Unifying the Past and the Present

Using the Museum as a Space to Counteract Modern Racism by Presenting the Sensitive Heritage of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Netherlands and Britain

Hedwig Oldenkamp

Cover Image: one of the displays of the ‘Afterlives of Slavery’ exhibition in the Tropenmuseum Amsterdam (photo by author).

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Preface

It took me almost three years to start a new master thesis after the first one received negative commentary and was assessed as unsatisfactory. Three years wherein I had to rediscover myself and find out how to find something that was compatible with both my chosen study and my changing interests. I want to thank my parents for giving me the space to do so instead of pressuring me into starting a new research before being ready. Because I was allowed to take my time, I ended up with a research topic I did not only find interesting, but one I became very passionate about along the way. One that combined my interest in the past and history and my wish to do something meaningful for the society I live in. I want to thank my supervisor, dr Llanes Ortiz, for helping me find this topic, guiding my personal interests so that they fit within the academic requirements. Thank you also for keeping it positive and for not judging the many changes, delays, and struggles I had along the way. It would truly have been an impossible task without your support. Lastly, I want to thank my friends at the place that has become my second home, and one in particular. Thank you for the time outs, the many, many coffees and grilled cheese, the laughs, and the support. Without you, I would have given up long before getting close to being finished. And love, thank you for finding me there and becoming the most positive result that ever came out of a failed attempt to graduate!

Chapter 1 - Introduction

On November 17th 2019 an incident took place during a Dutch football game that received national attention: player Ahmad Mendes Moreira was verbally abused by several supporters based on his skin tone. He was called C-nigger, cotton picker and black Pete (www.NOS.nl). The referee paused the game for about twenty minutes, wherein the players retreated to their changing rooms, before resuming the game.

In the summer of 2019, a news article was published that presented the results of a sample research conducted by the *Inspectie Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid* (inspection for social affairs and employment). It showed that 40% of the employment agencies that are not part of branche-organisations (resp. the *ABU and NBBU*) abode the request not to forward CV's from foreign (temporary) workers (www.nu.nl). *The Country Report - Non-Discrimination - The Netherlands* states that ethnic discrimination on the labour market (both for graduates and undergraduates) is widespread (Holtmaat and Loenen 2018, 10).

In the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, at the opinion panel of the exhibition '*Heden van het Slavernijverleden'* (Afterlives of Slavery), an eight year old girl had written about how her schoolmates call her names because she has a dark skin (interview with Robin Lelijveld, appendix A, page 113).

1.1 Research Problems

These examples show that racism and discrimination based on "race" are still, and often, present in Dutch society; a different skin tone or a last name that sounds "foreign" are reasons to treat people differently. Although the first example proves that racism towards people of all African descent is still present, it is often discrimination of people of Moroccan, Turkish or Syrian origin that springs to mind in discussing contemporary racism. This is understandable, as these are the targeted people of anti-Islamic political parties such as the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV, party for freedom), a well-known Dutch political party that actively promotes 'de-Islamisation' of the Netherlands (www.pvv.nl), and *Forum voor Democratie* (FvD, forum for democracy) who want a very restricted immigration policy in which permanent residence permits will not be granted to refugees (www.forumvoordemocratie.nl) and immigrants from many of these countries.

However, the Netherlands admits immigrants from all over the world. In 2017 more immigrant people were of Surinam origin than Moroccan, and the number of immigrants from the former Netherlands Antilles displays a significant growth (almost 30%) compared to 1996, which is the first year the CBS recorded data on this subject (www.opendata.cbs.nl). The increase in population of Caribbean and Surinam origins have awakened the debate about racism and discrimination towards these people.

In his preface of *Shackles of Iron: Slavery Beyond the Atlantic* Stewart Gordon (2016, xii) writes that (trans)atlantic slavery is the type of slavery that is known to the world, which is the reason why he omitted the subject from his book and focuses on different ages and types of slavery. Despite the fact that most people are indeed aware that the transatlantic slave trade existed, the general knowledge on the subject is very limited in the Netherlands, at least partly due to "collective amnesia" encouraged by nationalistic propaganda in the age of and ages after colonialism (Misztal 2007, 386). As a result, those of Caribbean and Surinam descant in the Netherlands are victim of stereotypical racism and discrimination. Their presence and their audible protest demand an acknowledgement of this part of history that could be largely denied until now (Oostindie 2005, 57-8; Van Welie 2008, 47). In the Netherlands, the discussion around *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete) is an explicit manifestation of the issues of modern racism. Black Pete is a central figure in the Dutch Tradition of St. Nicolaas, wherein a white man (comparable to Santa Claus) hands out presents, assisted by black workers. The traditional representation of Black Pete can be a painful reminder for, and contributes to the discrimination of, black and ethnic minorities (Holtmaat and Loenen 2018, 35). Those in favour of keeping the traditional Black Pete are of the opinion that discarding elements of this character is tampering with "our" traditions; they feel that changing the looks of Black Pete is taking something away from Dutch culture (*Ibid*.). Despite the fact that both the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Dutch Ombudsman for Children expressed their encouragement to change the stereotypical features, the Dutch Prime Minister stated it is not a matter for the Dutch government to enforce change on celebrations and cultural manifestations, thereby distancing himself and the government from the case as a whole (*Ibid.*).

This distanciation is characteristic for the Dutch and possibly for western Europe in general and, according to Rick van Welie (2008, 48-50) it was part of the Dutch dealing with the concept of slavery from the beginning: due to the fact that slave ships generally did not pass through the Dutch Republic and because colonists who went back to the Netherlands were not allowed to bring along their slaves, the Dutch were not directly confronted with the brutalities of colonial slavery and could uphold their front of great tolerance they prided themselves on. This approach is still taken on today. Van Welie (2008, 48) calls it an instinctive defensive reaction and I have to agree. Over the course of at least a year, whenever the topic of my thesis came up in conversation, people would tell me that slavery existed throughout all history - "it was accepted and normal" - that racism and discrimination works both ways - "they have prejudices about us too" - that the Netherlands was only minorly involved in the slave trade - "look at what the United States have done" - and that that it is something that has little to do with the way people currently treat each other - "I don't treat people differently because their ancestors used to be slaves, so others don't do so either". It keeps surprising me how often I have been responded to in this manner, especially considering the fact that many of the social circles I am involved in consist of Christian and/or highly educated people, who generally consider themselves open-minded and accepting. Although I believe (or want to believe) that most of these people would not purposely treat a black person differently than a white person, they are undoubtedly subconsciously prejudiced. They do not realise that asking a person of colour 'where are you from' is often considered offensive, because the person asking assumes the person of colour is not Dutch. This deep-set subtle racism is an unsurprising occurrence, considering that many people grew up in an environment that has taught them racial prejudices because the generation that raised them never learned to question these prejudices. Denial and justification of the part of history that is the root of racism is something so deep within Dutch culture we hardly recognise we do it and cannot understand that people of other origins might see the issue differently.

This instinctive defence needs to be corrected. With an increase in population of former colonies in the Netherlands, the Dutch need to accept the part they played with regard to the slave trade. Not to be accused, to grovel and bite the dust, but to increase the understanding of how racism is a western creation

and how that creation has led to the way minorities are treated today. Because despite the fact that the existence of race has been disproven by biologists and geneticists years ago (Lockley 2010, 336), many people still act on the prejudices that grew out of the colonial ideology of the existence of race.
Understanding where these prejudices come from and learning how unfounded they are is the first step in changing the mind-set and accepting people no matter how they look or talk, or what their name is. It might also give understanding to the government as to why their involvement - or at least providing an opinion - is important and why expressing that they want to bring back the Dutch VOC mentality might be offensive to people from former colonies, as to them this period is still immersed with the ideology of race.

1.2 Research questions

The question is how to achieve a collective understanding. The history of slavery is considered sensitive heritage: heritage that involves minorities and has been ignored or addressed from the perspective of the majority (Graham *et al*. 2005, 35-8), and has long been pushed to the background of collective memory. Over the past years, education about colonialism and slavery at schools has taken precedence over the attention given to the Holocaust (www.nos.nl). The Holocaust no longer appears to be the most sensitive part of our history, possibly because the larger part of the descendants of the victims have made their peace with it (Houtekamer 2020, unpublished thesis). However, the attention towards the history of slavery at school is relatively new and those who left school before the topic was implemented have not been educated on this subject. As this is the generation that is raising - or might soon be - children, they need to be reached too. An accessible means might be the museum. The western museum developed during the colonial period and used to be a place where objects – and people - collected from all over the world were put on display, often with a nationalistic purpose of “us” versus all others (Lidchi 1197, 155; Koksal 2014, 233). Museums have thereby contributed to the inequality of race and the creation of a dissonance between heritages of different people. Over the years, the museum has developed into a place of education and a place that acknowledges and addresses the conflicts and challenges of the present which aims to contribute to human dignity and social justice (www.ICOM.com). The museum is an institution that has been

working to get itself out from under its colonial wings and could therefore well be a suitable place to address sensitive heritages. Aside from the transatlantic slave trade, genocide - either in the pursuit of new terrain or with racial arguments at its base, and excavating, relocating, and displaying human remains are considered sensitive heritage. Sensitive heritages are those parts of history wherein minorities of the present feel unheard and unrepresented, or of which crimes against humanity appear to be ignored.

This thesis will explore the suitability of the museum as an educational space where sensitive heritage is concerned. It will analyse the complications that are involved in dealing with sensitive heritage, the representation of the heritage of slavery in museums and the influences it might have on the approach towards modern racism. With this analysis I aim to answer the following questions:

Main question

How are the memories and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade as an example of sensitive heritage curated in museums in the Netherlands and Britain today, and how could this be used to counteract modern racism?

Secondary questions

1. Why is the history of slavery considered sensitive heritage and how does it relate to modern racism?
2. What is the role and place of museums in the creation and deconstruction of sensitive heritages?
3. How are the history of the transatlantic slave trade and its legacies commemorated, curated, and acknowledged in Britain and the Netherlands?
    a. How is the history of slavery in the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, one of Britain's main former slave trading ports, presented to the public?
    b. How does the exhibition 'Afterlives of Slavery' in the Tropenmuseum display the history of transatlantic slavery in relation to other Dutch museums?

4. How effectively have the analysed locations incorporated elements of modern museology such as multivocality, multiperspectivity, engaging the public, and creating a connection with issues in contemporary societies?

