attitude	57	5,7%	9,0%
Slavery, including modern-day slavery; child labour	52	5,2%	8,3%
Homofobia; transfobia; or other phobias against people	14	1,4%	2,2%
Animal abuse; environment causes; pollution	47	4,7%	7,5%
Injustice	61	6,1%	9,7%
People who feel superior; supremacy; white privilege; power imbalance	38	3,8%	6,0%
Intolerance; hate; lack of respect	37	3,7%	5,9%
War; violence; terrorism	94	9,4%	14,9%

Government; current politicians; Donald Trump; capitalism	34	3,4%	5,4%
Bullying; abuse	42	4,2%	6,7%
Other	153	15,3%	24,3%
Comments critical on the content of the exhibition or disagreeing with it	16	1,6%	2,5%
Total	997	100,0%	158,3%

4.2.6 What is the price of freedom?

The texts within this display talk about active physical and intellectual resistance forms, starting with the enslaved people and Maroons and their struggle, and continues with the independence fight of former colonies, through to protests today against discrimination. This idea of an active struggle comes back in many of the comments, where an active rhetoric becomes evident in comments that recognize freedom as taking an effort and urge for something to be done (see table 4.8). Comments mentioning discrimination and modern day slavery are also fairly frequent, and many comments show an emotional layer that is also provoked by the subject:

“Privilege. The blood of the oppressors and the oppressed runs through me; it is my responsibility to recognize my systematic privilege and to call out, educate and prevent neo-colonialism, racist aggressions, and instilled hatred.” (#PRIC070, age 18)

“It's the fight of a life. Nelson Mandela and a lot of determination. It's also Rosa Park who didn't stand up when white people asked her!” (#PRIC027, age 16)

Another recurring theme here is that freedom doesn't or shouldn't have a price. This comment illustrates this together with the will to act:

“Freedom, how it should be: no price, independent of colour or descent. The price of freedom is to keep having a conversation with each other.” (PRIC#041, age 28)¹⁶

¹⁶ Translated from Dutch by author.

Table 4.8: Frequencies in responses to the question: 'what is the price of freedom?'

What is the price of freedom?			
Theme coded responses	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Being who you are	40	6,4%	7,8%
Being able to do what you want; think what you want	67	10,7%	13,0%
It doesn't have a price; it shouldn't have a price	88	14,1%	17,1%
The price is too much; high; everything; blood; life	45	7,2%	8,7%
Respect for others; tolerance; acceptance; equality	83	13,3%	16,1%
It is or should be self-evident	14	2,2%	2,7%
It takes a fight; effort	46	7,3%	8,9%
It is a human right; equal rights	35	5,6%	6,8%
It doesn't exist; many are still not free, including in the western world; eg. modern day slavery; discrimination; white privilege	36	5,8%	7,0%
Other	172	27,5%	33,4%
Total	626	100,0%	121,6%

4.2.7 What gives you strength?

This display focuses mainly on the way enslaved people on the plantations created resilience through art, song, music and stories. Even though they were from many different countries and cultures, this created a solidarity and a way of resisting by creating new cultures. Likewise, the theme of arts and music did come up within many of the comments (see table 4.9). The largest group however is by far ‘friends, family and relationships’. Overall, similar responses can be seen as to the question ‘What makes you a human being?’. The two other big themes emerging in the answers are about respect, tolerance and empathy, and about thinking, knowledge and learning. These two themes are both illustrated within this comment:

“I find strength in the fact that discussion is starting to be possible around this topic and that people are starting to think about it. The more awareness there is, the better this will be for society.” (#STR079, age 20)

Table 4.9: Frequencies in responses to the question: ‘What gives you strength?’

What gives you strength?			
Theme coded responses	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
God; religion; faith	37	4,9%	7,1%
Different types of sports	54	7,2%	10,3%
Family; friends; relationships	178	23,6%	34,1%
Food and drink	25	3,3%	4,8%
Being in nature	40	5,3%	7,7%
Arts; music; dance	49	6,5%	9,4%

Love; feelings	89	11,8%	17,0%
Learning; knowledge; wisdom; thought	58	7,7%	11,1%
Respect for others; having norms; equality	60	7,9%	11,5%
Freedom	22	2,9%	4,2%
Myself	48	6,4%	9,2%
Other comments	95	12,6%	18,2%
Total	755	100,0%	144,6%

4.2.8 What does the history of slavery have to do with you?

This question was not related to a specific display, but rather to the overall theme of the exhibition. Within these responses, the two biggest themes identified are about the history of slavery having effect on a personal level, with answers such as ‘it has made me who I am’, ‘it is part of my roots’, or ‘it is still personally impacting me when I experience discrimination or white privilege’; and on a societal level, with people answering that it is our shared history, it has made this country what it is today, or it is impacting society today in forms like racism (see table 4.10). These comments emphasize the personal impact, which was evident in some comments to other questions as well but which is particularly prevalent here:

“It determines my identity and my present. It is the mask I put on in the morning and take off at night.” (#SLA372, age 27)

“A lot! I was born in Colombia and I’m a descendant of African and Indian-slaves. I’m also descendant from former colonizers. It is important to create consciousness about the history in order to destroy long-established prejudices.” (#SLA051, age 32).

“It is important to realise that we all have a responsibility in the history and the consequences in the present. And racism is something that is still part of

everyday life, sometimes very subtle. We have to be aware of our history in order to understand it and solve it.” (#SLA032, age 60)¹⁷

These last two comments, in the ideas of ‘creating consciousness’, or ‘have to be aware’, illustrate the active rhetoric that is recurring here. The idea of awareness and shared history is coming back in these responses as well. Some people felt it had nothing to do with them, though this group was fairly small. This respondent, as many others, felt also a sense of guilt:

“Nothing at all. And that’s why I find it difficult to fill this in. And that I feel shame to even pick up a note. It feels too far away, and that is not good.” (#SLA085, age 35)¹⁸

Table 4.10: Frequencies in responses to the question: ‘What does the history of slavery have to do with you?’

What does the history of slavery have to do with you?			
Theme coded responses	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Nothing	27	4,5%	6,4%
Slavery is still going on; refugee crisis or low wages labour is similar	24	4,0%	5,7%
It is still impacting society now, in forms like racism, discrimination, white privilege	68	11,4%	16,2%
It is still personally impacting me, through experiencing white privilege	26	4,4%	6,2%
It is still personally impacting me, through discrimination etc	30	5,0%	7,1%
It is part of my identity; my roots; it has made me who I am	81	13,6%	19,2%

¹⁷ Translated from Dutch by author.

¹⁸ Translated from Dutch by author.

We have to remember; teach about it; be open about it; be aware	75	12,6%	17,8%
It is part of our history; our country is built upon it; made us who we are; it's everyone's history	72	12,1%	17,1%
Feelings; most often of shame, guilt, discomfort or sadness	48	8,1%	11,4%
It is not that long ago	13	2,2%	3,1%
We have to do something; take action; respect and tolerate each other; want change (active rhetorics); take responsibility	61	10,2%	14,5%
Other comments; no comment other than personal information (see graph 4.1)	71	11,9%	16,9%
Total	596	100,0%	141,6%

4.2.9 What is missing in the exhibition?

This question was likewise not related to a specific display within the text. Also, perhaps unsurprising, it is in answer to this question that most of the comments criticizing the content of the exhibition were (table 4.11). Comments such as ‘it had nothing to do with me’, ‘Africans were a part of it too’ and ‘others were doing it too, it was the morals of the time’ were frequent, though still not a majority. A very interesting comment illustrating this is:

“I sometimes read in articles of historians that 90% of the slaves out of Africa were already enslaved, but than by other black people, or that the circumstances on board were also terrible for the crew and that the ratios of survival were not that different. Are those attempts at relativising or does this exhibition also show a one-sided perspective? The narratives are so different, what should I believe?” (#MIS064, no age given)¹⁹

Whilst this comment shows a very interesting uncertainty about the subject, it also shows the way this visitor actively engages with the contents of the exhibition, rather

¹⁹ Translated from Dutch by author.

than passively receives them. Particularly in this question, there were also comments that contained stronger language. Interestingly however, many of especially this kind of comments triggered reactions from other visitors.

“Missed opportunity! Subjective approach, prejudiced, taken out of the context of its time. Shame!” (#MIS027, age 69)²⁰

“For heaven's sake, how could you possibly say something like that with all the knowledge about the past that we have now? If this is what you take away after such an exhibition, something went horribly wrong. Either in your head, or in your education/environment.” (#MIS055, age 20)²¹

This shows that people are engaging with the comments of other visitors too, not just with the exhibition, and that the comment section is an active part of the exhibition. All in all however, though they come back a little bit in other questions as well, these kinds of stronger language, negative responses are still quite a small group. Overall, within this question, most of the comments were about wanting to know more about the links between slavery and its modern effects, modern day slavery, and the need for a bigger exhibition.

Table 4.11: Frequencies in responses to the question: ‘What are you missing in the exhibition?’

What are you missing in the exhibition?			
Theme coded responses	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Modern slavery; contemporary forms of slavery, such as refugees, poverty	31	10,2%	13,5%
Other slavery happening at other times and other places, eg Asia or Middle East	22	7,2%	9,6%
Africans were helping in the slave trade	9	3,0%	3,9%
Modern effects of slavery like discrimination, racism	48	15,7%	21,0%

²⁰ Translated from Dutch by author.

²¹ Translated from Dutch by author.

Want to know more; need a bigger exhibition; should be educated more	30	9,8%	13,1%
There are more aspects to this story of slavery and slave trade	44	14,4%	19,2%
The role of native inhabitants	9	3,0%	3,9%
Mention of a compliment	33	10,8%	14,4%
Mention of Black Pete (Zwarte Piet)	9	3,0%	3,9%
Other	70	23,0%	30,6%
Total	305	100,0%	133,2%

4.2.10 Conclusions analysis comment section

In the introductory text to the exhibition, the questions ‘What is our shared history of slavery? How do we deal with it today? And how can we shape our common future?’ are asked. This shows the direction the exhibition wants to take and the ways it wants to encourage visitors to think. A further aim of the exhibition is stated in the introductory panels as trying to show ‘the different ways in which enslaved people resisted the system’ and how ‘the inequality that was built up in hundreds of years of race relations still lives on in Dutch society to this day’. Many of these questions and themes resonate within the answers that are given in the comments.

When looking at the comments overall, there are themes that recur in many of the responses, regardless of the question on the card. These are:

- The idea that the history of slavery is a shared past, and one that is important to be remembered.
- The personal impact this history has on people.
- The impact on society this has, mainly in terms of the realisation that racism and discrimination still exist.
- A desire for tolerance and respect, and a refusing to accept inequality.

- An active rhetoric and desire for changing the situation, particularly through increased education and better awareness.

The idea that slavery is behind us does occur to the audience, but more frequently there is the idea that it is a shared past, one that belongs to all of us. This shows that there is a notion of how this past should not be forgotten, but rather talked about more in order to understand the issues of today. This last quote summarizes this quite nicely:

“It makes me remember why teaching young people about respect, equality and kindness is so important. So that we will never forget the history and make sure this never happens again.” (#SLA044, age 24)

People therefore seem to often connect with the displays, and apply it to their own lives and experiences. It shows the visitors are active participants engaging with the exhibition.

4.3 Data results reviews

4.3.1 Introduction

The next section will discuss a range of reviews of the exhibition. Table 4.12 shows an overview of types of reviews used. These have been divided in four categories:

- national newspapers: these were all in-depth reviews aimed at a national-wide audience;
- special interest groups: these were on platforms aimed at specific audiences;
- opinion: these were in newspapers and online platforms, but mentioned as specifically opinion pieces;
- local news and information: these were on Amsterdam touristic websites and local news from Suriname.

After text analysis, frequently recurring themes have been identified (see table 4.13). In the subsequent sections each theme is discussed in more detail. All the quotes have been translated by the author, except for those from Contemporaryand.com, Public History Amsterdam and Hello Amsterdam, which were already written in English.

Table 4.12: Overview of reviews used. Those marked blue did use parts of the text release, those in yellow did not. See appendix 3 for an extended overview.

National newspapers	Special interest groups	Opinion	Local news and information
NRC	Studio I (Inclusief)	Vrij Nederland	Waterkant.net
De Volkskrant	Afromagazine	De Groene Amsterdammer	Zuidoost.nl
Trouw	Public History Amsterdam	Volkskrant Opinie	Hello Amsterdam
Het Parool	Museum Tijdschrift	NRC Opinie	
NOS	Historici.nl	ContemporaryAnd (C&)	
	Museumkaart.nl		
	CJP.nl		
	Socialisme.nu		

Table 4.13: Frequently recurring themes in the reviews. See appendix 4 for an extended overview.