1.3 Structure outline

It is important to introduce the approach of the research and the concepts that are important for this study. Chapter two will cover the methodology, as well as introduce the concepts 'sensitive heritage', 'the ideology of race' and 'museology'. Sensitive heritage is placed within the context of this thesis and the history of the transatlantic slave trade will be the example to explain how heritage become a sensitive remainder of the past due to conflict and trauma. Modern racism is often based on and related to external characteristics and is connected to the assumption of white supremacy. The roots of these thoughts can be traced back to the age of transatlantic slavery and the biased scientific research that took place in the nineteenth century. This has resulted in an ideology of race that is very persistent. European museums have contributed to this development, because of their originally nationalistic objectives. Arising during the colonial period, museums played a part in creating inequality. Modern museology is looking into ways to use ethnographic museums as a space to start a dialogue and create equality. The chapter will end with operationalising the analysis of the approach of the museums. It will explain the main concepts that have been taken into consideration and the manner in which these concepts are analysed upon visitation.

With the concepts explained, chapters three and four will examine the suitability of the museum as a space to start a dialogue about sensitive histories and the consequences of this history for modern societies. Chapter three will discuss the commemoration of slavery in Britain, thereby focussing on the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. Several objects will be discussed into more detail, to assess the chosen perspective of the museum and explore the possibilities for other angles. Chapter four will focus on the exhibition Afterlives of Slavery, assessing both the exhibition on its own and compared to a number of other exhibitions in the Netherlands.

To conclude the research, the findings will be summarised and discussed. An attempt will be made to give recommendations for future curation of sensitive

heritage and it will assess if and how museums can function as spaces for education about sensitive heritage and their functionality as a means in the fight against modern racism.

Chapter 2 - Methods and theories

The main analysis of this thesis revolves around the historical legacies of slavery as an example of sensitive heritage and looking into the way in which these are managed, presented to the public, and meant to invoke dialogue in museum contexts in the Netherlands and Britain. To found this analysis, several important concepts need to be explained and placed into context. To start, this methodological chapter will lay out the research approach, explain the way in which the museums have been selected and visited - and why Britain has been chosen as comparative case study. In addition, it will contextualise the meaning and complications of the terms 'sensitive heritage' and 'race' in relation to the history of transatlantic slavery. In conclusion, it will describe the development of the museum from a nationalistic institution to a space wherein heritage is something that belongs to the world instead of to a specific group of people. All these concepts and themes are important to place into context, before analysis of the case studies is possible.

2.1 Research development and approach

The first considerations for a topic for this thesis were connected to the heritage of Native American cultures. The intent was to find a topic with contemporary social relevance. This cultural focus shifted to Caribbean cultures, as I was looking for something with which I could contribute to social awareness and change in the Netherlands. The Netherlands used to have several Caribbean colonies, but the history of these Islands is largely unknown to most Dutch people. The location had been determined, but the topic needed to be refined further. Archaeology as a discipline depends highly on material culture and at the beginning of this research, it was intended to have objects be the focal point of the study. However, as the research continued, it became clear that there was only a small number of objects that could be connected to the Dutch Caribbean Islands, especially since the majority of the indigenous cultures have been wiped out by the Spanish conquerings. Therefore, the focus shifted to the heritage of slavery, of which more is known and documented, and about which the Tropenmuseum recently opened the exhibition *Heden van het Slavernijverleden* (Afterlives of Slavery). This increased the social relevance of my research, especially when the

relation between the history of slavery and modern racism was added as important research element. Due to the limited number of objects in this exhibition, the research was expanded to include several museums and exhibitions in the Netherlands, which led to a shift in focus from material culture to a more general analysis of the heritage of slavery in the Netherlands. Literature research of the history of transatlantic slavery led to the "discovery" of the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, which proved an excellent location for a comparative case study. Several other European countries that used to be involved in the transatlantic slave trade were considered for making a comparison, but were discarded as suitable options (see below, paragraph 2.1.2).

All museums visits took place without having done prior research on the objectives, origins and history, and financiers (e.g. local, regional, or national) of the museums and exhibitions, apart from visiting the homepage of the museums' websites. These homepages have been used to determine the suitability of the museums for the research. During the visits, the only information consumed was that which was written on the walls or the object description. Flyers or room descriptions have not been consulted, nor were audio guides. Although these tools are valuable additions, the objective of the visits was to analyse how much knowledge could be gained from a mere 'superficial' glance around the room, from the point of view of a minimally interested visitor. After the visits, the background of each museum was researched, and, in the case of the Tropenmuseum, a semi-structured interview was conducted to better understand their goals and objectives concerning the exhibition *Heden van het Slavernijverleden*. Several attempts to arrange interviews with curators or people connected to the other museums have been made, without success. Therefore, the interview with Robin Lelijveld was used as a secondary source to support arguments made in this thesis rather than a primary source of information.

After a year of emerging myself in the topic of transatlantic slavery, the research focus has shifted from the use of material culture to analysing the more general approach of museums concerning this topic; their measure of attention for, their curation, and their presentation of the history of transatlantic slavery and the connections they might make in attempting to diminish modern racism. Understandably, only a small number of museums is suitable for analysis in relation to transatlantic slavery. The paragraphs 'Case study in the Netherlands'

and ‘Choosing the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool’ will explain reasons for including the selected Dutch museums and omitting others, as well as justify the choice for Britain and the International Slavery Museum as comparative case study above other European countries.

2.1.1 Case study in the Netherlands

The analysis of addressing the history of slavery in the Netherlands centres around the exhibition ‘*Heden van het Slavernijverleden* (Afterlives of Slavery) in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. However, several other museums and exhibitions have been visited in order to be able to discuss the Afterlives of Slavery exhibition in a comparative context. Aside from the Tropenmuseum, four other museums and exhibitions have been visited: The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Big Surinam exhibition in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam, museum Volkenkunde in Leiden and the Westfries museum in Hoorn.

The museums have been selected based on their connection to the heritage of slavery, the *Gouden Eeuw* (Golden Age), and colonial history. The Tropenmuseum is a descendant of the first ethnographic museum in the world (see chapter 4) and provides an excellent example of a museum founded on colonial roots, revolving around other cultures and development into a modern museum in the Dutch capital city. The Rijksmuseum is the museum most visited in the Netherlands and covers much of the Dutch modern history eras. Although predominantly an art museum, famous events of Dutch history are addressed in the museum and it is interesting to investigate the attention given to slavery and the slave trade. The exhibition *Suriname* in the Nieuwe Kerk was a late addition to the case studies, as it opened nearing the end of the research period of this thesis. Including this case study in the analysis was done because it is an example of the most modern considerations in museology. In addition, the subject of the exhibition is clearly related this thesis: the cultural history of Surinam, which has been extensively influenced by its history of slavery (www.nieuwekerk.nl). The Westfries museum, which promotes itself as museum of the Golden Age, the age wherein the system of slavery developed, is also an interesting place for comparison.

Coincidentally, all museums and exhibitions are located in the west of the Netherlands. Museums at other locations were searched for and considered, for example museum Bronbeek and the *openlucht museum* (open air museum) in

Arnhem and the Drents museum in Assen. However, museum Bronbeek promotes itself as museum about the military history of colonial East India (www.visitarnhem.com), which is a subject that, due to its contemporary extreme sensitivity and complex historical elements (see chapter 4 paragraph 4.1), deserves its own research, rather than being a side note of this one. The other two museums have been excluded from this research as the open-air museum focuses on the history of the Netherlands from 1800 onward (www.openluchtmuseum.nl), and the Drents museums focuses on prehistoric archaeology and major international exhibitions (e.g. dead sea scrolls or the terracotta army) (www.drenthsmuseum.nl).

2.1.2 Choosing the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool

Of all European nations involved in the transatlantic slave trade that existed between 1501 and 1867, five were responsible for about 97% of the transatlantic slave trade: Portugal, Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands. Table 1 shows the approximate share of each country involved in the slave trade. The table is based on data gathered from the website www.slavevoyages.org. This website is a culmination of data and research from many universities and researches and is a digital memorial where one can find detailed information on the slave trade (www.slavevoyages.org).

Portugal	46,7%
Britain	26%
France	11%
Spain	8,4%
Netherlands	4,4%
United States	2,4%
Baltic States	0,8%

Table 1: Percentage of slaves that nations transported across the Atlantic (based on https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates)

Selecting only one location for thorough analysis and comparison to the Netherlands was partly done for practical reasons, as it was not possible to visit many locations outside of the Netherlands. During the research process, it became

apparent that Britain was most suitable for comparison with the Netherlands for a number of reasons. First, it has a, to a degree, comparable situation to the Netherlands. As was the case for the Dutch Republic, Britain's colonies were all overseas and for people ‘back home‘ it was relatively easy to distance oneself from the cruelties of slavery, despite the fact that both Britain and the Dutch Republic had a black population, however small, in the sixteenth century (Ponte 2018; Fryer 2010). In addition, the contemporary relationship with the former colonies of Britain and the Netherlands is comparable; though still maintaining a certain connection with their former oppressor, the colonies are no longer constitutionally part of the Kingdom. The Dutch colonies became self-governing in 1954 and in 1975 Surinam became fully independent. In the years that followed the Dutch Kingdom and the Antilles have worked towards independence for the Islands, thereby accounting for the economic consequences. On 10-10-2010, St. Maarten and Curaçao became independent countries, like Aruba has been since 1986. Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius became special municipalities (Hofman and Haviser 2015, 28). Britain has a comparative varying relationship with fourteen its former colonies; the Crown Dependencies and the British Overseas Territories (Mut Bosque 2017, 524). The specific differences between these are too complicated to discuss here. Important to know is that rather than being a sovereign nation, the connection with the either the Dutch or British kingdom influences important aspects such economic developments and immigration possibilities.

A second reason for selecting Britain is because it currently holds the only museum fully dedicated to slavery in Europe: The International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. This museum addresses the worldwide history of the slave trade and elements of this history that are still visible today. Britain prides itself on being the first country to abolish slave trade and slavery (although this is technically not true, see chapter three) and being the country devoting much attention to this in the 21st century. This self-celebratory attitude might be a remnant of the nation’s colonial history, when they were the centre of the world for a long time - a position they have now lost, but the results and attitudes were still obviously present in the British museum only five years ago (pers. ex., see for more on this chapter three).

Although perhaps more self-celebratory and focused on abolition than they realise themselves, the amount of attention given to the history of the transatlantic slave trade is another reason for comparing the Netherlands to Britain. Aside from

Britain, Portugal, France, and Spain all have a major share in the slave trade, but currently are less involved in addressing the present-day effects of this involvement. The following paragraphs will explain the complicated relationship each of these nations has with its connection to the slave trade, which in turn explains why Britain was most suitable for comparison.

France, which was a major trading force in the eighteenth century, competing with the British, built its Republic on the events of the French Revolution and its motto *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (freedom, equality, fraternity). Strictly speaking, France was the first nation to outlaw slavery in 1794, but the system was reinstated by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802 (Harrison 2015, 423-4). It was not until 1819 that the slave trade was abolished, followed by abolishment of slavery in 1848 (*Ibid.*, 424; 427). Due to these changing attitudes towards enslavement of people in combination with the fact that during the age of slavery and colonialism the ideologies of France's motto are virtually non-existent, the French have trouble acknowledging their role in this history, as doing so is admitting that the Republic was not always as humanistic as it now claims to be (Firth 2017, 69). Although France recognised the slave trade and slavery as a crime against humanity in 2001 and several memorials and exhibitions have been dedicated to these subjects since then - e.g. in Nantes, Paris and Bordeaux. However, an African or Afro-Caribbean perspective is often lacking and the monument *Le Cri, l'Écrit* in Paris is accompanied by a plaque that does nothing to eradicate the impression that France stood in its right until the abolition of slavery: *"For their struggles and their deep desire of dignity and freedom. The slaves of the French colonies have contributed to the universality of human rights and the ideal of liberty, equality, and fraternity which found our Republic. France here pays homage to them"* (Schmieder 2018, 41-6). In Nantes, the largest slave trade port of France, a memorial was erected in 2012. It was originally intended to speak out against the hegemonic discourses that are currently often deployed (Firth 2017, 71), but financial and political constraints have resulted in a monument that fits within the nations vision of celebrating abolition rather than commemorating slavery, against the artists' vision and wishes (Firth 2017, 78; Schmieder 2018, 42-3). Despite these negative connotations, even a memorial that focuses on abolition is a step forwards compared to fifteen years before, when a statue in honour of this abolition was desecrated and reshackled (Firth 2017, 68).

Portugal is responsible for about half of the total amount of enslaved that have been transported across the Atlantic. And Spain has, in spite of its late intensive involvement in the trade, transported over one million enslaved over the Atlantic. Both of these countries are even more absent in the European discussion of acknowledgement of guilt. There are no museums that focus on slavery. Barcelona does have a tourist walk centred around the role of Barcelona in the slave trade, although public acknowledgement (e.g. in the form of plaques on buildings or on houses connected to the slave trade) or promotion of the tourist walk is absent. The situation in Portugal is similar. Like in France, the colonial discourse is considered generally celebratory and considered as a period that brought forth wealth and power to the country (Schmieder 2018, 47-50). This lack of commemorative attention and change in approach might be partly ascribed to the relatively small number of people of African descent who can voice protest in the cities in question. However, the focus towards other silenced crimes and sensitive heritage, such as those under the Franco regime in Spain or the Salazar regime and its aftermath in Portugal. Additionally, both Portugal and Spain took part in the illegal slave trade after the agreement to abolish the trade was signed in 1817. (Harrison 2015; 428; Oostindie 2009, 613; Schmieder 2018, 57-8).

The arguments above exemplify just how sensitive subject of the history of slavery is. However, a reluctance to admit guilt by one party does not necessarily create a sensitive heritage. There are several elements which often inherently contradict each other that are at play when it comes to subjects that are regarded as sensitive heritage. The following paragraph will explore this term and, in doing so, will further explain the sensitivity of the history of the transatlantic slave trade.

2.2 Sensitive heritage

Heritage management is a concern for what remains of the past, a concern which derives from the ideas and ideologies of western modernity and generally entails the cultural legacies of a society, both tangible and intangible (Graham *et al.* 2005, 28; dictionary.cambridge.org). Discussion and fluidity are intrinsic aspects of heritage. Van Boxtel *et al.* describe it as follows:

> *Heritage is a continuous process of construction, conservation, management and interpretation in which people refer to the*

> *past with a view to the future, aiming to construct a historical identity in the present* (2016, 5-6).

Depending on present ideologies, a specific part of history receives more attention than others, which is then approached with the morals and mindset of that present. As a result, the meaning and interpretation of (the remains of) history is subject to change (*Ibid*., 7). Heritage will therefore never be objective. Discussion about the meaning, purpose, and ownership of heritage is not necessarily problematic. However, several elements in these discussions contain so much emotion that it results in imbalance and seemingly irreconcilable differences. There is no singular name for these heritages and depending on the article or book one reads they are named as dissonant heritage (e.g. Lähdesmäki 2019), dark heritage, conflict heritage (e.g. González-Ruibal and Hall 2015) or sensitive heritage (e.g. Watson 2016 and Savenije *et al.* 2014). Although the terms appear to be used interchangeably, I argue each has a nuanced meaning that justifies the different uses in different situations. The term dissonant heritage is neutral and indicates an imbalance between two or more parties that are connected with the heritage in question. This term is most appropriate for descriptions and discussions that are expected to be objective because of their overall influence, such as UNESCO documents (Lähdesmäki *et al.,* 2019). Dark heritage and conflict heritage are most often used to indicate an event of war and for locations where such conflict played out. González-Ruibal and Hall use these terms to refer to the Armenian genocide and the Jewish labour camps such as Auschwitz (153). Dark heritage is a somewhat problematic term, because by its name it evokes the idea that there is something that needs to be hidden or forgotten. Conflict heritage seems to limited to describe the heritage of transatlantic slavery. Although conflict and violence have played an important role in this history, there is much more to it. The history of transatlantic slavery is not limited to one location or a few plantations. Slavery and the slave trade were world-wide and should be remembered world-wide. Additionally, this heritage has long term effects which the descendants experience today, while a major part of the population in the world denies the severity of these effects. The term sensitive heritage expresses both the emotion that is contained in these heritages and indicates the manner in which they should be approached because of this abundance of emotions: carefully. The

history of the transatlantic slave trade should not be regarded objectively, nor should it be minimized to a period of conflict and nothing more. Because of the deeply layered complications of this heritage, I have chosen to use the term sensitive heritage in this thesis.

One of the most important elements that can result in a sensitive heritage is power inequality. Despite the fact that heritage discussions have been including more stakeholders - including the minorities whose legacies are often subject of these discussions - the need for preservation of these legacies still often derives from the obsessions of educated and influential parts of Western societies and the inequality of power remains visible (Graham *et al.* 2005, 28). Conflict between stakeholders arises when different groups place different importance on the various aspects of heritage. Regarding the past as means of validation and identity or as proof of continuity inherently means disagreement about function, importance, and exploitation of heritage (*Ibid.*, 33). In the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue from the Council of Europe from 2008 a division between *dialoguers* and *dialogees* is present, whereby Europe (*dialoguer*) brings culture to the minorities and immigrants (*dialogees*) (Lähdesmäki 2019, 37). Rather than addressing the influence of unequal power relations of the past for the present, European policy seems to focus on and promote a communal, encompassing European cultural heritage, ignoring the negative events of the past (*Ibid.*, 38). This attitude has strongly influenced what remains of the past have been marked as heritage and how it is presented and exploited. Sensitive heritages are those legacies of the past that represent extreme conflicts and inhumane actions such as war, genocide, and the discarding or relocating of human remains, all the result of unequal power relations. These legacies are often ignored, downplayed, or addressed from a Eurocentric view (Graham *et al.* 2005, 37-8; Van Huis 2019, 216-7; González-Ruibal and Hall 2015, 153). Over the last decade these legacies of pain, disease, trauma, and violence have been gaining in space and attention, albeit slowly, and influenced by modern ideologies which are often product of the Western World.

The involvement of the Netherlands in the history of slavery from the sixteenth century onwards is an exemplary case study of both attention for sensitive heritage and a dissonance within this heritage. On the one hand, the transatlantic slave trade has been getting more attention, whereby the nations'

involvement is acknowledged and the darker sides of history are addressed at schools and in museums. However, at the same time, the attention for the negative presence of the Dutch in the East Indies is still lacking. One explanation for this might be that, as with the cruelties of the Franco regime in Spain, the crimes that took place here are for now too sensitive, both for the Dutch and the former East India colonies (see for a more extensive discussion on this subject chapter four paragraph 4.1). However, the sensitivity of the history of transatlantic slavery is not restricted to the white people in the Netherlands. On the contrary. Aside from the number of European, and later American, nations that were involved, it is the black people for whom this heritage and in particular its Eurocentric approach is painful and sensitive. It was their ancestors who were the victims of the European desire for expansion and the stories of what has been done to them have been survived from father to son, mother to daughter. This history is true for every black person that immigrates from the Caribbean Islands or Surinam to the Netherlands, regardless what community or subculture they are from. They are living in the effects of the history of slavery in their daily life. The nonchalance and ignorance of the white people regarding this history, makes their heritage all the more painful.

The sensitivity of transatlantic slavery is not intrinsically linked to the existence of slavery itself, despite the fact that slavery is now considered in extreme conflict with human rights. The fact that slavery has existed throughout the course of human history is one of the arguments most often raised by white people trying to (subconsciously) justify the transatlantic slave trade. It is true that the keeping of slaves is mentioned in the world's oldest known textual sources from the Ancient Near East, which can be dated back to at least 5000 BC (Snell 2011, 7; Klein 2010, 2). However, the transatlantic slave trade distinguishes itself in scale, purpose, and racial prejudice (see for the latter paragraph 2.3) as well as in attention (or lack thereof) for the cruelties that took place. In a span of about 350 years, approximately 12.5 million enslaved Africans were transported across the Atlantic to the New World (Davis 2010, xvii). This estimation does not include those who perished on the way from inland Africa to the coast where they were sold to European traders nor does it account for the thrive of slavery in Africa itself which emerged after the abolition of western slavery (Harrison 2015, 493). This means millions more Africans suffered uprooting due to the European market interests and its aftermath. Transatlantic slavery consisted predominantly of chattel slavery,

wherein the enslaved becomes a commodity to his owner and loses his rights of personhood and is one of the elements of Roman culture that revived during the Renaissance (Bradley and Cartledge 2011, 1; Harrison 2015, 232-3). In its origin, this form of slavery was generally the result of warfare, where after the victor could treat the defeated as pleased. This was often a life of servitude. With regard to the transatlantic slave trade, the aspect of war often took place outside the scope of European presence, deep within interior Africa. Furthermore, dehumanisation of the captives was an important element of the trade for the European traders, as they needed to maintain their dominance by enforcing unequal power relations. Actions such as separation and branding the enslaved completed their transformation for person to commodity (Low 2018, 106-35). The enslaved were sold mainly as work forces for the plantations in the Caribbean, as they were said to be more suitable for the hard work than white people, who were more susceptible to tropical diseases (Lockley 2010, 340)). In reality, it was the greed of the European colonizers - which resulted in the pressing economic need for cheap labour - that motivated the creation of a large-scale slave trading system (*Ibid*., 341; Davis 2010, xvii).