	Reviews not using press release text	Reviews using press release	Total number of reviews
Total	13	8	21
<i>Mention of:</i>			
Discussion as aim of the exhibition	6	5	11
Visitor comments section	9	5	14
Shared past	4	4	8
Perspective of the enslaved	5	3	8
Agency of the enslaved is central	6	1	7
Collaboration	4	5	9
Decolonization	6	0	6
Exhibition is linking past to present	6	8	14

Slavery is not a finished story	4	3	7
Racism as power structure	7	0	7
Zwarte Piet	7	0	7
<i>Values:</i>			
Educative value	3	1	4
Step in the right direction?	7	0	7
Exhibition does not want to be moralistic	5	0	5
<i>Visitor experience:</i>			
Comment on text	4	0	4
Comment on (number of) objects	5	0	5
Is it emotional or touching?	7	1	8

4.3.2 Discussion and comment section

As becomes clear from this overview, the discussion and comment section were frequently mentioned within the reviews. Richard Kofi was often quoted in relation to this, as for example in the NOS review:

“There is a lot of discussion about the history of slavery, the colonial past and the way this resonates. We want to provide a better foundation for this discussion.

Give people new arguments and new things to think about.” (NOS)

This goal to start a discussion was one of the main aims of the exhibition, and frequently mentioned both within the exhibition and in the press release. The comment section was intended in part as to encourage such a discussion, as that same review emphasises:

“The museum does not avoid the discussion, but rather encourages visitors to give their opinion. Kofi: “It is not the intention to give answers, but to ask questions.” (NOS)

So not only did many reviews pick up on this goal of the museum, most of the reviews view this discussion as a positive one. There was only one review, the socialisme.nu, who thought this discussion platform remained too much within the frame of conventional questions. Nonetheless, they thought the goal of discussion in itself as something positive.

4.3.3 Shared past

The idea that the history of slavery is a past that is shared by all Dutch people is another position that is heavily emphasised in the exhibition (and the press release). Martin Berger is quoted in the NOS review: “The history of slavery is something that belongs to all Dutch people. But if you don’t get any class on the subject, than it does not feel like your history” (NOS). The review in Vrij Nederland (an opinion magazine) continues along the same trend: “We, so all the Dutch people, have to learn how to deal with this history. We must learn to create empathy for our shared history” (Vrij Nederland). So despite the museum trying to emphasise this idea of a shared past, outside of the reviews using the press release, it was only picked up by a limited number of reviews.

4.3.4 Perspective and agency of the enslaved

Although it was mentioned in the press release that the story in the exhibition is told from the perspective of the enslaved, it was the reviews that did not use text from the press release that mainly emphasised this:

“Not before there was an exhibition on the history of slavery that so explicitly draws attention to the black culture; the story of the enslaved and the consequences for their descendents.” (NRC)

This is recognized as a necessity, and seen as a positive by most of the reviews mentioning this:

“That there is need for the former colonized or enslaved to have their histories on display is only now recognized.” (Public History amsterdam)

The fact that half of these reviews talk about this indicates that it is seen as noteworthy and novel, thereby also showing the lack of previous exhibitions that tell this story from the perspective of the enslaved.

Though not mentioned in the press release, the fact that activism is an important part of the message of the exhibition is also mentioned frequently:

“Their [the enslaved] resistance, is the message of the museum, is just as much part of the history of slavery as the humiliation associated with it.” (Trouw)
“It is about the way enslaved people back then revolted against the slave drivers.” (Socialisme.nu)

Again, this is seen as a novel perspective worth mentioning. Showing this aspect of the history was important to the creators, as Richard Kofi was quoted in several reviews:

“We explain how a certain logic made people do terrible things, but also that there was a feeling of agency with the enslaved to resist and to disturb the created order.” (Volkskrant Opinie)

“By emphasising the resistance, the exhibition shows the enslaved not as suffering objects but as not accepting their unfreedom.” (Historici.nl)

It is perhaps surprising then that this was not mentioned in the text of the press release.

4.3.5 Collaboration and decolonization

Collaboration with different activists, artists and other experts was mentioned in the press release, and picked up by half of those using the press release. Collaboration in three of the five other reviews mentioning collaboration was only about the cooperation with the group #Decolonizethemuseum (namely *historici.nl*, *vrij Nederland* and *NRC*). *Zuidoost.nl*'s review centred around collaboration with a local theatre group who were part of the opening. Only *ContemporaryAnd*, an international critical art and museum platform, was very critical on the point of collaboration, stating it was very necessary:

“Any meaningful attempt at decolonization must place contributions by curators of color in the Netherlands and abroad with their museal experiences and creative inputs at the center. For an institution that indicates an interest in the afterlives of slavery, these processes cannot be avoided.” (ContemporaryAnd)

So either the museum did not make clear enough their efforts of collaboration, or they thought it was not enough.

Many of the reviews mentioned the fact that this exhibition was a run up to a larger, more permanent exhibition. This was also seen as part of a trend of further decolonization of the museum. Two reviews (*PublicHistory* and *ContemporaryAnd*) questioned whether the Tropenmuseum, as a museum with its roots deep in colonial history, is the best place, or even able, to truly decolonize. Nevertheless, they are hopeful about the efforts:

“Its collection is associated with the colonial enterprise and how art and objects representing cultures were part of a larger project of ‘discovering’, classifying, hierarchizing, and subjugating. From a curating standpoint, it’s fascinating to think how, in today’s world, a collection built through violence can be mobilized for the implosion of the colonial gaze.” (ContemporaryAnd)

In only three other reviews (NRC, Vrij Nederland and De Groene Amsterdammer), a wider focus on decolonization was mentioned as a relevant theme related to this exhibition. It is in the title of the review of NRC, and Wayne Modest is quoted:

“The term ‘decolonize the museum’ emerges everywhere in the western world (...). In the Netherlands, the climate is quickly changing. At the moment we are the frontrunners of this discussion in Europe.” (NRC)

De Groene Amsterdammer focuses more on the restitution debate, and sees the Tropenmuseum as slowly trying to showcase the origin of many of the objects. So collaboration, and active efforts of the museum to tell a decolonized story and include a diversity in the creation of the exhibition, was only picked up to a limited extent by the reviews. This despite the museum putting quite some effort in this, even publishing a zine called Co-Lab²², in which many people who collaborated on the exhibition reflect on this process. Decolonization is only talked about to a limited extent: only two of the historic interest pieces, two opinion pieces, and only one national newspaper.

4.3.6 An unfinished story

It is perhaps unsurprising that the theme of linking past to present is among the ones that are most frequently mentioned. The title of the exhibition is centred around it, and the press release emphasises it as well. Showing the history of slavery not as finished but as having continuing impact today, was one of the major aims of the exhibition. The reviews likewise react on it:

“The history of slavery is too often shown as a finished history and the story is too often told from the perspective of the colonizer. This has to change, states the museum.” (Historici.nl)

“It wants to make visitors think: in what ways does this history live on? For example in stereotyping.” (Trouw)

“No one is guilty of that past, but we have to be aware of the history. Because this past still lives on in the present.” (Vrij Nederland)

The reviews are generally in favour of this emphasis on the relation between the past and the present:

“With this exhibition we are taking a step in the right direction. The knowledge that you get from it, will not only help you to put certain ways of thinking and

²² This is available online: <https://www.materialculture.nl/en/research/publications/co-lab>

events from the past in a new perspective, but it will also give you the chance to understand the pain and resistance of certain marginalised groups in our country better” (Vrij Nederland)

“Just now, when in the west people have forgotten all about the colonial past, they are sternly reminded of it by descendents of the colonised, who have settled in the motherland for some generations now.” (De Groene Amsterdammer)

Quite a few reviews that did not use the press release picked up on the way the exhibition explains

racism as a created power structure. This can be seen as an expansion on the previous point showing the impact today of the history of slavery.

“Still it has to be explained that racism exists and that people of colour are truly structurally suppressed.” (Socialisme.nu)

“It is striking that the main emphasis is on the rise and construction of the white superiority feeling and the reaction on that from the circles of the suppressed. The history of slavery on itself remains fairly underexposed in the small exhibition.” (De Volkskrant)

Quite a few of the reviews however also thought this link could have been made clearer.

Though not a big part of the exhibition, Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) is mentioned in a fair few reviews. Most of the times however, it is only mentioned as an example of contemporary discussions on issues such as the legacy of slavery. Only Vrij Nederland expands a little on it:

“Also the shoes of the former ‘Hoofdpiet’ (Head Black Pete) are displayed in the exhibition. They are a museum object, as if the creators have wanted to say: Zwarte Piet is already history, let’s move on.” (Vrij Nederland)

4.3.7 Values

It is striking that only the national newspapers mention that the exhibition does not want to be moralistic (NOS, NRC, Trouw and De Volkskrant). Rather it is emphasised that the exhibition wants to ask questions and provide background to contemporary discussions:

“The exhibition does not want to blame, but rather provide a background to the discussion on racism.” (NRC)

“Although it is clear which position the makers of the exhibition take, they are doing their best to ask questions rather than give a moralistic sermon.” (De Volkskrant)

“We don’t want to say ‘we are the authority, this is the story’, we want this to be a living organism.” (NOS, quoting Martin Berger)

“Feelings of guilt, that is something the Tropenmuseum does not want to go into.” (Trouw)

On the other hand, many of the reviews in the opinion or special interest groups critiqued that the exhibition was not going far enough and was holding back.

“The obvious efforts to cover a wide variety of topics might indicate how much these stories have been erased from the Dutch collective imaginary.”

(ContemporaryAnd)

“But also for a first step they did not put their best foot forward: it is very much aimed at the artistic and intellectual avant-garde of Caribbean Dutch and their white associates.” (De Groene Amsterdammer)

So although many of the reviews emphasised the educative value of the exhibition, and agreed it was a good step in the right direction, it was not without critique that they could have done more.

4.3.8 Visitor experience

Six reviews in total mentioned the style of the exhibition, more specifically that the exhibition has a lot of text and not many objects. They mainly think more objects and less text could have made the exhibition more touching, though they do agree that the objects that are there are impressive. The critique is therefore mainly that the text makes it too academic:

“The exhibition remains strongly within the ideal. We have learned once that there is a hierarchy among people, so we can unlearn it, according to the exhibition. The fact that this has become a material reality as well is missing a little.” (Socialisme.nu)

“That which is shown in short professorial monologues could have been displayed with images and objects. Surely there are more appealing objects than the sober displays that are there now (...) Can’t you do it with more images, more music, more feeling?” (De Groene Amsterdammer)

A similar critique was made by Auke Kok in NRC opinie, who argued that the text was too constructed and politically correct. He himself was more struck by the comments made by the children, and felt the tone of the text was too distancing.

The exhibition is also often mentioned as having an emotional impact, or as confrontational. This emotion is mainly provoked by visitor comments and some of the objects:

“The shivers run down your back when you think that this object²³ truly mutilated living human skin.” (Volkskrant Opinie);

“It is hard to not feel emotion at a receipt for a 6-year old girl.” (NOS)

“It is a restrained exhibition; not aimed at emotionalizing visitors, but to let them think. This works, and with emotion, as is evident from the written notes which the visitors can hang up.” (De Groene Amsterdammer)

Only Socialisme.nu was untouched by the exhibition, and critiques:

“It is not touching, it remains at a distance. The exhibition exhibits, it displays things that are important and asks conventional questions, but it hardly frightens or surprises.” (Socialisme.nu)

It seems that the reviewers did not mind feeling emotional. On the contrary, they call for a more touching and moving experience.

4.3.9 Conclusions analysis reviews

In conclusion, several themes emerged that were frequently written about. The first theme, one that was among the most frequently mentioned, is discussion as aim of the exhibition, of which the comment section is a part. This was generally seen as a positive goal, and the frequent mentions show that it was deemed relevant and important. The idea of slavery being a shared past of all Dutch people, which is emphasised in the exhibition quite frequently, was not picked up so much by the reviews.

The fact that the exhibition aims to tell the story of slavery from the perspective of the enslaved and their descendents, and by extension focus on the agency of the enslaved, was considered in the reviews as a novel perspective. In line with this, collaboration and decolonization as themes emerged as well. Though collaboration was mentioned in the press release, it was only picked up to a limited extent by reviews not using the press

²³ The object referred to is a branding tool.

release. Decolonization as a wider trend was also only discussed to a limited extent. On the other hand, the link between past and present and its impact today, and the fact that it is seen as an unfinished story, was picked up by most. This is unsurprising, given the fact that it is in the title of the exhibition, and the primary goal of it.

The place where there was the most clear divide between the newspapers on the one hand and the opinion or special interest media on the other hand was the tone of the exhibition. The newspapers all emphasised that the exhibition did not want to be moralistic. On the contrary, many of the opinion and special interest media thought the exhibition, though a step in the right direction, did not go far enough. This is the only case where the difference is so clear between the mainstream media and more specialized sources. Limited comments were made about the displays, but when they were made they generally agreed that there was a lot of text, and not enough objects. The emphasis on text, they said, made the exhibition too academic. This leads to the final point which got mentioned by many of the reviews, which is that the exhibition evokes emotion. This was seen as a positive thing, and something that could have been even more present than it was.

So in all, none of the reviews thought the exhibition was unnecessary or not a good topic for an exhibition. On the contrary, most agreed it was an impressive exhibition aimed at starting a necessary discussion. The reviews were mainly positive about the exhibition, and one of the few main critiques was actually that it did not go far enough, that the exhibition was too safe.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of data

This next chapter will aim to connect the different data presented in the previous sections. It will discuss the wider themes that emerge, and aim to understand them in light of the theoretical framework discussed in chapter two. Consequently, it will compare my results to a case study from the UK by Laurajane Smith (2011). Lastly, it will present certain limitations in my study and room for further research.

5.1.1 Collaboration, activism and personal impact

5.1.1.1 Collaboration process as self-critique

The collaboration process was picked up on only to a limited extent by the comments and reviews. This although the museum itself made a conscious effort to have a collaborative process when creating the exhibition. Such a critical creation process was very important for the museum, in order to “hold a mirror up to itself” (Berger, appendix 1). Both curators Martin Berger and Robin Lelijveld emphasised that the museum actively did not want to have the single or even central voice in the exhibition. Rather, it wants to step away from the role of the museum as authority (ibid.; Lelijveld, appendix 2). In this way, the museum engages in a self-critical discursive analysis, turning the reinterpretations of meaning that take place within a museum context into a multivocal process.

This process led the museum to realise its role as a political actor, and not aim for a traditional notion of a neutral exhibition, "as many activists and other critical stakeholders have pointed out, this supposed neutrality many times unconsciously reproduced white, cisgender, eurocentric perspectives" (Berger and Kofi 2017, 11). This resulted in the perspective of the enslaved being central, and this is also why the museum did not want to tell a story of structures and systems, but rather a story that is about individual people; and “not even just individuals who were enslaved, but also (...) those that carry in them the complexity of the system” (Berger, appendix 1). In this way, they aim to step away from a uniform historical narrative and represent to the visitor the contingent nature of the cultural discourse on colonialism that usually forms

interpretations in museums. It is for this reason that collaboration is considered so important, and this process therefore did not end with the opening of the exhibition. The critical reflective zine Co-Lab is a good example of the way this is continued: "This forms part of our museum's new way of working where we foreground critical listening and collaborative learning as important to pushing a more inclusive agenda" (Ouedraogo and Modest 2017, 5). Through all this, they recognize that in order to be a place of representation, museum professionals need to be open to share power; share power to make interpretations but also to make decisions and add ideas (Rijnks-Kleikamp 2017, 9). This remixing of power is essential if the museum as institute wishes to decolonize (Zeefuik 2017).

The museum is thus aware of its role as a 'space of representation' which actively produces meaning (Foucault 1984, 3, Lidchi 2013), and is also aware that these interpretations are part of a larger conceptual and discursive framework (Lord 2006a). Through a collaboration process, they aim to make the interpretations multivocal, and in this way, display not only the reinterpretations of meaning (concepts) of objects, but also the systems of representation that re-contextualise these objects. It is for this reason that Simone Zeefuik, one of the activists who helped with the exhibition, was able to comment in Co-Lab: "*Afterlives of Slavery* does more than swap vocabularies - it denounces that system and its continuing effects" (Zeefuik 2017, 24). Collaboration, then, encouraged a self-critique for the museum itself, and was the method through which the museum could reveal the process of reinterpretation of meaning that takes place within the museum as a heteropia.

5.1.1.2 Emotion showing visitors as active agents

This is however only one side of the coin: it needs to similarly encourage a self-critique within the visitors. The collaboration process, despite being mentioned in the press release, was not picked up much by either the reviews or the visitor comments. Nevertheless, despite the fact that this approach was not made explicit in the public reactions, the effects of it on the exhibition are perhaps more relevant. As Lelijveld explains: "The decision to include and embed these voices - both historical and contemporary - relates directly to the attempt to personalize the exhibition's narrative and was motivated by the aim to encourage visitors to think about what this history means to them" (Lelijveld 2017, 15). This seems to have had effect, since the personal

and emotional impact of not just the exhibition, but the history of slavery, frequently recurred in the visitor comments, and likewise the reviews talked about emotion as an integral part of the exhibition. Even though some of the reviews thought that more objects would have made the exhibition more emotional, this did not seem to bother the visitors at all, since it did not really occur in the comments. On the contrary, emotional and personal impact was amongst the most frequent responses.

In comparison, Macdonald, in her research on visitor books, found that visitors were unlikely to go beyond cursory personal notes in visitor books, and she hypothesises that this might either be because visitor books do not tempt people to be personal, or because an exhibition on traumatic themes might make it inappropriate to be personal (Macdonald 2005). It is curious then that this seems to be not at all the case in this exhibition. There seem to be several factors that could explain this. Connecting the story to people personally was one of the main aims of the museum: "I think one of the main goals of the exhibition was to make people actively think about what this history meant for them personally" (Lelijveld, appendix 2). The discussion section as integral part of the exhibition would have encouraged a wider range of people to write something down than would have otherwise written in a visitor book. The type of questions asked also made it very personal, asking directly what the history, and themes within, meant for them. Lastly, the exhibition not trying to be neutral, but being about individual stories, will have played an important part in the emotional reactions of the visitors, as it is easier to relate to individuals than to systems. What this then shows is that visitors did not just come to the exhibition to learn, or at least that was not one of the main outcomes of their visit. Rather, they were active agents that engaged with the subject in an active and affective manner. Particularly given that the exhibition is so explicitly about not just a moment in the past, but its influence into the present, it shows the way the exhibition invites to "not just commentary but action, making new pasts-in-presents" (Shanks 2012, 68). It shows that the exhibition, by moving beyond the Authorised Heritage Discourse and emphasising the intangible layers of the heritage (Smith 2011), encouraged an affective connection between object and visitor.

5.1.1.3 Discussion encouraging activism

Another aspect in which active participation from visitors was encouraged was in the comment section. This discussion section went beyond the usual visitor book, and was

not only for the purposes of feedback on the exhibition. Rather, it was an integral part of the exhibition, both visually as well as conceptually:

*"For me it was very important that visually it would not detonate with the rest of the exhibition, so that it would be clear that the opinions and questions who are hanging there, would for us be an integral part of the exhibition. Those voices are part of the exhibition."*²⁴ (Berger, appendix 1)

In this way, visitors become participants in the exhibition and are invited to share their thoughts and ideas in a way that becomes part of the museum displays. Through this process, visitors "re-enter the museological process: they move from being the end-point or 'receivers' of the 'museum messages' to being part of the process through which museum exhibitions are created." (Macdonald 2005, 131). This has a large effect, as Lelijveld explains in Co-Lab:

"Slowly the responses form a temporary body of human expressions of hope and despair, shame and pride, innocence and guilt, regret and mercy, joy and fear, anger and delight, relief and discomfort, distrust and trust. It has become a site for encounter, in person and through writing." (Lelijveld 2017, 14)

The wide range of comments, ranging from little jokes to thoughtful critiques, show the different levels of engagement with the subject. An active participation is particularly happening when visitors decide to write something themselves, but a more passive participation also takes place when people are merely reading the comments. Both of these will have an influence on the way they perceive the exhibition: "The ritual of reading and perhaps also writing in the visitor book helps visitors to formulate their own position in relation to those of others" (Macdonald 2005, 125). The fact that there are quite a few instances of comments reacting to other comments shows that visitors read other comments that are hanging there, and suggests that this process is happening also for those not writing anything down.

This study also shows that age plays an important factor in the way the exhibition impacts visitors. This is unsurprising, given that slavery has been taught in different ways in schools throughout the last half century. Until as recently as 1975, it was hardly taught in schools. This changed with the independence of Suriname and the coming of many Suriname people to the Netherlands. The topic became compulsory in secondary schools. In the last twenty years however, the school texts have become more shallow

²⁴ Translated by author

again and there is increasing critique on the way the topic is taught (Van der Sanden 2017). Though unlikely to be the only influencing factor, the way the topic is taught in schools, and therefore the way people have learned about this history, seems to play a role in the way the exhibition is perceived.

Another point to make here is that within the comments, there frequently was an active rhetoric and desire to change the current situation. As shown, visitors engaged directly with the exhibition, as seen in the fact that their comments often could be directly linked to the themes of the displays and the texts. This fact that they actively participated, suggests that a self-critique was encouraged by the exhibition and received by the visitor. Already the discussion section in itself was part of the museum's aim to have dialogue and discussion be a part of an activating exhibition (Lelijveld, appendix 2). It is not only the commentary section though: "I certainly think that the emphasis on strength, creativity and resilience (...) can help you get into a certain frame of mind"²⁵ (ibid.). It seems therefore that this attitude of active rhetoric can be linked to the central role the agency and activism of the enslaved played in the exhibition.

This active role of the visitor as shown here enforces the idea of considering heritage as a performance and seeing the museum visit as involving "subjective political negotiation of identity, place, and memory" (Smith 2015b, 460). This also has a consequence for the museum, since it implies a changed relationship between museum display and visitor, one that the Tropenmuseum wants to take seriously:

"Partnering' with visitors demands a criticality towards the consequences of these relations and the responsibilities that come along. We may not have found the key yet, but these multiply-voiced expressions of personal experience do underline the urgency to care, not only as a museum and as world citizens, because we are all implicated in this past, but more importantly because we share our future." (Lelijveld 2017, 14)

5.1.2 The history of slavery's impact on society today

The title of *Afterlives of Slavery* emphasises one of the main goals of the exhibition, namely to show how history of slavery has an impact on people and on society today. The museum felt like this was a necessary angle to highlight:

²⁵ Translated by author

"There are so many people who are just not conscious of the way that history lives on, and what kind of impact it has on the system in which they are actually a part of. (...) There still exist so many inequalities of which people are not aware, and in which they even participate, unconsciously (...) and the reason for that lies a while back." (Lelijveld, appendix 3)

Here Lelijveld touches upon the problem of slavery as a memorable past, which causes an aphasiac condition in which the consequences of the past in society today are not dealt with. It is for this reason that Bijl argued that structures of racism are not visible to the Dutch public, and it is worth quoting him in full:

"One connection between the slippage of critique of colonial violence and of this 'multicultural' terminology is unacknowledged racism in the Dutch past and present. In other words, the Dutch aphasiac condition produces an inability to see the nation as the former metropolis of a colonial empire and to acknowledge the lasting racial hierarchies stemming from this past, leading to a structural inhibition of the memorability of colonial violence." (Bijl 2012, 451)

Contrary to this, however, one of the main themes emerging in both the responses of visitors and the reviews of *Afterlives of Slavery* is about how the history of slavery has an impact on society today. This is often emphasised or expanded upon by saying that this past is a shared past, the history of slavery is an unfinished story and it is still visible in structures like racism and discrimination.

The fact that this is being acknowledged among the visitors of the exhibition could be explained in two ways. Either the people who already have a certain affinity with the history of slavery and its impact today are interested in the exhibition, or the story of the exhibition and the way it is told influences the way people comment on it. As demonstrated above, many of the comments correspond to the themes of the exhibition, which would suggest that the exhibition does have an impact on the visitors. The first however is a difficult question to answer without a very extensive visitor study that includes people who do not come to the museum. People coming into the Tropenmuseum (and museums in general) often already have a certain interest, at the very least in cultures, which does result, as Lelijveld points out as well, in a certain one-sidedness in the visitor comments. When examining the comments, "you do start to think about which voices you are missing" (Lelijveld, appendix 2). Although this is something that the museum is well aware of, inclusion of different groups who do not

often go to museums is a difficult problem that many museums have been struggling with (see for example Diaz-Andreu 2014; Kean 2000; Kiddey and Schofield 2015; Smith 2006).