The number of enslaved that have been transported, thereby losing their personal and cultural identity, the economic efficiency with which it has been done, and the denial of the severity of the events after the age of slavery all have contributed to the becoming of transatlantic slavery as sensitive heritage. However, one aspect of the trade above all others has caused dissonance, especially because of its contemporary effects: the ideology of race. The following paragraph will explain how European expansion has resulted in a modern human inequality that is based on skin colour and other external characteristics.

2.3 The ideology of race

Presumably, the most problematic effect of all that slavery and colonialism have brought is racism manifested in skin colour. In spite of the countless researches wherein historians have counteracted the arguments of an ancient awareness of race (Smedley 2006, 53-4), and despite the fact that both biologists and geneticists have disproved the existence of human races (Gould 1981, 31), the belief in a classification of humans based on external features is extremely deep-rooted. Even in the scientific world some argue in favour of its existence.

Race: the Reality of Human Differences by V. Sarich and F. Miele (2004) is a fairly recent example of such race scientists. Aided by historical anecdotes and an unfounded use of genetics (DNA) Sarich and Miele attempt to justify the social, political and economic treatment of humans based on biological classification, therein confirming the reality of racism (Foster 2004, 1663), a concept that has been persistent for almost five centuries.

Racial differentiation based on skin colour developed itself in less than a century, born out of a need to justify the treatment of conquered and enslaved people under the pretence of the creation of an orderly society (www.americananthro.org; Vinson 2017, 2). Upon landing in the New World at the end of the fifteenth century, the Spaniards' initial response was to classify the 'Indians' an inferior type of human, mainly because Christianity was unknown to them, although they lacked several other societal elements key to European societies as well, such as architectural structures and clothing (Vinson 2017, 4). Although the base of this division in the colonies was religion, the separation quickly evolved to one of white superiority over indigenous people. However, a shortage of women meant that racial mixing, first with Indigenous Americans, later with African people, was inevitable. Early in the colonial period mixed-race children were raised as 'white people' or 'indigenous' based on whether or not the white father acknowledged the child as his; whiteness was symbolic and a privilege rather than a phenotype on which one's status was based (*Ibid.,* 11). Officially, the governmental administrators tried to build their orderly society much more than skin colour: descent, culture, place of birth, place of residence and other aspects played a part, but after several revolts and conspiracies led by mixed race people who were part of the white society, the attitude towards people of mixed descent changed and slowly skin colour came to be inherently linked to the ability to adapt to European societal norms (*Ibid*., 11-13). The blacker the skin (or lineage) the less sophisticated one was. The moral classification of American-Indians above Africans might be explained by the actions of Charles V, the Spanish king who at the beginning of the sixteenth century decreed that Indians should not be enslaved, as their conquering and conversion to Catholicism meant they qualified as Spanish subjects and were therefore equal to the colonists (Harrison 2015, 237). The moral objection against enslaving Africans was much less strong - albeit even in its early beginnings not undisputed. They were regarded as heathens with strong

connections to the devil. The connection between the evil and the colour black is likely to have contributed to classification based on skin colour; the darker the skin, the darker (eviller) the soul. By the end of the sixteenth century racial ideas such as these were well-established in European minds, both in the colonies and their home lands. During the age of slavery, the white acted the oppressor and the black people as oppressed, due to 'their inferiority in body and mind', an idea accepted by many well-respected leaders such as Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln (Gould 1981, 32-35). Black people were considered dumb and beastly, inclined to follow their wild, 'savage' instincts. They were assumed to have a submissive, obsequious, imitative nature, their aggressive wildness triggered by a beastly instinct (*Ibid.46-7).*

For two centuries these racial prejudices remained largely unquestioned. from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, scientific justification of social treatment based on skin colour was investigated, because this division had become a reality in the age of the transatlantic slave trade. A scientific classification of a variety of human races based on physiology to which characteristics such as intelligence and work ethic could be linked would absolve the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century white population from the severity of the crimes done against black people. Many of the researches conducted during this time were based on hypotheses that aimed to prove the inequality of humans rather than that they attempted to collect objective research data (Gould 1981,30-72; Lockley 2010, 336). Results of these researches reinforced the ideas of the existence and hierarchy of race. Europeans of the eighteenth century started to assert themselves, the "whites", as being created "in the image of God", as is stated Genesis 1:26. All other 'races' were considered either a separate creation (polygenism) or a degeneration of the Eden perfection (monogenism), with black people having deteriorated furthest from the original (Gould 1981, 39-42). In spite of the continuous disagreement of monogenists versus polygenists, it was no question that the "blacks" were at the bottom rung of any evolutionary ladder and they are described as submissive, childlike and unintelligent (*Ibid.*), ideas accepted without much question until well into the nineteenth century, when both scientists (e.g. Agassiz and Morton) and political leaders (e.g. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin) attested to the inferiority of black people and the impossibility of white and black people living in harmony (Gould 1981, 31-2; 42-54). Even those

in favour of the abolition of slavery often had ideological motives rather than humanitarian ones; enslavement of humans did not fit into a modern, evolved society that was the centre of the Enlightenment (Klein 2010, 190). More problematic than human inferiority was the fact that with the acceptation of a polygenetic origin of men the factuality of the Bible was put into question. Therefore, most advocates of slavery used religious arguments such as the degeneration of black because of the curse of Ham (*Ibid.*, 70), which kept a single origin of people intact and was therefore more easily accepted. After the official abolition of slavery and the slave trade, the enslavement of blacks was replaced by segregation: black people were separated from white people in churches, schools, jobs and housing issues (Gavins 2016, 249). As a result, the divide between whites and blacks increased and the abolition of slavery did not provide an equality of human races. The system was legal until 1964 (*Ibid.*), but racism is still very much present in contemporary society. Black people are still regarded as criminally inclined, less deserving of health care, and disadvantaged in many other daily aspects. Marcus Hunter draws an analogy between Einstein's theory of relativity and racism:

> *[…] the history, acts and agitation between the oppressor and the oppressed since the colonial period has participated in making race function much in the way that Einstein characterizes gravity. Much like how gravity affects matter in the natural world, in the social world, race in varying degrees draws people apart and together, binds people to sidewalks, neighbourhoods and institutions of civil society. Racism, in turn, operates as a socio-economic and political accelerant and force that leads to racially disparate outcomes and privileges (2017, 1174).*

The ideology of race that has come forth out of the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and the scientific researches of these periods is still embedded in today's society, almost undeterred by its scientific debunk. Dienke Hondius explains in her *Blackness in Western Europe: Racial Patterns of Paternalism and Exclusion* that 'race' is a relatively new concept in the Europe of the twenty-first century and that only recently European nations are realising that the history of

slavery and the slave trade began “at home” (2014, 10), which partly explains the denial of problems related to racism. Roughly five centuries after the beginning of transatlantic slavery, Europeans are ready to take discussion outside the academic field into the everyday lives of the community. The next paragraph will discuss the suitability of the museum as the space for this discussion.

2.4 Museums as space for a debate about racism

Museums as they exist in Europe and America are a product of colonialism. World-wide, museums were modelled on different levels and for different purposes (Koksal 2014, 233). Globalisation has shown us that museum is a ‘heterogeneous’ concept with a variety of meanings, which change in space and time (*Ibid.*). It is therefore impossible to ascribe the museum a single, unambiguous definition. This paragraph will explore the transition of the museum from a colonial, political tool to a space of discussion and education, where the heritage of all people can be addressed in equality. It will discuss the importance of objects as representation of stories and the need for multiperspectivity (see below, paragraph 2.5). As slavery belongs to the history of people (as opposed to that of nature or art) the museum developments discussed below are about the changes of the ethnographic museum.

The beginnings of the ethnographic museum can be traced back to the *Wunderkammer* or the ‘Cabinets of curiosity’ of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These *Wunderkammer* contained objects collected from all over the world and were a display of the collectors’ interests (Lidchi 1997, 154-5). Originally, such collections were private, but from the seventeenth century onwards, they became more accessible to the public (Meyer and Savoy 2014, 3). To illustrate the initial way of collecting and documenting information, I will refer to Lidchi’s example of the collection of the British botanist Tradescant. His collection consisted of a variety of objects for which his son later wrote a catalogue. The descriptions of the objects, both natural and artificial, are based on their ‘curious’ characteristics rather than objective information such as origin or material (Lidchi 1997, 156). For artificial objects that means a description of symbols or unique materials is present, but exact place of acquirement or a more general description is absent (*Ibid*.). It would be decades before an ethnological descriptive standard would be adopted.

Lidchi (1997, 157) states that ethnology is everything that is connected to races and people and their relationship with each other. The earliest natural-history and ethnographic museums were erected to celebrate the advanced state of Western humankind and, by default, classified all others as inferior (Weil 2007, 35). In addition, museums have long been a political stage for the reinforcement of nationalism and an idea of "us" against all others (Koksal 2014, 233), which has contributed to the unequal treatment of humans. It was not until after the colonial period that everything related to non-western people (including the human beings themselves) became more than a curiosity worthy of display (Cobb 2005, 363). How recent this development is, is evident in the persistence of the 'human zoo'. A mere one hundred and fifty years ago, indigenous people were uprooted and transported to the World Exhibition of 1883 in Amsterdam, where they were forced to re-enact their daily life for the entertainment of the public (www.theobakker.net). Although the majority of such displays had disappeared by 1940s, a few exceptions remained open until the 1960s (www.historianet.nl; pers. comm.). And despite the fact that from the early twentieth century onwards, due to the emergence of anthropology, museums started to devote more attention to the ethnic aspects of their collections and the representations thereof (Lidchi 1997, 156-7), it was not until the 1980s that a more truthful, inclusive representation of other cultures became a leading approach in museology (*Ibid*., 128; Cobb 2005, 363).