The results presented here and the Dutch aphasiac condition are therefore not mutually exclusive. The fact that the current day impact of the history of slavery is starting to be recognized does not take away that those lasting hierarchies that Bijl mentions still exist. This is for example shown in the visitor comments, through the fact that so many mention the history of slavery having a personal impact on them. Likewise, many of the reviews critically assess this point and talk about the modern day effects in society. Unlike the visitors, who mainly react within the context of their museum visit, the reviews, written after the visit, often place the exhibition within a wider context. Through this they can also critically assess to what degree this effect is shown within the exhibition. Particularly the reviews with 'expert' knowledge, expand on this point:

"So, only during recent years the Tropenmuseum managed to dig up and effectively display the colonial past that was already hidden in plain sight. This is to me an example of how the Dutch look at their past: only now they've, sometimes reluctantly, come to terms with the dark sides of history." (Public History)

The exhibition should therefore be considered both within the Dutch aphasiac condition as it is, as well as within in a wider trend of discussing different perspectives on colonialism and on decolonizing that history. It is for that reason perhaps that many of the reviews, particularly the national newspapers, viewed the idea of an exhibition from the perspective of the enslaved as a noteworthy and novel perspective. In some of the other reviews, however, this was seen as insufficient:

"Meanwhile, this exhibition seems to imply that a post-colonial world is built by the mere acknowledgement of the colonial past, which raises the question as to whether the conversation on race in the Netherlands is in such an embryonic stage that this may be seen as an important achievement." (ContemporaryAnd)

This shows the paradoxical notion that the focus on activism and agency of the enslaved that the exhibition takes can be seen as simultaneously a novel perspective and merely an acknowledgement of that history, as the activism was always part of the narrative, just not regularly highlighted. Nevertheless, the exhibition does move beyond acknowledging this history, as it is one of the first exhibitions on this topic which actively

tries to relate contemporary racism with the the history of slavery and the colonial structure. Similarly, the conversation that is started by the exhibition is not often taken up by museums:

“I think many museums find it difficult, and it is difficult. It is very vulnerable, you can stir up a lot of commotion and you can become a stage on which other people are hurt. So there is a certain fear to discuss this topic.” (Lelijveld, appendix 2)

The exhibition therefore needs to be seen within this context of an increasingly decolonising conversation that allows for the voice of different perspectives. There are many more exhibitions planned in the Netherlands, such as *Slavernij* in the Rijksmuseum, planned for 2020; or *Shifting Images* that recently opened in the Mauritshuis. There are even plans for a national museum of slavery in Amsterdam and the Tropenmuseum itself is planning a much larger, more permanent exhibition on the colonial history of the museum and the Netherlands for 2020. It will be interesting to see what methods will be used by these museums to make these exhibitions, and consequently what effect these exhibitions will have on its visitors and on wider Dutch society. This will be exciting future research.

5.2 Comparison to other cases

One of the best cases to compare this study to is a large visitor study conducted in 2007 in the UK (see Cubitt *et al.* 2011; Smith 2011; Waterton 2011). The year 2007 marked the two hundredth bicentenary of the British abolition of the slave trade, and many museums around the UK had exhibitions on slavery and abolition. Laurajane Smith conducted a large visitor study across many of these museums. To understand her results however, it is important to first understand the British societal context of perceiving the history of slavery, which in many aspects corresponds to the Dutch situation (see section 2.4, in particular 2.4.3). As in the Netherlands, the history of slavery is described as having been met with ‘humiliated silence’ (Connerton 2008), leading to a form of collective forgetting (Cubitt *et al.* 2011). As the museums in the bicentenary wanted to represent this history, they stood for a significant challenge as to who they wanted to represent this history for, as British society could be described as “a transitional post-imperial society learning, uncertainly, to become a multicultural

society" (ibid.: 3). This uncertainty became visible in the different ways the bicentenary was approached. The recognition of the history was seen as an important opportunity for particularly the Caribbean-British communities to also acknowledge continued implications in today's society (Smith 2011). This form of remembering however, "requires not only a significant intellectual but also an emotional remaking of British self-identity" (Smith 2011, 261). As she continues to explain, the collective forgetting of this history "is vital in maintaining the survival of an important aspect of British post-imperial self-identity: a belief in, and confidence about, British historical and contemporary morality" (ibid.: 261). This has led to the reproductions of the abolition myth in many museums: a large emphasis on the abolition of slavery, rather than the entirety of the history of slavery, which promotes the heroism of white abolitionists and depicts enslaved as passive and helpless victims (Cubitt *et al.* 2011; Simpson 2012; Smith 2011; Waterton 2011). This tendency to display the narratives in this way, reinforced the tensions between those searching for recognition, and those wanting to maintain their belief in historic morality as an essential part of British identity (Smith 2011, 262).

Afterlives of Slavery differs from these on several, and interconnected, points. To begin with: the aims of the museums are different, and by extent the narratives they tell. Many of the British museums tried to both reinforce the abolitionist narrative as well as to seek a re-reading of history. However, in aiming to appease everyone through such supposed neutrality, and by trying to avoid controversy, they failed to convincingly speak about either narrative (Naidoo 2011). People of African heritage, although they wanted the story to be told and "given its full weight in public understandings of British history", were reluctant of a tendency to link their social identity in relation to that history, because it so often casts "Africans historically simply as victims or survivors, and not as creative agents" (Cubitt *et al.* 2011, 4). *Afterlives of Slavery* on the other hand, tried to actively tell the story from the perspective of the enslaved. So rather than talking about abolition, they centred their narrative around the agency, activism, creativity and resilience of the enslaved.

Secondly, the reaction of the visitors to the exhibition is different. Smith, upon interviewing many visitors to a range of these exhibitions, tries to understand the role emotion has in the reactions of the visitors. She identifies, particularly amongst white British respondents, a trend to sidestep trauma by disengaging from the exhibitions. This

is done mainly through the use of five self-sufficient arguments which were used for a deflection of these negative emotions that undermine their sense of identity. These are, in order of frequency of use:

“1. It was a long time ago, you cannot turn back the hands of time.

2. The morals of the time were different then.

3. It was not just Britain; other countries were involved too.

4. The Africans were party to it.

5. We are just working-class people; the elites were the ones who benefited.”

(Smith 2011, 267-268)

In terms of emotional responses, she assesses that “attempts at acknowledging dissonant and confronting histories were (...) too emotionally destabilizing, and visitors turned to an array of strategies to insulate themselves from the emotional content of the exhibition” (ibid.: 300). Again, these reactions differ from the emotional involvement that was evident in *Afterlives of Slavery*. Although there are several factors impacting this outcome, not in the least the different methodology (interviews versus visitor comments), I would suggest that the different, more personal narrative that is represented in the Tropenmuseum has an impact on the different reactions as presented in this thesis. Nevertheless, whether engaging or distancing, the emotional aspect plays a significant factor in both these cases. This reaffirms Smith’s argument that museums are not only places for learning but that other processes take place of which museums should be aware: “It is an experience or moment of active cultural engagement that has a range of consequences” (Smith 2015, 460). This engagement is beginning to be better understood, and is often particularly obvious in heritage related to the Second World War (see for example Saindon 2012). Increasingly however, visitor engagements beyond learning are starting to be understood at a wider range of heritage sites and museums, and is particularly relevant when dealing with contested or difficult subjects, such as slavery and colonialism (see for example Smith 2015; Bonnell and Simon 2007).

Finally, as a result of her research, Smith argues that people go to museums to reinforce their pre-existing notions and values, and that, as a result, “museums are less active in facilitating public debate than they are in reflecting the nature and status of that debate” (Smith 2011, 301). However, I would argue that the fact that the Tropenmuseum created the exhibition through a self-critical and collaborative process,

the active participation of different groups in the creation of the exhibition as a result of that process, as well as the presence of the commentary section in the exhibition, are a big part of encouraging social debate. Inviting the visitors to talk with the curators shows the process of dialogue that went into the exhibition's creation, and which remains an integral part of it. This shows the extent to which the Tropenmuseum realised they did not want to be the central and authoritative voice in the exhibition (Berger, appendix 1; Lelijveld, appendix 2). Stepping away from that role requires a certain vulnerability (Lelijveld, appendix 2), but it does allow the start of a conversation and thus the facilitation of a public debate.

5.3 Problems with the research and room for further research

Within the previous section I have aimed to connect my data with a broader discussion in Dutch society on the history of slavery. A cautionary note needs to be placed with that discussion. The most significant issue with this is the selection bias as briefly discussed in section 3.3.2. The visitor comments are made by visitors to the museum, and it cannot be assumed that they represent Dutch society as a whole, or even the whole group of visitors coming to the exhibition. Although the way the comment section was designed did encourage many visitors to participate (as discussed in sections 4.1.2 and 4.3.1), not all visitors who came into the museum wrote in the comment section. It is therefore possible that certain voices or groups of people are not included here. Another way the data set does not represent Dutch society is evident in the overview of respondents by age (section 4.1.3.1), which shows that the group visitors studied here were significantly younger than the national average of museum visits. Also, when comparing the analysed group to age categories in Dutch society as a whole, there were also relatively more younger people (under 35) and fewer older people (over 60) than the national averages (NIDI 2017). Next to age, this analysis included the comments made by foreigners, who, in relation to that discussion on impact on Dutch society, are not necessarily relevant. Therefore, although this was not an issue overall as I wanted to look at public perceptions, and foreign visitors are part of that public, for that specific link my data set was not fully representative of Dutch society as a whole.

This selection bias is a difficult problem to overcome when trying to find the role of museums within such public discussions. On the one hand, it is a challenge for museums to find ways in which they can reach wider groups of people, so that their visitors reflect more society as a whole. On the other hand, a larger study including interviews with visitors, and interviews with non-visitors, would be a good way of furthering this understanding of a museum's role in the public perceptions of slavery. This however was beyond the scope of this thesis. As mentioned briefly a few times before, more exhibitions on colonialism and slavery are planned for the next couple of years. A wider comparison could therefore be made in the near future of the way the Dutch public perceives slavery and colonialism in museums. Wider implications of the role of museums into the way these subjects are treated within Dutch society could then also be made clearer.

The thematic analysis I have done here is to a certain degree a subjective method, particularly on the aspect of choosing which themes to include. Although they come from the data itself, there are a nearly endless number of themes possible (Russell Bernard, 2011). The amount of themes presented here therefore has a degree of arbitrariness: on the one hand, less themes could have been chosen to perhaps improve the impact and clarity of the tables; on the other hand more themes could have been chosen to reduce the quantity of the 'other' category. The way it is presented here was a subjective choice to illustrate the range of comments, whilst at the same time give a good impression to the reader of the contents of the comments.

6. Conclusion

In trying to understand the impact of exhibitions on visitors and the extent to which this is influenced by the creation process of an exhibition, in other words the influence of the museum on this, I have discussed the public perceptions of the *Afterlives of Slavery* exhibition in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. I found that when understanding museums as heterotopias, it becomes clear that the objects and narratives told within the museum space are decontextualized from their original meaning and reinterpreted. This reinterpretation that takes place has traditionally been in the hands of only museum professionals, thereby deciding which story is told, whose story and how it is told. Rather than following this authorized heritage discourse, however, the Tropenmuseum wanted to actively change and not be the central voice in the exhibition, and therefore made collaboration an important part of the process of making *Afterlives of Slavery*. In this way, the Tropenmuseum has embraced the self-critique that a heterotopia encourages, and through such a multivocal process wanted the exhibition to be a space of representation. This process resulted in activism and agency of the enslaved being a central theme of the exhibition, together with an emphasis on the impact that past has today.

The museum can thus be understood as an 'other space', a space outside of normal societal space, and it becomes possible to discuss topics that within normal space are harder to discuss. The museum has a potential of using its collections to challenge known discourses by reinterpreting the concepts and meaning attached to the object, which in its turn can encourage a self-critique in visitors to challenge their own known values.

More than that, the museum wanted to make visitors participants within the exhibition through the discussion section, which was an integral part of the exhibition. Through analysis of these comments, it became evident that the exhibition had an emotional and personal effect on many of the visitors. These comments show that learning or knowledge transfer was not the principal or primary effect of the exhibition, but rather that writing these comments resulted in an active engagement which encouraged an active rhetoric within the visitor. Heritage visits therefore are a complex process in which emotional engagement plays a significant role. I would argue that the

personalisation of the exhibition, for a large part possible through the collaborative process, can be linked to the personal effect it had on visitors, and likewise that the activism and agency of the enslaved can be linked to the active rhetoric evident in the public perceptions of the exhibition. Longer term research and more comparable exhibitions would be needed to see if this link truly exists. An important aspect of such research could then also be to see whether the discussion started in the museum is continued after the museum visit.

Contextualising this exhibition within wider Dutch society makes these results perhaps even more remarkable, particularly considering the Dutch colonial aphasiac condition so frequently present, in which slavery and colonialism are considered as 'elsewhere', both physically and temporally. Such compartmentalisation in history seems, if not taken away, at least not reinforced by *Afterlives of Slavery*. That the different perspective displayed within the exhibition was considered so new by the reviews points to how rare this still is. However, as the reviews emphasise, the link between past and present is made evident within the exhibition, and in this way a first step is made to stop treating the colonial past as 'long ago and far away'.

This is not to say that *Afterlives of Slavery* is the perfect exhibition. There are voices still missing within the narrative they tell for example. However, and perhaps because of, the processes that went into the creation of the exhibition are not just likely to be repeated in future exhibitions, but expanded upon and improved (Berger appendix 1; Lelijveld appendix 2). Further research, then, could also include what effect such exhibitions have on the wider debate on colonialism in Dutch society as a whole on the longer term.

Nevertheless, expanding the goal of museum visits beyond knowledge transfer and opening up museum processes to be multivocal and collaborative would already greatly aid museums when tackling contested topics. In this way, museums can not just reflect social debate, but encourage it along. Museums can thus become an 'other space' where a plurality of voices can be heard and therefore a good place to discuss controversial topics.

In the end, I think this exhibition, as well as the subject of dealing with colonialism as a whole, has the capacity to hold a mirror to people and society in general. Slavery, then, is an example of an excessive oppressive power, but unfortunately such power imbalance can be found in most of history, as well as in the present. If an exhibition or a museum, then, chooses to play a role in inviting a renewed mentality in how people within a society should treat each other and respect each other, now and in the future, then every visitor should be invited and encouraged to take a critical look at him- or herself and their attitude to those around them. This is exactly the difference between history and heritage: rather than realizing what has happened in the past, which is what history does, heritage is about the ways this past continues in the present. If a museum, then, chooses such a role, on the basis of their collections, building and space, they move beyond educating knowledge of the historical past and become a part of heritage processes.

Exhibitions about the colonial past are therefore primarily not, or should not be about who is to blame or who is a victim of this past. Rather, it is about understanding the ways the past has an impact on the present. Museums, then, by realizing that they can go beyond the role of authoritative teaching, into being a space which can produce an active, meaningful and personal experience for visitors, can encourage such understandings. Through this, they have the capacity to invite visitors to take a critical look at their own understanding of history, and the realisations of the way this past works on into the present.

Abstract

Dealing with the Colonial Past: public perceptions of slavery in museums.

This thesis aims to understand if and how museums can be a good space to deal with controversial topics, by exploring the link between museum exhibitions and the formation of social and collective memory, particularly related to contested pasts. It looks at how the *Afterlives of Slavery* exhibition in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam is perceived by audiences and to what extent the aims of the creators of the exhibition have had an impact on these reactions.

An increasing body of work is looking at the connection between heritage and identity. The Netherlands has a significant colonial history, which in recent years has been the subject of an active academic as well as public debate. Likewise museums are increasingly working on how to deal with their colonial pasts. Nevertheless, thus far not much research has focused on audience reception of such exhibitions. This thesis aims to see whether the agency of displays and their impact on visitors will be evident and argues that the contested nature of the exhibition material will show stronger reactions from audiences. Building on previous work done within museum studies, heritage studies and memory studies, the data discussed in the thesis is collected through comments left by visitors within the exhibition, as well as reviews written about it. Visitor comments are a rich resource which most museums have but which is hardly used as a research source. However, it can provide valuable insights about visitor views and experiences. Interviews with the curators are done to understand what the aims were of the exhibition, and to see whether these have been fulfilled.

Whilst I do not expect visitors to change their preconceived opinion after seeing one exhibition, I do think that the museum exhibitions influence the way people regard and think about issues such as the colonial past of their own country. This thesis will increase understanding of the link between museums and identity construction, as well as the way the colonial past is viewed in the Netherlands. It shows that emotion plays an important role within the visitor process and that a collaborative creation process has a big impact on enabling a multivocality within the museum. These insights are relevant for museums dealing with contested pasts, particularly those parts related to colonialism and slavery.

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Appendix 1: Interview Martin Berger

Interviewee: Martin Berger, curator Tropenmuseum

Interviewer: Jacoline Buirma (Italic)

Location: Tropenmuseum offices

Date: 29-05-2019

Wat was jou rol precies in het maken van de tentoonstelling?

Officieel was ik conservator wat in dit geval niet helemaal hetzelfde betekende als in andere tentoonstellingen, want meestal als conservator doe je de inhoud en als tentoonstellingsmaker doe je hoe die inhoud vertaald wordt, maar omdat we bij deze tentoonstelling zo weinig tijd hadden om dingen te maken en ook omdat we veel met een outside expertgroep werkte, was dat maken van die content heel erg gedeeld met iedereen. (...) In principe heb ik wel de objectselectie gedaan, grotendeels, in ieder geval de midden-zuid-amerika objecten, Richard heeft de dingen over Afrika geselecteerd, niet heel veel maar een paar, omdat hij bij het Afrika museum werkt en die collectie veel beter kent. Daarnaast heb ik teksten geschreven en dat soort dingen.

Maar het leuke aan deze tentoonstelling was juist dat we alles samen deden, binnen het museum, maar ook samen met mensen van buiten het museum.

Waarom is deze tentoonstelling tot stand gekomen, hoe zijn jullie op het idee gekomen om zo'n tentoonstelling te maken?

Ik denk dat daar meerdere antwoorden op mogelijk zijn. Maar de manier waarop, hoe ik het zie, is dat we altijd al het idee hadden dat er een tentoonstelling over de koloniale geschiedenis moest komen, en origineel was die gepland voor 2019, voor dit jaar, en dat zou dan een grote tentoonstelling zijn geweest. Om allerlei redenen konden we dat qua geld en mankracht en tijd niet halen, maar tegelijkertijd werd wel, vanwege de gehele verbouwing van het museum, het deel over suriname gesloten, en was er beetje het idee we kunnen niet het tropenmuseum zonder tentoonstelling over Suriname hebben eigenlijk. En dat gecombineert met het feit dat, dat is meer mijn interpretatie dan feitelijk, maar we hadden een event over slavernij hier, en dat was een groot succes, allemaal sprekers, en de volgende dag kwam in de krant dat het Rijksmuseum een tentoonstelling over slavernij ging doen, en toen was onze directeur super gefrusteerd,

en die vond dat wij toen snel snel ook iets moesten doen. Dat is mijn indruk van hoe dat toen allemaal gegaan is. Wat natuurlijk niet wegneemt dat die onderliggende wens om iets over dit thema te doen er natuurlijk altijd al was, maar dat het dus uiteindelijk iets sneller is uitgevoerd dan we anders hadden gewild.

Hadden jullie een specifiek doel van de tentoonstelling, wat jullie hebben willen bereiken?

Ik denk dat onze hoop was dat we een tentoonstelling hebben willen maken waarin zowel mensen die al, laten we zeggen bekend zijn met deze geschiedenis en die er ook door getroffen worden in de hedendaagse leven, als ook mensen die er iets minder van weten, allebei de tentoonstelling konden bezoeken en daarin iets konden herkennen, en dan specifiek iets konden herkennen over hoe deze geschiedenis hun eigen leven vormt, en de wereld waarin ze leven. En dat was ook wel echt het idee qua, daarom heet het ook echt heden van het slavernijverleden, want we wilden onze historische collecties gebruiken om hedendaagse problematiek te duiden. En hopelijk de bezoeker te laten inzien dat ons heden gevormd is door onder andere koloniaal verleden. En dat idee dat toch wel heel erg heerst in de Nederlandse samenleving van 'dat is toch lang geleden, maakt allemaal niks meer uit, bla bla bla', om dat in de kraag te drukken. Dat was voor mij persoonlijk in ieder geval het doel, kan niet voor andere spreken.

Waarom was die samenwerking zo belangrijk voor jullie, dus ook met groepen van buiten het museum?

Om meerdere redenen. Ten eerste omdat wij gewoon niet alles weten, en daar ons ook heel bewust van zijn, en we samenwerken met mensen die heel erg veel meer weten over heel veel verschillende dingen. Dat was het eerste. Aan de andere kant ook omdat het heel belangrijk is om jezelf een spiegel voor te houden; in hoeverre komt het verhaal dat je wil vertellen ook echt over. En welke woorden gebruik je daarvoor, en hoe ga je ermee om. En ook omdat we denk ik heel erg actief wilden proberen om de stem van het museum, niet zo klein mogelijk te maken, maar wel zeker te weten dat we niet alleen maar vanuit het museum spreken, en ik denk dat dat uiteindelijk aan de basis lag, het idee dat we ons realiseren dat wij, dat idee van de autoriteit van het museum, de centraliteit van het museum als stem, dat dat echt in het verleden is, en dat als we vinden dat dat echt van het verleden is dat we daar ook naar moeten handelen.

Denk je dat het effectief is geweest, dat proces?

Ik denk zeker dat dat effectief is geweest, in de zin van dat het veel veranderingen in de tentoonstelling heeft opgeleverd, ten goede. Als we dit niet hadden gedaan, dat hele proces, had de tentoonstelling er heel anders uitgezien, was ook veel minder goed geweest denk ik. Niet om te zeggen dat die nu heel goed is, maar dan was die wel minder goed geworden. En ik denk dat zeker qua perspectief, maar ook qua keuze van verhalen enzo, misschien iets minder qua keuze van objecten, omdat dat toch onze collectie is en die kennen wij het beste, dat het wat dat betreft heel veel heeft opgeleverd en dat het heel verrijking heeft gegeven aan de tentoonstelling.

Zijn er dingen aan het proces die je nu anders zou doen?

In algemene zin zou ik zeggen we moeten gewoon meer tijd nemen voor dit soort dingen, maar ja, dat is beetje iedereen. Ik denk dat het interessant zou zijn geweest, maar ook dat hangt samen van tijd, als we, mochten we dit ooit nog doen, op deze manier, ook een klankbord groep hebben van mensen die niet specialisten zijn. We hadden nu, wat ook een logische normale, en op het moment ook ook op gegronde redenen, met mensen die specialist zijn, die heel goed weten hoe het in elkaar zit. Lijkt mij heel interessant om ook een keer gewoon een korte sessie te hebben met mensen die niet echt van straat plukt, maar wel bij wijze van spreke van straat plukt en waarbij je ook echt een dwarsdoorsnede van de bevolking hebt, van hoe komt het verhaal bij jullie aan en wat vinden jullie ervan, etc etc. zodat je daar nog sterker op kan inspelen. Want uiteindelijk als je alleen maar spreekt met mensen die het toch al weten, om het zo te zeggen, ontwikkel je ook per definitie een blinde vlek. Dus dat, als er in de toekomst nog zo iets is en we hebben de tijd ervoor zou ik dat heel graag doen.

Want is er sprake van in de nieuwe tentoonstelling in 2021, wordt een soortgelijk proces daarvoor ook in gang gezet? Of is al in gang gezet?

Denk ik wel, ik ben daar iets minder bij betrokken, maar ik kan me niet voorstellen dat ze dat niet zouden doen. Daarvoor is het ook een veel te groot ding, het wordt echt de hele eerste verdieping. Het is echt enorm, niet alleen fysiek, maar ook qua impact.

Waarom hadden jullie gekozen voor specifiek het perspectief van de tot slaafgemaakten?

Ik denk omdat we aan de ene kant omdat de objecten die we hebben door hun zijn gemaakt, tenminste het grote deel van de objecten die we laten zien. Aan de andere kant omdat we vonden dat er al genoeg tentoonstellingen waren die dat niet deden en we wel heel bewust wilden proberen over dezelfde geschiedenis een ander verhaal te maken. En niet alleen een verhaal dat over structuren en systemen gaat, maar een verhaal dat gaat over individuen. En dan ook niet alleen individuen die tot slaaf zijn gemaakt, maar ook zoals in die lijn van individuen die we ertussen hebben zitten, mensen die soort van die complexiteit van het systeem in zich dragen. Om te laten zien dat hoewel je het hebt over individuen, deze mensen allemaal in het systeem bleven wat je dringt tot een bepaalde keuze. En dat ook die mensen die aan de foute kant van de geschiedenis staan ook door dat systeem werden gedwongen om dat te doen. En het was gewoon een bewuste keuze om te zeggen wat nou als we een keer niet het verhaal vertellen vanuit de eerste nederlander kwam in 17 nogwat ..

Heb je het gevoel dat dat goed is bereikt in de tentoonstelling, om echt een ander perspectief te laten zien?