Over the last five decades, museology has transformed greatly. In the 1980s and 1990s the repatriation movement called for recognition of what had taken place during the colonial eras. Museums slowly started to engage with those cultures whose objects they possessed. Recently, a shift from working from a concern of preserving what does not belong to Western cultures because it would be lost otherwise, disregarding the wishes of non-western cultures involved, to including the cultural practice of preservation into their research can be observed (Kreps 2003, 146). Multivocality and multiperspectivity (see below, paragraph 2.5) have become key aspects of museology, and exhibitions are now created in cooperation with those whose culture or experiences are subject, in consultation with scholars, and by taking into account the interest of the public (Van Boxtel *et al.* 2016, 7). The changing values of the museum are visible in the description the International Council of Museums (hereafter ICOM) uses to explain the functions of the museum. In 2007 the definition of the museum was as follows:

> *A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment (www.ICOM.com).*

In 2016, the ICOM recognized that over the last decade the aims of the museum had transformed to such an extent that the definition they held was no longer encompassing. Therefore, a committee was appointed to lead the discussion and search for a possible new definition. Members of ICOM and interested parties were invited to send in their options and based on the over 250 entries, the committee has proposed the following definition, which was voted on at the ICOM conference of September 7th 2019[1]:

> *Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflict and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.*
>
> *Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing (www.ICOM.com).*

[1] At the time of writing, the ICOM conference has taken place, but the report of it has not been published.

It is evident this definition is more extensive and inclusive than that of 2007. One of the changes most noteworthy for the discussion in this thesis is the transition from the museum as an institution that exhibits, to it being seen as a space of critical dialogue. Museums no longer display the result of a discussion, but intent to invoke one, by exhibiting open dialogues as objective as possible. In doing so, they stimulate the visitor to think outside their personal frame of reference and might be able to change popular but unjust public opinions. The idea is: If it was possible to create inequality, it should also be possible to create equality using museum (Sandell 2007, 100). However, changing a definition does not immediately change the museum. It takes time for museums to adjust and reorganise their exhibitions, particularly in the case of permanent displays. Aside from a change in moral approach, museums also need to change their ways of presentation. In a modern age, multimedia tools are of increasing importance in an engaging museum, which in turn changes the value of objects. However, when exhibiting history, objects remain very important to museums, as the yearning for a tangible representation of the past remains (Van Boxtel *et al.* 2016, 4). What has changed is the meaning of the object. It is no longer the object itself that is the focus, but the story behind it. Contemporary disciplines such as museology, anthropology, and archaeology are increasingly realising that material culture derives its importance from its material and social histories (Hicks 2010, 53). In modern museums, the object is a visualisation of a reality, rather than that it exists on its own, and it is meant to bring a part of history closer to the present (Savenije *et al.*, 2014, 5). An important aspect of a reality is identity. An object seldom contains merely one story. Every story behind an object belongs to an individual or group, an identity. These stories may complement or contradict each other, but it is important to address the multi-dimensity of objects in museums as well (*Ibid.*, 7-8). In doing so, the museum becomes a space where objects are used as visualisation of an intangible, multiperspective heritage that belongs to all people rather than a single entity.

2.5 Operationalising the museum visits

In this thesis I attempt to apply the issues of sensitive heritage and racism to museum exhibitions. In order to be able to analyse the exhibitions properly, it is important propose a set of ‘rules’ on which I base my assessments. This paragraph

will set out and explain the critiques that have been the base of the analysis in chapters three and four.

One of the most important points that will be addressed is the presence of multivocality and multiperspectivity. Although these terms are very similar, I have chosen to use them individually, as there is a nuanced difference of meaning. Multivocality is the term most often used in archaeological publications and refers to a multitude of voices on which an analysis of material can be made (www.oxfordreference.com). In museums multivocality is also mostly present during the research and development stages. Multiperspectivity is addressing a story or a history from different points of view. These views can be human, but can also be achieved by placing something in the context of location or time (Van Nieuwenhuyse 2017). Applied to a museum context I also use the term multiperspectivity for the visibility of a multivocal research and development. In this analysis the presence of multivocality and multiperspectivity will be looked at, as well as the division of these voices. Does each element get equal attention or does one prevail over another?

A second important criterium is the existence and strength of the connection between past and present: Do the exhibitions link the history of slavery to modern issues such as racism and social injustice? What modern heritages rooted in the history of slavery do they address and display? As racism and social injustice are one of the reasons that the history of slavery is considered a sensitive heritage, it will also will be analysed whether or not the exhibitions address the sensitivity of their content and if so, how is it done. Is there a connection between its sensitivity and the presence of a multiperspective story? Is a dialogue for what needs changing in the future initiated?

Lastly, the initiative of the museum to engage people in the discussion is assessed. What material is presented and can the visitors interact with and relate to it? Are the visitors called upon to take the issues discussed in the exhibition home and discuss them with their peers, etc.?

Based on these three focal points, chapters three and four will discuss two exhibitions into detail. Of each exhibition, the general angle is critically assessed; is it Eurocentric or is the African voice the predominant one? And are there any other voices present in the exhibition? To answer these questions several texts in the museum will be analysed for use of words, written perspectives and the

addressing of different aspects of objects or their broader context. Additionally, several historical objects will be compared to what can be found in academic literature, so as to analyse the multiperspectivity of specific objects. The connection to the presence of modern heritages will be addressed by analysing the presentation of these heritages – are they positive or negative? – and the immediate relation that is made with the history of slavery. Visitor engagement will be, where possible, analysed based on reviews from TripAdvisor and Google reviews and the ways in which the museums invites the visitor to actively think about the topics in the exhibition, such as the opinion boards.

2.6 Conclusion

Sensitive heritage are those remains of the past that invoke negative feelings, often the result of extreme conflict or inhumane actions. The history of transatlantic slavery is a good example of sensitive heritage, as the actions during the age of slavery are considered some of the most inhumane in history, due to its size, durability and racial prejudice. In addition, its severity has long been denied and the effects of the history are still present today. It is only since the population from former colonial areas, generally of a different skin tone than the Europeans, in the European nations have become present enough to be heard, that the attention for this history is increasing. European nations such as Britain and the Netherlands and, somewhat slower, France, are realising racism is a contemporary problem that finds its roots in the age of transatlantic slavery. Racism based on skin colour emerged during the sixteenth century and has been abused for over four centuries, persisting even after slavery in the form of Apartheid, segregation and racial prejudices. Even during and after the decolonial discourse and the abolition of the colonies, racist ideologies did not disappear and science has long been used to justify transatlantic slavery. Acknowledgement of its sensitivity is impeded by the even larger sensitivity of more recent history, such as the Franco regime in Spain or the genocide of World War II. Attention is needed and has to be brought outside the academic fields. Museums, which find their roots in nationalism might prove a suitable space for bringing this issue to the larger public. Because of their educational purposes, their intent to encourage discussion, and the changing view towards objects, the museum might be a space for the dialogue about slavery and racism. Evidently this is not an easy task. The next chapters will

explore the ways in which museums in Britain and the Netherlands approach the history of transatlantic slavery, to assess the current place of the museum within this history and possibilities for the future. This will be done by attempting to answer the following main questions: (1) How are multivocality and multiperspectivity visible in the exhibitions? (2) How is the connection between past and present presented in the exhibitions? And (3) Does the museum invite the visitor to engage in the discussion and take it outside of the museum?

Chapter 3 - The commemoration of slavery in Britain

Chapter two has explained the concepts that are important for the discussion of this thesis and it is now possible to analyse the attitudes towards the history of slavery and its relation to contemporary racism of Britain and the Netherlands with the aid of several case studies. The following chapter will revolve around the acknowledgement and commemoration of slavery in Britain. After shortly discussing the presence of commemoration of slavery throughout the country, the analysis will focus on the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, which is currently the only museum in Europe fully devoted to the history and legacy of slavery. The analysis will start with a walkthrough to provide the reader with an overview of the exhibition, thereby also aiming to identify the angle that the museum has taken towards the history of slavery. Several objects of the exhibition will be explored into more detail. Aside from discussing their placement in the exhibition and the story they tell, the objects will be researched in literature, to examine whether or not they might convey stories besides the one expressed in the museum. The closing part of the chapter will be a discussion on the point of view towards slavery the museum has chosen and it will compare this angle to the availability of other stories and angles embedded in the objects displayed in the museum, as well as reflect on the ways in which the current approach attempts to counteract modern racism.

3.1 Britain and commemorating slavery

Compared to other European countries, Britain has devoted relatively much attention to their history of slavery, which is not surprising as it has been responsible for about 30% of the total slave trade. However, since commemoration of this history started, the focus has been on celebrating abolition rather than on reflecting on the legacies directly attributed to the period of the slave trade and slavery itself (Wilson 2008, 391-4; Schmieder 2018, 36-7). Although Britain was not the first country to abolish the slave trade - Denmark precedes it - it was the first nation to actively enforce other nations to cease the trade, as well as the first nation to fully abolish slavery (Harrison 2015, 423-27). Accomplishments they focus on, thereby leaving their involvement in the slave trade and slavery unmentioned (Chambers 2013, 294), an attitude visible in the available memorials.