Mwa. Ik bedoel deels wel, ik denk dat er wel echt belangrijke, en dankzij die expert groep, niet zozeer dankzij onszelf, er echt wel belangrijke dingen zijn waarin je in de text terug kan zien dat we echt proberen te schrijven vanuit een bepaald perspectief. Aan de andere kant, is er natuurlijk ook een beetje bizar om te denken dat je kan schrijven vanuit dat perspectief. Dus ik denk dat het zeker gelukt is om een ander verhaal dan normaal te creëren, daar ben ik al heel blij mee. Maar of het echt gelukt is vanuit het perspectief van de mensen te schrijven, weet ik niet zeker. Zeker omdat we ook wel kunnen zeggen we maken een tentoonstelling die dit, want dat zou je dan wel nog kunnen doen, je zou kunnen zeggen we maken een tentoonstelling vanuit zwart perspectief, om te kijken naar deze geschiedenis. Maar ik ben zelf heel duidelijk niet zwart, dus ook dat vind ik een beetje leugenachtig om te zeggen dat we dat doen, weet je. Ik draag die geschiedenis niet op die manier in me. Dus ik denk we hebben ons best gedaan, en ik denk dat we ook best wel heel wat hebben bereikt daarin, maar het kan altijd beter.

Zijn er belangrijke aspecten die je zou willen dat bezoekers meenemen of oppakken eruit? Dat je zegt nou dat zijn dingen, als mensen langslopen, dat ze

Nou ik denk heel erg het idee van het is niet over, wat er gebeurd is, wat er gebeurd op die manier zo sterk gevormd dat het nog steeds speelt. En het idee van dat je er dus ook zelf iets aan kan doen. Je hoeft geen slachtoffer van de geschiedenis te zijn, en je hoeft je ook niet schuldig te voelen aan de geschiedenis, het enige wat je moet doen is zorgen dat je in het heden op een ethische manier met mensen omgaat. Ik weet dat het een beetje hoogdravend is en dat ik veel vraag van een tentoonstelling, maar dat is wel wat dit soort ideaal (inaudible).

Waarom hebben jullie de discussie sectie op zo'n manier weergegeven?

Omdat ik denk dat dat ook voorkwam uit het bewustzijn dat wij niet alles weten, en tegelijkertijd ook wilde dat dit een plek was waar mensen aan toe konden voegen of kritiek konden uiten. Weet je het is best een emotioneel onderwerp, dus als je daar je ei in kwijt kan zegmaar is dat best wel fijn. En als je dat in een bezoekersboek doet, waar je dan naar toe moet lopen, en is heel iets anders dan als het gewoon in de ruimte hangt en je er naar kan kijken, en het op die manier ook op dezelfde manier is vormgegeven als de tentoonstelling, waardoor het ook deel van de tentoonstelling wordt. Dus dat was voor mij heel belangrijk dat het soort van visueel niet heel erg zou detoneren met de rest van de tentoonstelling, zodat het duidelijk werd dat al die meningen en vragen die daar hingen voor ons integraal deel zijn voor de tentoonstelling, dat die stemmen deel zijn van de tentoonstelling.

Wat je vaak in Nederland hoort, en wat ook in andere onderzoeken die ook kijken naar slavernij, bijvoorbeeld in Engeland is een groot onderzoek geweest naar bezoekers van slavernijtentoonstellingen, en daar hebben ze heel veel antwoorden gekregen van 'het is lang geleden, het was een andere moraal, Afrikanen deden er zelf ook aan mee', dat soort antwoorden. Maar op de briefjes komen die eigenlijke helemaal niet zo heel vaak terug. Verbaasd je dat? Of waarom denk je dat dat is? Had je erop gerekend of gehoopt?

Cool. Interessant! Nou ik denk dat het deels te maken heeft met het soort vragen die wij stellen. De vragen zijn natuurlijk heel persoonlijk. Ik bedoel 'wat betekent vrijheid voor jou' 'waar verzet jij je tegen', het gaat niet over, het is iets heel anders dan wanneer iemand naar je toekomt van wat vind jij van slavernij? En ik heb niet alle briefjes

gelezen, maar ik zag wel dat er af en toe in sommige van die dingen ook wel stond, in de meer vrije van 'wat mist er' dat er wel dat soort dingen wel in stond.

Ja het komt wel voor maar het is geen meerderheid ofzo

Het valt wat dat betreft wel mee ja. Ik had laatst foto gemaakt van onder andere van Tina, negen jaar oud, waar verzet jij je tegen? 'Minder chocola'. Maar bijvoorbeeld ook mis je iets in deze tentoonstelling of heb je een verhaal wat je zou willen delen? 'Ik vind dat mensen zich aanstellen over Pieten en vuurwerk enzo, het is traditie', maar ook bijvoorbeeld, en die hing ernaast, 'een nadruk op verzet is goed en belangrijk, maar het blijft het stereotype idee van de koloniale onderdrukker en onderdrukte tot slaafgemaakte reproduceren, immers de enige agency die de tot slaafgemaakte krijgt is een reactie op de structuur die door de koloniale overheersers zijn bedacht.' Ik had niet echt verwacht dat we dat soort reacties zouden krijgen. Dus dat vind ik wel heel cool dat je ziet dat er echt een enorme range is van kinderen die zeggen ik verzet me tegen boeven ofzo, en dit soort mensen die heel gearticuleerd er iets over zeggen. Maar dat vind ik juist heel leuk eraan, juist wat je traditioneel zou bekijken als ruis zegmaar. En we hebben ook wel een paar reacties gekregen, maar niet zo veel, van mensen die per email bijvoorbeeld zeggen 'jullie zijn tegen zwarte piet dus ik kom nooit meer terug', maar het valt me heel erg mee inderdaad. En of dat nou is omdat we sowieso een museum zijn waar mensen die dat misschien denken niet zo snel naar toe komen, dat weet ik niet zeker, ik denk wel dat het meespeelt, en ik denk dat het andere misschien ook te maken heeft met de persoonlijke vragen.

Ik had een quote van een van de reviews, in het Engels, "Meanwhile, this exhibition seems to imply that a post-colonial world is built by the mere acknowledgement of the colonial past, which raises the question as to whether the conversation on race in the Netherlands is in such an embryonic stage that this may be seen as an important achievement" (ContemporaryAnd). Wat denk je hiervan? Ben je het hiermee eens, of zou je zeggen dit vind ik wat te ver gaan?

Dat is zelf niet hoe ik de tentoonstelling zie. In ieder geval, ik denk juist het feit dat we die spoken words erin hebben, die heel erg gaan over wat betekend het in het heden, maar ook het feit dat we dingen over die protesten hebben en het deel over de black archives, dat die meer zijn dan alleen maar een acknowledgement of the colonial past. Dat die veel verder gaan en zeggen ja, het is niet alleen het colonial past, het gaat over het heden, en dat verleden in het heden.

Ik weet natuurlijk niet wie dit heeft geschreven, en waar hij of zij vandaan komt,
Het was van een website heet contemporaryand, en is een internationaal platform voor culturele en kunst kritiek.

Want ik kan me voorstellen dat je uit een hele andere context qua land het dan misschien anders is, ik bedoel, daar kan ik ook niet over oordelen want ik kom dat zelf niet. Maar laat ik zeggen dat ikzelf dat niet heel erg in de tentoonstelling zie. Ik heb absoluut niet het idee dat de tentoonstelling alleen maar gaat over kijk dit was het koloniale verleden.

En het feit dat de 'conservation on race is in such an embryonic stage in the Netherlands'?

Ja dat is wel waar denk ik. Dat is iets anders, daar ben ik het niet mee oneens, maar ik heb niet het idee dat dat persees, maar misschien kan ik dat niet inschatten want ik heb de tentoonstelling gemaakt, dat dat persees is wat er spreekt uit deze tentoonstelling. Dat is in ieder geval niet de bedoeling dat dat uit de tentoonstelling zou spreken.

Het gedeelde verleden is iets wat veel terugkomt in de tentoonstelling zelf, en wat ook in de briefjes veel terugkomt, maar ik heb ook naar reviews gekeken en daar komt het minder vaak in terug. Waarom zou dat zijn denk je?

Wat komt er dan wel in de reviews terug?

Discussion as aim of the exhibition, perspective and agency of the enslaved, an unfinished story, tone of the exhibition

Misschien kan je denk ik wel zeggen dat het unfinished story gaat wel degelijk over een gedeeld verleden en een gedeeld heden. En ja ik denk wel op een of andere manier dat je ervoor kiest om een tentoonstelling te maken op de manier waarop wij nu hebben gedaan, dat dat idee van een gedeeld verleden minder over kan komen in zekere zin. Omdat het heel erg gaat over de ervaring van mensen die tot slaaf zijn gemaakt, het gaat heel erg over de mensen die de effecten daarvan nu ondervinden, maar het gaat veel minder over de mensen die dat delen, diegene die daar schuldig aan waren. Wat automatisch impliceert dat je die een beetje onzichtbaar maakt, er is een soort van onzichtbare hand die dit allemaal doet, maar die maak je niet expliciet in de tentoonstelling. Wat denk ik wel dat gedeelde verleden veel minder benadrukt. Dat had ik me trouwens nooit zo bedacht, dus dat realiseer ik me nu voor het eerst. Dus ik denk dat dat wel mee kan spelen ook, het feit dat wij, alleen al als we het over keti koti

hebben en het feit is dat voor alle Nederlanders of niet, dan hebben we het expliciet over is dat nou een gedeeld verleden of niet. Terwijl de rest van de tentoonstelling veel meer is wat gebeurt er op dat moment met deze mensen.

Als je nu terugkijkt zijn er dingen die je anders zou doen? En zijn er dingen waarvan je zegt die zijn heel geslaagd, die moeten we houden?

Ja wat ik zelf heel erg een gemiste kans vind, en ik snap nog steeds niet zo heel goed hoe dat precies gebeurd is, is dat we het helemaal niet hebben over de inheemse bevolking in de tentoonstelling. Dat is een van de dingen die ik bij mezelf op een soort prioriteiten lijst had gezet toen we begonnen aan het proces, dit mogen we echt niet vergeten want deze mensen worden altijd vergeten. En toch zijn we in deze tentoonstelling ook weer die mensen grotendeels vergeten, behalve een beetje als we het hebben over de koloniale tentoonstelling van 1883, waarin bepaalde inheemse mensen ook tentoon gesteld werden. Maar niet zozeer de impact van het koloniale systeem en de slavernij op hun, dus dat vind ik wel echt een gemiste kans, dat zou ik anders doen.

Verder, als je alle tijd en ruimte zou hebben zou je deze tentoonstelling ook over Indonesië en Sri Lanka en Ghana en Zuid-Afrika hebben, maar daar gaat dus ook die grote tentoonstelling in 2021 over.

En wat goed is, waar ik het meest tevreden over ben zijn de spoken words, ik vind dat die echt alle aspecten van de tentoonstelling het meest belichamen. Daar hebben we natuurlijk zelf de minste credits aan, want dat zijn die mensen zelf die die spoken words hebben geschreven. Maar ik vind dat dat echt heel erg goed werkt, dat is heel erg poveren waar het over gaat, voor wie en waarom. En heel erg vatten wat zowel het heden als het verleden is. Dus dat zou wat mij betreft sowieso, zouden andere mensen nog een keer voor ons het werken mogen doen.

Appendix 2: Interview Robin Lelijveld

Interviewee Robin Lelijveld, researcher RCMC

Interviewer: Jacoline Buirma (Italic)

Location: Volkenkunde museum

Date: 05-06-2019

Wat was jou rol precies in het maken van de tentoonstelling?

Ik was betrokken als onderzoeker, dat was mijn titel, en ik werd teruggevraagd door Wayne, ik was op dat moment nog niet in dienst hier, ik zat op dat moment ergens anders, omdat er hulp nodig was. En toen ben ik dus ingestapt in het team met Martin en Richard.

Waarom deze tentoonstelling, waarom zijn jullie hem gaan maken, hoe zijn jullie op het idee gekomen?

Ik denk meerdere redenen. Een omdat er in het Tropenmuseum op dat moment niks over slavernij te vinden was. Twee omdat we heel erg bezig zijn met de thematiek, wat betekent het nou om te decoloniseren als museum, slavernij is daarin heel erg voor de hand liggend. En volgens mij lag het idee er ook al een tijdje, dat is wat ik begrepen heb, ik weet dat Wayne [Modest] er al een tijdje mee bezig was, maar dat is dus voor mijn tijd, en dat hij dat dus heeft opgepakt met Martin en Richard, om dat door te zetten. Dus hij had ook heel specifiek het idee over dat het niet een historische tentoonstelling moest zijn, maar echt over het heden.

Wat was specifiek het doel van de tentoonstelling? Is er iets wat jullie specifiek hebben willen bereiken?