For example, the monumental arc, erected in 1834 in front of Henry Wyatt's (member of his local Anti-Slavery Society) house, remembers the abolitionists but does not mention the enslaved and their sufferings (Tibbles 2011, 296). The celebratory attitude towards abolition is one that has proven difficult to change. It is a mere seven years ago that Barkawi and Brighton wrote that Britain sees itself as a 'plucky island nation of white folk who brought civilization to the savages and beat Napoleon and the Nazis' (2013, 1109). The sentiment of 'bringing civilization' stems from the Colonial period wherein Britain was unrivalled in size and power (Hyam 2010, 1) and using these words in the twenty-first century resonates the words of Eric Williams written over fifty years ago:

> *"The British historians wrote almost as if Britain had introduced slavery solely for the satisfaction to abolish it" (Williams 1966, 233 in Schmieder 2018, 37).*

The similar phrases that are used despite their fifty years apart implies that the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007 has done little to change this attitude of 'remembering to forget'. However, there is more willingness to address the issues than there was a generation ago (Tibbles 2011, 293), a willingness that increased after 2007, when the country devoted much attention to the jubilee of the abolition of slavery in the form of exhibitions, television programs, and other international activities. It should be mentioned that the preparedness to talk about slavery and its modern implication is increasing within the white community; within the black community this has always been present. In the 1970s, Bob Marley and his band, originally from Jamaica, a British colony until 1960, became internationally successful and their lyrics speak plainly of racism (Unterberger 2017, 8). In the 1980s black artists created figurative art which symbolise the pain, loss and indignation, as well as the endurance and resilience (Chambers 2013, 294). Because of the relatively small number of Caribbean and African people in Britain, their voices could mostly be ignored, although they have slowly been gaining in volume since 2007 (Schmieder 2018, 37). Since then, there have come exhibitions about slavery in London (London, Sugar & Slavery), Greenwich and Bristol. Several monuments remembering the victims of the slave trade and slavery have been erected in Bristol, Lancaster and London (*Ibid.*, 37-8). The International

Slavery Museum in Liverpool opened on August 23rd 2007, the Slavery Remembrance Day of the abolition of the slave trade in Britain (liverpoolmuseums.org.uk) and is one of the largest projects of the bicentennial celebrations. Plans for a second museum devoted to the history of slavery, now in London, were made public in 2019 (museumoflondon.org.uk, www.theguardian.com). Strong critiques on the existing exhibitions mention a lack of a black voice – the enslaved are still represented as an anonymous multitude or mass of victims rather than as individuals who resisted slavery from the very beginning – as well as a continuing focus on abolition (Cubitt *et al.* 2011, 15; Wood 2010, 164). Despite many large projects, a radical change in attitude is absent and it can therefore hardly be said that Britain is far ahead of other European countries, especially in light of very recent events that followed the death of George Floyd[2]. One of these actions was the toppling of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol by activists of the Black Lives Matter movement (www.theguardian.com). Following this incident, the website www.topplethеracists.org was created, which locates statues in the United Kingdom that can be associated with colonial violence, calling for them to be removed or moved to a museum and placed within proper context (www.topplethеracists.org). These actions show that racism is still a big problem in Britain and that a rising voice to protest racism is necessary, as the government is slow to change the approach. The International Slavery Museum is an interesting location to analyse the country's attitude towards the history of slavery and the opportunities for change, partly because its location - Liverpool being one of the main former slave trading ports in Britain, and partly because of its uniqueness within Europe.

3.2 Walkthrough of the International Slavery Museum

The International Slavery Museum (ISM) can be found on the third floor of the Merseyside Maritime museum, which is located at the Royal Albert Dock. Plans for extending the museum to the Dr Martin Luther King, Jr Building were approved in 2010 (liverpoolmuseums.org.uk), but at the time of visiting, the museum still had

[2] On May 25th 2020 George Floyd, an African-American man died of suffocation by police violence. There was no clear cause for the actions of the police and Floyd indicated several times he was unable to breathe. His dead sparked world-wide anti-racism protests (https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-death-of-george-floyd-in-context).

to be entered through the Maritime museum and no signs of an oncoming move were present. Richard Benjamin, director of the ISM, spoke of 'big, transformative plans' in 2019, although he did not mention an expected time for relocating to the new building (www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk). Despite the lack of a building of its own, the current location is unsurprising as the museum is an expansion of the former Transatlantic Slavery Gallery of the Maritime museum and Britain has a long history of linking the history of the slave trade to its maritime activities, thereby undermining the effects of slavery beside the trade (liverpoolmuseums.org.uk; Moody 2017, 150). Creating a National Museum about slavery was the initiative of the newly appointed director of National Museums Liverpool, David Fleming, in 2001 and this initiative was met with enthusiasm by both Liverpool and national government (liverpoolmuseums.org.uk). Although the national authorities were enthusiastic, it is noteworthy the initiative came from a local level rather than a national one.

The museum was visited on October 29th 2019. The building that houses the museum is easy to find, but upon entering the visitor feels lost for a moment. The reception area and museum shop appear to belong to the Maritime Museum and due to a lack of directions signs, it is not immediately clear where the International Slavery museum is to be found. However, if one turns right and finds the way to the elevator, the signs direct to the third floor for the International Slavery Museum. Upon leaving the elevator, the museum starts without further introduction, leading the visitor alongside a Freedom and Enslavement wall filled with quotes about enslavement and freedom. Several screens are incorporated in the wall and play interviews with descendants of enslaved Africans, historians, and others, reminding the visitor that the effect of slavery still exist today (Fig. 1, page 40). Opposite this wall an opinion board has been erected, inviting visitors to leave their impression of the museum (Fig. 2, page. 40). Rounding the wall, the visitor enters the first exhibition theme of the museum; Life in West Africa. The written information in this room acknowledges the complexity of West African cultures that existed long before the Europeans arrived and it states that what the Europeans considered 'barbarian' is not less evolved or less complex, merely different from the European way of living. The setup of this room corresponds with that of the others and it is predominantly occupied by object cases that display a rich material culture and its complex meanings (Fig. 3, page 40). It also features a recreation of

an Igbo family compound. Nonetheless, the display lacks a certain finesse. Oostindie (2010) sums up well why this part of the museum is its weakest element:

> [...] problematic is the image of West African culture as somehow uniform and ahistorical [...] Unfortunately, the display unwittingly communicates the idea that contemporary architecture and art apparently are the same as they were throughout West Africa four centuries ago (Oostindie 2010,146-7).

Leaving the West African theme, the next - and largest - room of the museum is dedicated to the transatlantic slave trade. There is no indicated direction, but a large, secluded circular construction that can be entered from two sides, inside of which confronting images of the cruel circumstances of a slave voyage are shown, creates a natural circular route around the room. In parallel with the previous room, most objects are displayed in glass cases, with the object descriptions on a separate plaque on the glass. In addition, the room features paintings, posters, digital aids, and several small metal cabinets, of which the drawers can be opened by the visitor. Inside are historical documents that have to be protected against too much exposure to light. The objective of the room is to explain the transatlantic slave trade and the impact it had on life. Not only on that of enslaved people, but on European people too. The description below describes the exhibition as started from the left.

Figure 1: Freedom and Enslavement wall (photo by author).

Figure 2: Opinion board (photo by author).

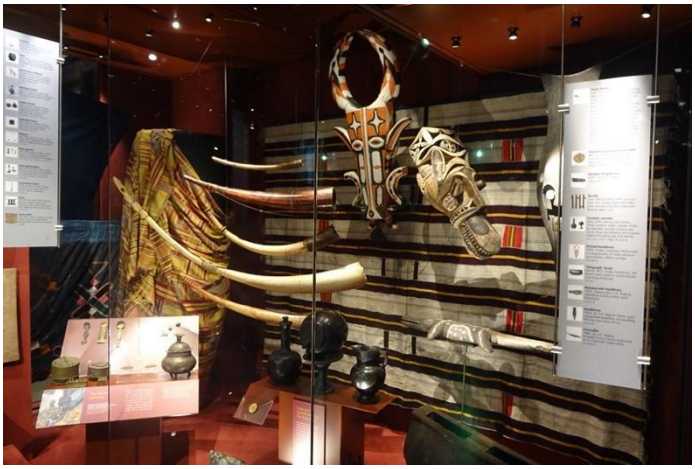

Figure 3: Array of African objects (photo by author).

In the Enslavement and the Middle Passage room, the first few cases display objects from indigenous South American and Caribbean cultures. Only two objects represent the indigenous Caribbean people; two worked stone tools, accompanied by a short explanation of how very few objects from these people remain, since disease, war and forced labour virtually wiped out these cultures (Fig. 4, page 43). Noteworthy is that at other places in the museum texts like these feature a historical indication of the object (Fig. 5, page 43), which is missing here. The next display shows objects that were used in the trade at the African continent, such as strings of glass beads, textiles and cast metal (Fig. 6, page 44). Texts in this display explain the complicated process of preparing a ship for a slave voyage. At the end of this vitrine a separate, horizontal rather than vertical, display shows rusted shackles. Against the opposite wall, drawer cabinets are placed and these contain historical documents from the ships, such as inventory lists and account books (Fig. 25, page 54). The slave trade in Africa is addressed next. The displays show objects from an African culture, shackles that were used on the ship, guns that were used to keep the slaves from running away or traded for slaves and a cut-away model of a slave trader ship (Fig. 7, page 44). Opposite this display is a large digital screen where the visitor can educate him- or herself on the global involvement of the slave trade; it lists the countries and their ports involved and clicking on the names gives more information on the specific ports (Fig. 8, page 44). A small case, somewhat hidden in a corner displays a selection of coins that were collected on the Caribbean Islands. Aside from official currency, the case contains so-called tokens (Fig. 9, page 45). However, any explanation on the meaning of these coins and tokens is absent. The left end corner of the room - a remarkably dark corner - is occupied by a cabinet about the development of Western Europe versus the underdevelopment of Africa. The objects in this display are a selection of nineteenth and twentieth century objects from Africa (Fig. 10, page 45), as evidence of the ‘underdevelopment’ of Africa.

The back end of the room addresses the beneficial effect of the slave trade for the homeland. With the increasing trade, products such as sugar and cotton became available to the working class rather than being a luxury product and with the increased demand for these products, the trade in slaves also increased. In Britain, this increase in supply and demand is often seen as the onset the Industrial Revolution (see paragraph 3.3.3). Although the majority of the enslaved was

transported to the colonies, rich families in the homeland owned slaves as too, as a display of their wealth. These slaves were dressed up in quality clothes, but frequently abused in their daily lives. The objects in this vitrine reflect the wealth that the white people in Britain obtained from the trade; painted coffee pots, detailly crafted woodwork such as clocks and jewellery boxes (Fig. 11, page 45). All these objects could be created and brought to the homeland because of the existence of the slave trade.

The right side of the room is dedicated to the life of the enslaved on the plantation. Seen from the entrance of the room, the right front corner contains a fairly secluded space. Here, a large sepia photo hangs on a wall. With digital aids the photo has been made to look like one is watching an old movie. A woman speaks about what happened on the plantation. She narrates three stories, one of which is about how an enslaved young man ran away and was chased by dogs to bring him back. The voice of the woman and her choice of words evoke strong emotions (Fig. 12, page 46). The largest part of the right side of the room is taken up by a composition of photos and drawings on the wall, with a scale model of a slave village in front of it (Fig. 13, page 46).