Ja, ik denk mensen echt actief aan het denken laten zetten over wat deze geschiedenis betekend voor hen persoonlijk. Dus, omdat er heel vaak in Nederland argumenten worden gebruikt in debatten van 'het is niet onze geschiedenis, het is jullie geschiedenis, het is van daar en niet van hier', er zijn zoveel mensen die zijn gewoon niet bewust van hoe die geschiedenis doorleeft, en hoe dat impact ook heeft op hoe zij daarop in dit systeem meedraaien eigenlijk. Dus ik denk dat dat het grootste doel was.

Waarom was samenwerking zo belangrijk?

Omdat we ons allemaal realiseerde dat je als museum niet neutraal bent, klinkt cliché natuurlijk, maar ja, dat je gewoon niet de autoritaire stem kan zijn in dit verhaal. Dat vooral. Dus dat je veel meer mensen erbij moet betrekken. En ook omdat het was ook een beetje een experiment met samenwerking, deze tentoonstelling, dus we hebben niet een ideaal model ofzo waarin we dat doen. We doen dat veel langer, we werken samen met partijen bij tentoonstellingen enzo, alleen nu hebben we heel actief geprobeerd in een heel vroeg stadium van de tentoonstelling mensen erbij te betrekken. En ik denk dat dat, ik weet niet goed hoe dat in andere tentoonstellingen werkt, maar voor mij was dat in elk geval heel nieuw. Dus mensen echt mee brengen in de klankbord groep, en dingen terugkoppelen, en ook inhoud van de tentoonstelling qua objecten. En je stelt je daardoor op een bepaalde manier heel kwetsbaar mee op. Maar het is wel echt super waardevol.

Denk je dat het effect heeft gehad, dat hele proces? Wat voor soort effect denk je dat het heeft gehad?

Ja, zeker, absoluut. Het meest zichtbaar vond ik het zelf in dat we de teksten schreven, en dat wij allemaal dachten, ja we zitten toch vrij in het onderwerp, en we zijn heel erg bewust van al die structuren en racisme enzo, en dan schrijven we die tekst en die leggen we dan voor aan #decolonizethemuseum, en ook aan die klankgroep trouwens, en dan haalden die er echt dingen uit en zeiden je kan het ook anders doen, want dit is best wel vanuit de koloniserende partij geschreven. Dus in zekere zin hebben ze echt veel invloed gehad op de inhoud van de tentoonstelling. Ook de thema's hebben we met hen echt besproken, en ik denk dat die echt wel grotendeels gevormd zijn door die gesprekken met hen.

Zijn er dingen die je anders zou doen volgende keer?

Dat vind ik heel lastig om te zeggen, omdat ik er natuurlijk net iets later bij kwam, dus ik weet niet precies hoe en wanneer de mensen benaderd zijn. Maar vrijwel iedereen kwam uit ons netwerk, dus daar hadden we al eerder dingen mee gedaan. Hoe zou ik het anders doen? We hebben het afgelopen jaar met Nancy Jouwe, van Mapping Slavery, die was betrokken als onderdeel van de klankbordgroep, daar hebben we nog een installatie mee gemaakt, dus dat kwam wat later. Maar eigenlijk hebben we, zien we iedereen nog in het veld, en kom je mensen nog vaak tegen, dus je praat wel bij over de

tentoonstelling, over wat er allemaal gebeurd, en we hebben natuurlijk dit gemaakt [points to Co-Lab]. Dus misschien, ik denk dat idealiter kom je ook weer terug bij mensen nadat de tentoonstelling staat, en ik denk dat wij dat wel gedaan hebben, onder andere met dit [Co-Lab].

Dus dat dat proces niet stopt met de opening.

Ja dat sowieso. En ik vermoed ook dat wij deze mensen, of in ieder geval een deel van deze mensen, waarschijnlijk allemaal mee gaan nemen in De Erfenis. Dus dat je op basis van wat er nu staat met elkaar kunt evalueren. Ik denk dat ik dat zou doen.

Dus dat je vooral door blijft werken aan het proces.

Ja, dus dat je er ook nieuwe mensen weer bij haalt. Zo zou ik het willen doen denk ik.

Waarom hebben jullie gekozen voor het perspectief van de tot slaafgemaakten?

Precies om de reden van die autoritaire stem van het museum. En ook omdat het een verhaal is dat vaak verteld wordt vanuit niet de stem van de tot slaafgemaakte, en tegelijkertijd is het ergens ook, voor mij persoonlijk, ik ben wit, ben vrouw, kom uit nederland, heb geen ouders die ergens anders vandaan komen, dus het voelt ergens in mijn hoofd soms wel eens gek om dat te zeggen, we hebben geschreven vanuit het perspectief van. Maar dat was wel heel bewust, om een keer ander verhaal neer te zetten, en om juist de verhalen die vaak in tentoonstellingen over de slavernij voorkomen, dus over de passieve slachtoffers, over het leiden en over trauma's, dat is een groot onderdeel van het verhaal, dat is heel belangrijk, maar om ook een keer te laten zien: het gaat ook over kracht en hoe die mensen de kracht vonden om met het systeem om te gaan. Dat is ook een bepaalde vorm van, beetje zoeken naar, dat heb ik geloof ik ook in het stukje [in Co-Lab] geschreven, kan zoiets werken als een vorm van healing. Als je erover praat met elkaar en je het omdraait, het perspectief.

Heb je het gevoel dat jullie dat hebben bereikt, of hebben kunnen bereiken?

Dat vind ik een heel lastige vraag, dat vind ik lastig om over te oordelen. Ik denk dat, het enige wat ik zie, hoe lang zijn we nu open, anderhalf jaar? We krijgen zoveel verzoeken van studenten, uit de universiteit, vanuit andere musea, andere culturele instellingen, Reinwardt, allemaal mensen die geïnteresseerd zijn in de tentoonstelling, en die langs willen komen. Die mogelijkheid is er omdat die zolang staat, niet zoals veel andere tentoonstellingen die vaak maar 3 of 6 maanden staan. Maar er is veel interesse, en ik weet dus niet of we specifiek dat bereikt hebben als we het hebben over healing en zo.

Maar ik denk dat het voor sommige mensen wel een belangrijk verhaal is wat we vertellen. En dat we daar wel in geslaagd zijn, en je leest het soms ook wel op die kaartjes he, van 'oh dat wist ik niet, dank je wel'. Dus ik denk dat als het er maar een is die zich dat realiseert, dan is het al een succes.

Wat zijn belangrijke aspecten die je zou willen dat mensen meenemen of onthouden van de tentoonstelling?

Hoe ingesleten discriminatie en racisme is in de samenleving. Dat vooral. Dus hoe er nog steeds heel veel ongelijkheden bestaan waar mensen zich niet van bewust zijn, en dat ze daar zelf aan mee doen, niet bewust. Maar dat ze wel, dat de wereld niet iedereen dezelfde kansen biedt, en dat de reden daarvan in een tijd terug ligt.

Waarom hebben jullie de discussie op deze manier vormgegeven?

Ook vanuit de gedachte dat, daar was ik verder niet bij betrokken, maar omdat het zo'n activerende tentoonstelling moest zijn, en dus de stem van de bezoeker dus heel belangrijk is, en we ook echt met mensen in gesprek willen gaan, en een platform voor discussie en dialoog moet de tentoonstelling zijn, staat dat centraal. Dus ook fysiek hebben de ontwerpers het in het midden neergezet.

Het gedeelde verleden is ook iets wat veel terug komt in de tentoonstelling, en wordt ook best veel genoemd in de briefjes. Maar ik heb ook naar veel reviews gekeken en daar komt dat idee veel minder in terug. Waarom zou dat kunnen zijn denk je? Verbaasd je dat?

Het verbaasd me enigszins, omdat dit wel een thema is dat opgepakt wordt door heel veel verschillende culturele instellingen, en ook het RCE heeft een gedeeld verleden programma, en er zijn veel activiteiten met het woord gedeeld verleden. Dus als ik eerlijk ben verbaasd het me dat die stukken er niet over spreken. Goeie vraag, lastige vraag. Ja misschien ook omdat mensen, prive, dan misschien door die tentoonstelling gaan nadenken van 'oh mijn buurman is Surinaams, wat zou dit voor hem betekenen, en wat betekend het dat we naast elkaar wonen'. Dit weet ik niet hoor, dat dit zo is, maar ik kan me voorstellen, en dat is wat we hopen, dat de tentoonstelling ook reflectie terweeg brengt.

Wat je vaak in Nederland hoort, en wat ook in andere onderzoeken die ook kijken naar slavernij, bijvoorbeeld in Engeland is een groot onderzoek geweest naar bezoekers van slavernijtentoonstellingen, en daar hebben ze heel veel antwoorden gekregen van 'het is lang geleden, het was een andere moraal, Afrikanen deden er zelf ook aan mee', dat soort antwoorden. Maar op de briefjes komen die eigenlijke helemaal niet zo heel vaak terug, komt een beetje voor, maar niet super veel. Verbaasd je dat? Of waarom denk je dat dat is? Had je erop gerekend of gehoopt?

Nou ik vond het wel meevallen inderdaad, ik had het iets anders opgepakt, maar misschien ook omdat je er dan specifiek naar zoekt, maar ik vond juist wel dat er mensen waren, inderdaad niet heel veel, die zeiden van 'ja maar de Afrikanen deden dat zelf ook, en die hebben dat allemaal mogelijk gemaakt, en eigenlijk dat ging allemaal weer terug naar de Turken' dat kwam een aantal keer voor. Maar tegelijkertijd kwam, in dat stukje van wat mis je in de tentoonstelling, ook wel dat soort dingen terug, van slavernij in Afrika. Ja daar kan je natuurlijk meerdere dingen in lezen, maar...

Ja maar zelfs binnen de vraag wat mis je in de tentoonstelling was dat geen meerderheid van briefjes die zulk soort argumenten en dat soort dingen opschreven.

Nee, dat soort dingen waren geen meerderheid inderdaad.

Verbaasd je dat, of waarom denk je dat dat zou kunnen zijn?

Omdat ik denk dat een heel groot deel van de Nederlandse bevolking überhaupt geen idee heeft over de geschiedenis van de slavernij. Dus dat ze ook niet weten dat er überhaupt, dat ze bijna niet eens weten dat tot slaafgemaakten uit Afrika gehaald werden, dus laat staan wat er überhaupt in Afrika gebeurt. Dat denk ik. En dat ligt dus voor een groot deel bij het onderwijs ook. Heb jij zelf les gehad over slavernij?

Nauwelijks. Een beetje, over die driehoekshandel, dat schepen naar Afrika gingen, en dan met slaven naar Zuid-Amerika gingen en met suiker terug naar Nederland. En dat was het dan.

Ja, echt minimaal. Ik ook nauwelijks. Koloniaal dan wel, maar dat was de VOC. Ik denk dat dat wel een belangrijke reden is dat mensen dat argument minder gebruiken.

Maar ook argumenten als 'het was een andere moraal in die tijd' hoor je ook niet heel veel.

Nee, het komt niet heel veel terug op de kaartjes, dat klopt. Het kan ook zijn, ik weet niet hoe jij daarover denkt, jij hebt er natuurlijk ook gelezen, maar ik vond sowieso dat de meerderheid van de kaartjes leek te corresponderen met wat wij in de tentoonstelling deden. Het wordt vaak niet bezocht door rechtse, even stereotyperend

Geert Wilders-stemmer uit Limburg, maar vaak door mensen die toch geïnteresseerd zijn in culturen. (inaudible) die toch op hun manier verbonden zijn, dus ik denk ook wel dat dat meespeelt, zeker. We kregen heel weinig kritiek op de kaartjes. En daarom, dat is wel grappig, want ik ben nu bezig met een onderzoeksproject naar die kaartjes, van wat kunnen we ermee doen, wat doen we ermee in de toekomst, wat staat er nou precies, en dan ga je ook daarover nadenken van welke stem mis je nou precies. Want het is best wel, niet eenzijdig zozeer, maar ergens ook weer wel. Want het filtert het sowieso al uit wie het museum in komt, en dat zijn gewoon niet alle mensen. En dat realiseert het museum zich natuurlijk ook heel goed.

Ik had een quote van een van de reviews, in het Engels, "Meanwhile, this exhibition seems to imply that a post-colonial world is built by the mere acknowledgement of the colonial past, which raises the question as to whether the conversation on race in the Netherlands is in such an embryonic stage that this may be seen as an important achievement" (ContemporaryAnd). Wat denk je hiervan? Ben je het hiermee eens, of zou je zeggen dit vind ik wat te ver gaan?