An enlightened border surrounds the model of the village. On this border, short descriptions highlight certain places of the village. Around the scale model, about three screens have been placed. On these, the visitor can zoom in on several aspects of the village. These stories revolve around historical figures and naming them gives life and context to the scale model.

The last room of the exhibition is dedicated to the various legacies of the history of slavery. A timeline that starts at the end of the room about the trade and which continues to far into the legacies room, lists important data and events in the fight against slavery; e.g. slave revolts - successful and unsuccessful, the Underground Railroad, the statements for and against the rights of enslaved, and important events of the decolonisation era. Though few objects accompany the display one vitrine shows a bowl which has ‘product of free labour’ painted on it (Fig. 14, page 46) and a book written by an African man about his escape from slavery. The timeline shows that slavery was resisted from the very beginning, both by the enslaved and by various white people (see paragraph 3.3.1). In the room both modern racism and positive black legacies are present. It is mentioned how many places still name streets after white “heroes” of that time; wealthy merchants

who made their fortune with the slave trade and how black people who and others of the resistance remain predominantly unmentioned (Fig. 15, page 46). A shrine for the ancestors who were victims of the cruelties of slavery is present, respectfully secluded (Fig. 16, page 47). However, the neutral or positive effects of the dispersion of African people over the world is more prominent: the room shows how much African cultures have influenced modern food, language, music (Fig. 17, page 47), and art and a large wall in the middle of the room shows pictures of successful and famous black people who are known for their positive achievements (Fig. 18, page 47). The aim of this exhibition room seems to be to let the visitor leave the museum on a positive note, without a heart that has become too heavy (see paragraph 3.4).

Although the museum addresses more or less all aspects of the slave trade, slavery, and its legacies, the point of view appears mainly Eurocentric. By this I mean that the cruelties done of the enslavement, Middle Passage and forced labour are no longer denied, but the voice of the enslaved and their descendants is absent or too faint to notice. It seems to be the "*we* did this to *them*" story. "*We* uprooted *their* lives, *we* made it happen to *them* and *we* see their strength and resilience in spite of what *we* did. The voice of the black individual or community is not explicitly present, perhaps with the exception of the room with the "talking sepia photograph". The paragraph below will explore the possibilities of a different, more inclusive perspective.

Figure 4: Stone objects from original people of the Caribbean (photo by author).

Figure 5: Objects from Chimu culture, including historical indication (photo by author).

Figure 6: Beaded jewellery used for trading on the African Continent (photo by author).

Figure 7: Open model of a slave trading ship (photo by author).

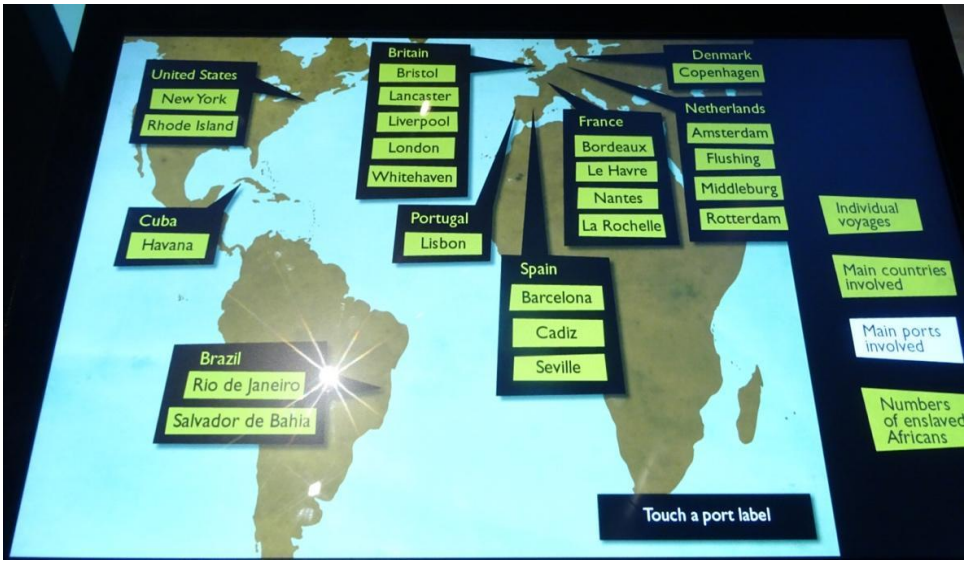

Figure 8: Digital display where the visitor can find information such as countries involved in the slave trade and numbers of enslaved that have been transported (photo by author).

Figure 9: Coin display of currency used in the colonial areas (photo by author).

Figure 10: Explanation of the underdevelopment of Africa, including a list of objects in the display (photo by author).

Figure 11: Objects that display indirect profit of the trade (photo by author).

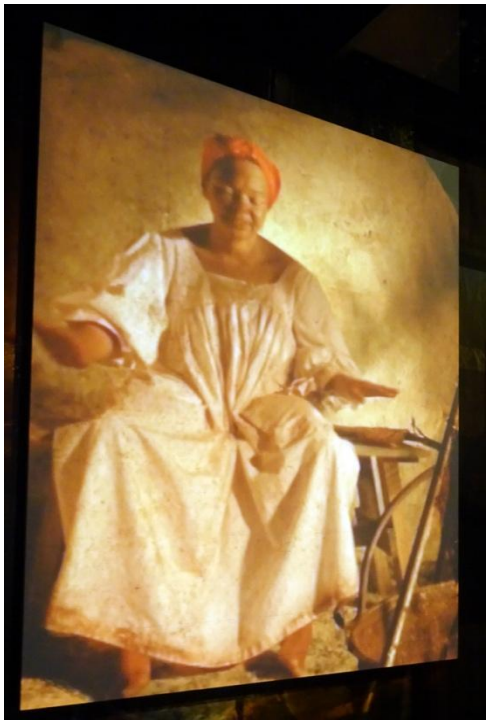

Figure 12: Photograph of the woman who tells stories from the perspective of enslaved people (photo by author).

Figure 13: Maquette of a planatation with wall of pictures about what took place there behind it (photo by author).

Figure 14: Products of free labour (photo by author).

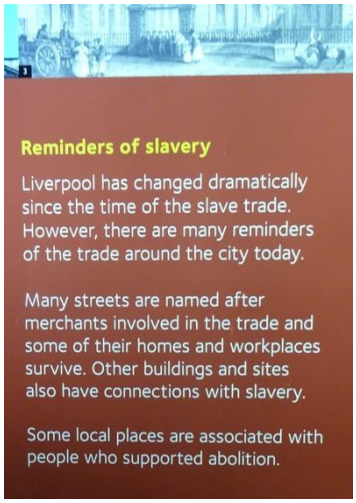

Figure 15: Recognising the effects of slavery on the street (photo by author).

Figure 16: Commemoration shrine for the ancestors (photo by author).

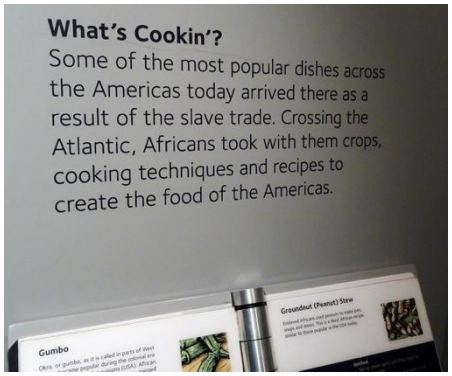

Figure 17: Influences of slavery on contemporary daily life (photo by author).

Figure 18: Wall of famous, achieving black people (photo by author).

3.3 Highlighted objects

This paragraph addresses several objects of the transatlantic slavery exhibition room in detail. The objects have been chosen based on their connections to different aspects of the slave trade and the potential of a plurality of stories. The selected objects are; shackles, a shrine figure, an account book of a trading ship, and two depictions of black people; a painting of a black boy and the sepia photograph of a black woman. Of each object, the placement within the exhibition is analysed to determine what story is (or which stories are) presented in the museum. This presentation will be linked to a literature study of each object to consider other aspects of the slave trade they might be able to convey. The purpose of this paragraph is to show that many objects that have a connection to slavery do more than telling the story from a European perspective: they tell the African story too.

3.3.1 Shackles - confinement and physical resistance

Shackles are displayed at various places in the exhibition; a set of rusted shackles from Ghana, in the display on the acquisition of slaves, two sets of shackles that were used aboard the slave ships and variety of shackles and mobility confiners that were used for disciplinary actions on the plantations in a display about life on the plantations (Fig. 19, Fig. 20, and Fig. 21, page 50-1). In discussing slavery, shackles are some of the most powerful objects to use as a means of visualisation: they are a universal depiction of loss of freedom and identity, and they were used at all facets of the slave trade. This is also the way they are presented in the museum. The set of shackles from figure 19 has been excavated at Tamale, Ghana and is being dated to the eighteenth century (object description in the museum). At this time the area that is now Tamale consisted of several villages without a unified authority; it was not until 1907 that Tamale became the capital of British Northern Territories and developed into a city (Fuseini *et al.* 2016, 65). As enslaved were often supplied by local traders (see below, paragraph 3.3.3) it is very difficult to determine to whom the shackles belonged; it may have been western European traders or the local suppliers. In both cases, the shackles stand for the first loss of freedom and having to subject to another authority than one's own, be it African or European.

The display at the start of the transatlantic journey also contains two sets of shackles. They were used to confine the slaves in the forts, in the transportation from the fort to the ship and oftentimes aboard the ship that transported them to the Caribbean. The use of shackles at all the aspects of the trade displays a need for the constant reinforcement of authority and unequal power relations (see below). A third array of shackles is displayed in the vitrine about loss of identity. This case also contains several other metal items that were used as punishment methods (Fig. 22, page 51). Most of all of all, this case displays creative array of cruelty. European owners developed various methods to punish based on the crime; a muzzle for when an enslaved spoke out of turn, a punishment collar for trying to run away. The variation of disciplinary tools indicates that plantation owners were well aware of the fact that they were dealing with humans rather than animals or a human form hardly above animal. Chapter two has explained that the division of human according to race was a way of justifying the actions of white superior powers, but the variety of methods confine the movement of the enslaved displays a purposeful cruelty that cannot be downplayed or denied. Dr Richard Benjamin, head of the International Slavery Museum acknowledges the sensitivity of the shackles:

> "*[they] are difficult to look at and evoke strong emotions. But it is important that they are on public display so that people can tangibly experience the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade."* (www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk)

However, the shackles tell another story: one of resistance. The mere fact that enchainment was necessary at all aspects of the slave trade is proof of the fight against enslavement. If not kept confined, the African people would rebel, run away, or commit suicide (Lester 1998, 1). Although collective rebellions are an important aspect of the resistance, individual resistance took many forms as well. Enslaved people would work below their capabilities and sabotage the business of their owner, e.g. by being late, working slow, harvesting before the crops were fully grown, or setting properties on fire (Morgan 2007, 127). Stealing, spitting on their owners, or speaking up are known forms of active resistance and it are these actions that inspired the cruel invention of different types of confinement (*Ibid*.,

127-9). Aside from all the cruelty they contain, shackles tell the story of the strength and resilience of the African people as well, which is an aspect deserving of more attention than it currently gets. The shackles in the museum are presented as objects that European used to confine and punish enslaved people. The experience of enslaved people is not touched upon in the exhibition. However, the White man has not been given a name or face, leaving him a faceless man. This gives the visitor the opportunity to distanciate themselves from the oppressor. Neither the black person or the white person is given a strong voice, which creates a discrepancy within the object.