Nou hij zegt wel dus ook dat het een stap is in het embryonische proces waar we nu in zitten, zo vat ik hem op. Ik vraag mezelf überhaupt soms wel af wat is het nou precies dat wat we in een tentoonstelling kunnen doen, en kunnen bereiken. Ik denk dat het zeker waar is wat deze persoon zegt dat de conversaties over ras heel minimaal zijn, en dat het echt met fluwelen handschoentjes ook nog worden aangepakt. We hadden natuurlijk in Februari ook een event over *Circulating Race*, en daar hebben we ook wel heel bewust over nagedacht van hoe gaan we dat nu naar buiten brengen. Je wilt niet dat het een soort van ziek polariserende avond wordt waar alleen maar schreeuwers komen van fock Zwarte Piet, Nederland Zwarte Piet, je wilt verder gaan dan dat. En het is nog steeds zo dat het onderwerp ras, voor veel mensen bestaat niet bijna, die zitten een beetje van 'ja dus wat is het probleem precies'. En ja, ik snap wel wat deze persoon zegt, natuurlijk, het is een erkenning van dit verleden. Maar ik denk wel dat dit de eerste tentoonstelling is, vind ik ook wel een beetje jezelf een schouderklopje geven, maar ik denk wel dat dit de eerste tentoonstelling is die op een actieve manier probeert die relatie te leggen tussen het hedendaagse racisme en de slavernij en koloniale geschiedenis. Die tentoonstellingen over slavernij voorheen kwam dat minder aan de orde. Dus ik denk, dat dat wel een achievement is op een bepaalde manier. Dat dus die discussie durven aan te gaan. En veel musea vinden, het is ook lastig, het is heel

kwetsbaar, je haalt veel shit over je heen, je kan een podium worden waar andere mensen gekwetst worden. Dus het is ook een bepaalde angst om dit onderwerp te bespreken.

Aan de andere kant, komt in de briefjes het activisme best wel naar voren, er zijn best veel briefjes die actief verwoord zijn, van oh hier moeten we wat tegen doen, of die andere mensen aansporen, dus dat dat best wel actieve retoriek is. Denk je dat dat te maken heeft met het thema van activisme en de nadruk op agency en activisme van de tentoonstelling zelf?

Ja, dat zou kunnen, ja dat denk ik wel. Ik denk ook dat het gewoon door heel veel mensen bezocht wordt die het heel erg aan het hart gaat. Ik weet niet of je dat perse activisme kan noemen, maar wel,

Ja activisme is dan misschien een groot woord, maar wel een bepaalde actieve houding in elk geval.

Ja, ja precies. Ja ik denk dat dat wel meespeelt. Dat het publiek zal voor een groot deel heel veel bij voelen en denken, dat helpt al. En ik denk zeker dat die nadruk op kracht en creativiteit en veerkracht, wat in Engeland hiervoor al gebeurde, en wat je in Nederland ook steeds meer wel ziet gebeuren, dat die nadruk daar zeker wel bij zal helpen, het brengt je in een bepaalde denkkaders. Denk ik, hoop ik! Als je een thema verzet ziet, of een thema, hoe beweeg je je door zo'n systeem, hoe vind je de kracht om daar mee om te gaan, dat dat zeker wel iets oproept van 'ja inderdaad'. Ja dat denk ik wel.

Ja daar lijkt het in elk geval wel op, veel mensen reageren wel op zo'n manier.

Ja, denk ik ook.

Als je nu terugkijkt, zijn er dingen die je anders zou doen, of dingen die je heel erg geslaagd vindt?

Nou ik zou zeker, en dat is precies waarom we dat onderzoeks project doen, iets met participatie doen, op welke manier ook. Ik zou niet weten op welke manier precies maar dat komt er sowieso in terug. Wat we ook sowieso mee gaan nemen is die nadruk op het heden. En wat ik minder goed vind werken is, dat is meer een deel van de tentoonstelling, is het deel over de toekomst. Die vind ik niet zo sterk zelf, ik merk ook zelf als ik een rondleiding geef ofzo dat ik erg blijf hangen in de middenzaal, die thema's zijn heel sterk, en dan neem ik mensen meestal nog wel mee naar de namenlijst, maar het deel met die puzzel en die twee Afrikaanse leiders die zich hadden uitgesproken

over excuses etc etc, dat vind ik zwak op een bepaalde manier. En dat wisten we denk ik, we stellen daar gewoon vragen van hoe nu verder, is het herdenken, is het feestvieren, is het keti koti, dat zou ik anders doen in de andere tentoonstelling denk. Hoe weet ik niet zo goed. Maar met dat stukje heb ik moeite zelf. En ik zou toch nog iets meer de rol van het museum erin verwerken, als koloniaal instituut. Dat komt nu wel aan de orde maar is nu niet heel zichtbaar, en ik denk dat we in De Erfenis daar meer mee gaan doen. Ook omdat je dan een veel groter deel van het gebouw hebt. Het gebouw zit natuurlijk ook super vol met beelden, dat je daar ook iets mee kan doen.

Appendix 3: Overview of reviews

Title	Writer	Media	Type of media
<i>National newspapers</i>			
The Tropenmuseum takes the lead in 'decolonization' ²⁶	Leendert van der Valk	NRC	Dutch liberal national newspaper
Tropenmuseum: confrontation with the history of slavery and a trip through fashionable Africa ²⁷	Wim Bossema	De Volkskrant	Dutch left-wing national newspaper, aims at higher educated readers
What makes a human being a human being? Slavery exhibition makes visitors think ²⁸	Lidwien Dobber	Trouw	Dutch national newspaper, often has attention for ethical, religious and social issues
Tropenmuseum wants to make you think about the history of slavery ²⁹	No author	Het Parool	Dutch social-democratic national newspaper
Stereotypes from times of slavery still continue today ³⁰	Lambert Teuwissen	NOS	Dutch public news broadcasting
<i>Special interest groups</i>			
How do you, as a contemporary museum, deal with the heritages of slavery ³¹	No author	Studio I	Platform for inclusive culture, aimed at museums
Afterlives of slavery	No author	Afro magazine	Magazine for representation in art
The Tropenmuseum: coming to terms with the colonial past?	Tom van der Aart (public history student)	Public History Amsterdam	Blog on public history from the University of Amsterdam
Afterlives of slavery	No author	Museum tijdschrift	Magazine for museum

²⁶ Original title: Het Tropenmuseum gaat voorop in 'dekolonisatie'

²⁷ Original title: Tropenmuseum: confrontatie met slavernijverleden en een trip door modieus Afrika

²⁸ Original title: Wat maakt een mens tot mens? Slavernijtentoonstelling zet bezoeker aan het denken.

²⁹ Original title: Tropenmuseum wil laten nadenken over slavernijverleden

³⁰ Original title: Stereotypen uit slavernijtijd werken nog altijd door

³¹ Original title: Hoe ga je als hedendaags museum om met de erfenissen van slavernij

			enthusiasts, information on exhibitions
Tropenmuseum wants to change the outlook on history of slavery ³²	Tessa Hofland	Historici.nl	Open platform for historians and history experts and professionals
Afterlives of slavery	No author	Museumkaart.nl	Website of the national museum pass
What we still notice today of slavery ³³	No author	Cjp	Website for culture pass for the youth

Opinion

At the exhibition Afterlives of Slavery you learn what wasn't in in your history books ³⁴	Nugah Shrestha	Vrij Nederland	Dutch opinion magazine, slightly left in nature
The museum of the evil conscious ³⁵	Abram de Swaan	De groene amsterdammer	Dutch opinion magazine, generally considered left- liberal
Museums are decolonizing: Richard Kofi retells the history of slavery ³⁶	Lonneke van Genugten	De Volkskrant Opinie	Dutch left-wing national newspaper, aims at higher educated readers
Slavery is hot, but please do it in children's language ³⁷	Auke Kok	NRC Opinie	Dutch liberal national newspaper
The Tropenmuseum about the afterlives of slavery ³⁸	Rosanne Beentjes	Socialisme.nu	News and opinion website, socialistic in nature
Analyzing the past and decolonizing the future	Heiter Augusto	ContemporaryAnd.com	Art magazine and dynamic space on contemporary art from Africa

³² Original title: Tropenmuseum wil kijk op slavernijverleden veranderen

³³ Original title: Wat we vandaag nog merken van de slavernij

³⁴ Original title: Op de tentoonstelling 'Heden van het Slavernijverleden' leer je wat niet in je schoolboeken stond

³⁵ Original title: Het museum van het kwade geweten

³⁶ Original title: Musea dekoloniseren: Richard Kofi hervertelt de slavernijgeschiedenis

³⁷ Original title: Slavernij is hot, maar dan graag in kindertaal

³⁸ Original title: Het Tropenmuseum over het heden van het slavernijverleden

Local news and information

Exhibition Afterlives of Slavery in the Tropenmuseum	No author	Waterkant.net	News about Suriname
Exhibition Afterlives of Slavery	No author	Zuidoost.nl	News and information on Amsterdam Zuidoost, the area in which the Tropenmuseum is located
Afterlives of Slavery: a permanent exhibition in the Tropenmuseum	No author	HelloAmsterdam.com	Online city guide

Appendix 4: Frequently recurring themes in the reviews

	Reviews not using press release text	Reviews using press release	Total number of reviews
Total	13 NRC, De Volkskrant, Trouw, Het Parool, NOS, Vrij Nederland, De Groene Amsterdammer, NRC Opinie, Volkskrant Opinie, Socialisme.nu, Public History Amsterdam, Historici.nl, ContemporaryAnd,	8 Studiol, AfroMagazine, Museum Tijdschrift, Museumkaart, CJP, Waterkant, Zuidoost, Hello Amsterdam	21
<i>Mention of:</i>			
Discussion as aim of the exhibition	6 NRC, De Volkskrant, Trouw, NOS, Volkskrant Opinie, Historici.nl,	5 Studiol, AfroMagazine, Museum Tijdschrift, Waterkant, Hello Amsterdam	11
Visitor comments section	9 NRC, De Volkskrant, Trouw, Het Parool, NOS, Vrij Nederland, De Groene Amsterdammer, NRC Opinie, Socialisme.nu,	5 Studiol, AfroMagazine, Museum Tijdschrift, Waterkant, Zuidoost	14
Shared past	4 Trouw, Het Parool, NOS, Vrij Nederland,	4 Studiol, AfroMagazine, Museum	8

		Tijdschrift, Museumkaart,	
Perspective of the enslaved	5 NRC, NOS, Volkskrant Opinie, Socialisme.nu, Public History Amsterdam,	3 Studiol, Waterkant, Hello Amsterdam	8
Agency of the enslaved is central	6 Trouw, NOS, De Groene Amsterdammer, Volkskrant Opinie, Socialisme.nu, Historici.nl,	1 Studiol,	7
Collaboration	4 NRC, Vrij Nederland, Historici.nl, ContemporaryAnd,	5 Studiol, AfroMagazine, Museum Tijdschrift, Waterkant, Zuidoost	9
Decolonization	6 NRC, Vrij Nederland, De Groene Amsterdammer, Public History Amsterdam, Historici.nl, ContemporaryAnd,	0	6
Exhibition is linking past to present	6 Trouw, NOS, Vrij Nederland, De Groene Amsterdammer, Socialisme.nu, Historici.nl,	8 Studiol, AfroMagazine, Museum Tijdschrift, Museumkaart, CJP, Waterkant, Zuidoost , Hello Amsterdam	14
Slavery is not a finished story	4	3 AfroMagazine, Museum	7

	NOS, Vrij Nederland, De Groene Amsterdammer, Historici.nl,	Tijdschrift, Waterkant,	
Racism as power structure	7 NRC, De Volkskrant, Vrij Nederland, NRC Opinie, Volkskrant Opinie, Socialisme.nu, ContemporaryAnd,	0	7
Zwarte Piet	7 NRC, Het Parool, NOS, Vrij Nederland, De Groene Amsterdammer, Socialisme.nu, Historici.nl,	0	7
<i>Values:</i>			
Educative value	3 De Groene Amsterdammer, Public History Amsterdam,	1 Hello Amsterdam	4
Step in right direction?	7 De Volkskrant, Vrij Nederland, De Groene Amsterdammer, NRC Opinie, Socialisme.nu, Public History Amsterdam, ContemporaryAnd,	0	7
Exhibition does not want to be moralistic	5 NRC, De Volkskrant, Trouw, NOS, ContemporaryAnd,	0	5
<i>Visitor experience:</i>			
Comment on text	4 NRC, De Groene Amsterdammer, NRC Opinie, Socialisme.nu,	0	4
Comment on (number of) objects	5 NRC, De Volkskrant, De Groene Amsterdammer, Socialisme.nu, Historici.nl,	0	5

Is it emotional or touching?	7 NRC, De Volkskrant, NOS, De Groene Amsterdammer, NRC Opinie, Volkskrant Opinie, Socialisme.nu,	1 Hello Amsterdam	8
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