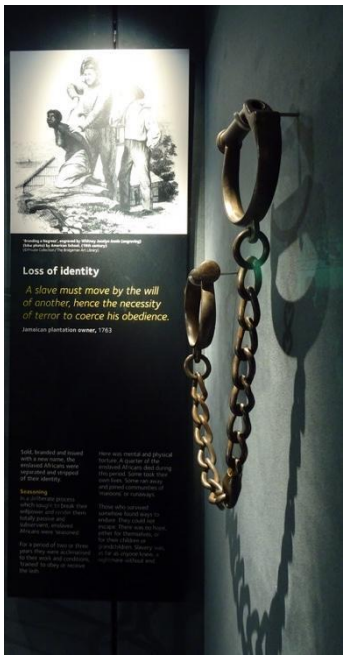

Figure 19 (above): Rusted shackles from Tamale (photo by author).

Figure 20 (right): Shackles as image of loss of identity (photo by author).

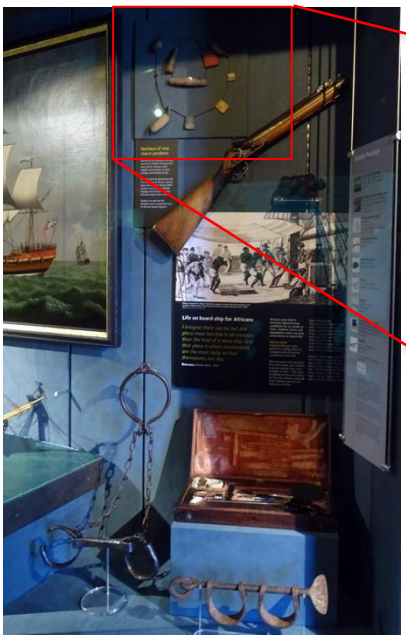

Figure 21: Variety of shackles used to confine enslaved (photo by author).

Figure 23: Pendant (photo by author).

Figure 22: Confinement tools as means of punishment (photo by author).

3.3.2 Shrine Figure - the xenophobic excuse for barbarians and a spiritual escape

The shrine figure in the display about the acquisition and transport of enslaved is one that belongs to the religion of the Aro Confederacy (Fig. 24, page 54), which was an African state in what is now Nigeria (text below figure in museum). In Africa, slaves were mainly provided by local traders rather than that white people explored the depths of the continent to capture black people themselves (Postma 1990, 86). In his book *The African Slave Trade*, Thomas Fowell Buxton (1839) cites several sources that state that the wars in Africa would have been be substantially less frequent were it not for the Europeans and their demand for slaves (i.e. page 53, 57 and 59). However, up until today the controversy of the relation between the history of slavery and the inland wars in Africa remains (Rönnbäck 2018, 309-10). Whatever the impact, it is known that African traders such as the Aro abused the indigenous religious culture for personal gain. The shrine figure on display was connected to the Ibiniukpabi oracle. Traders used the judicial powers of this oracle as a means to acquire people to sell into slavery. Originally, this oracle was said to be the voice of local nature spirits and it developed a widespread reputation of clairvoyance (Ugo Nwokeji 2010, 76). In the centuries of the European slave trade, the Aro used this

reputation to travel as agents of the oracle and request payment in the form of people, who were to be sold into slavery, in exchange for judicial and divine intervention. (text below object (fig 24); Ugo Nwokeji 2010, 76)). Their territory for this was the Igbo hinterland, which buildings are represented in the first room of the museum, although no reference is made back to it (Chambers, 2006, 794).

Aside from imagery about African religions, the shrine figure can also represent a division; one between Christianity and indigenous religion. The figurine is a visualisation of violation of the first and second of the Ten Commandments: 'You shall have no other gods before me' and 'You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them […]' (The Bible, Exodus 20: 3-5). Regarding the Africans as heretics was one of the arguments the Europeans used to justify slavery (Morgan 2007, 2-3). Even today, Christianity is often the benchmark against which all other religions are compared (Masondo 2008, 3) and if done so, African religions cannot be understood, as they are taken out of their cultural and historical contexts (Beyers 2010, 1). Despite the fact that African Religions vary in appearance, there are several characteristics that return frequently: the believe in a Supreme Being, spirits and divinities, the cult of ancestors, and the use of magic, charms, and spiritual forces (Ibid., 3). An example of such a charm is displayed in the museum (Fig. 23, page 51). Base of these beliefs is a holistic worldview in which all humans, animals, and plants are spiritually connected and these connections were (and are) honoured and maintained by ritualistic practices (*Ibid*., 5-6). This was an approach to the world the Europeans did not (want to) understand and was therefore deemed heretic. However, this interdependent nature of African religions can be seen as one of the factors that kept it alive. Despite the fact that enslaved people were often stripped naked for the Middle Passage and were therefore were not able to bring their charms with them (Bly 1998, 180), they did bring their religion, which was easier than bringing along Christianity would have been, as African traditions are adaptable to circumstances rather than having to fit in a set of dogmatic beliefs (Juergensmeyer 2003, 80). An example of this is the creation of a deity in case of an emergency. Adoro was a goddess installed by the Alor-Uno people to protect against the horrors of slaving and warring activities (Achebe 2003, 88). Before the need of protection against slavery and kidnapping this deity did not exist, as the

situation that called for her protection was not known to the people. In line with this fluidity of religious beliefs and practices, the dispersion of African people meant that a large number of African religions came into contact with each other (at the fort, aboard the ship, or at the plantation) and elements of each religion were combined and formed a "new" religion, often taking on certain elements of Christianity as well. This process is known as creolization and although it is now commonly interchanged with hybridity or mixture of cultures worldwide, the word derives from the age of slavery and the combination of elements of the Old World with the New World (Taylor 2012, 311). In addition to a fluid concept of religion, the conviction of the spiritual connection with the African homeland was strong and at times very visual. The belief that their spirit, the Flying Africans "myth"[3], would return home to Africa after death was often a reason for enslaved people to commit suicide on either the journey overseas and in the colonies (Bly 1998, 181; McDaniel 1986, 90-93).

The figure in the museum is therefore more than a visualisation of how Europeans influenced African traders to use their belief system to collect slaves. It is also a representation of a different view of the world. One that is interdependent and eternally connected to all that is around. This, in turn, is something that the enslaved used everywhere to survive – physically or spiritually - and evolve their cultures in spite of (or maybe because of) what was done to them. Unfortunately, these connections are not present in the museum.

[3] The word myth is used by McDaniel in the description of the Flying Africans and for lack of a better word I have repeated it. However, as the story has spiritual and cultural aspects which I do not want to deny for those who stand by it. Therefore, the word is hyphenated.

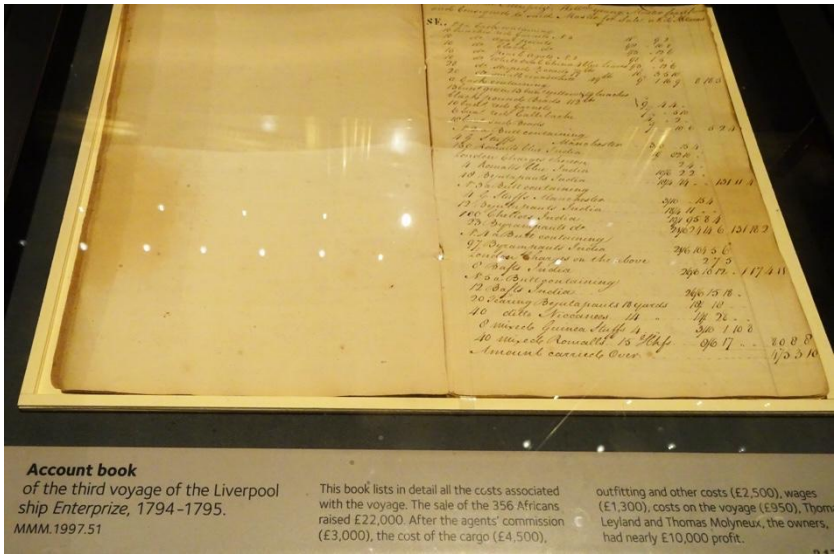

Figure 24 (left): Aro shrine figure, symbol of a religious believe abused by slave traders (photo by author).

Figure 25 (above): Account book of the Enterprize (photo by author).

3.3.3 *Account book of the Enterprize - African enslaved as the foundation of the Industrial Revolution*

The next object selected for closer analysis is a page from an account book of a slave voyage *(*Fig. 25). This account book lists data from the *Enterprize* - the owners second ship by this name - and was built in 1790. It was owned by Thomas Leyland and Thomas Molyneux. Thomas Leyland was merchant and banker and, in later life, a millionaire, mostly due to his interest in sixty-nine slave voyages. He was elected mayor of Liverpool three times (Smith 2010, British Online Archives, www.microfilm.digital). Thomas Molyneux was his business partner from 1788 onwards and was involved in 50 slave voyages. He was elected both bailiff and mayor of Liverpool in different years (Smith 2010, 47-9). Both traders belonged to the wealthiest population layer of Liverpool.

The *Enterprize* made a total of eight successful slave voyages between 1791 and 1801, all of them to Caribbean Islands (Smith 2010, 54-76, www.slavevoyages.org). Its ninth voyage resulted in its wrecking North East of Ireland in 1803 (*Ibid.*). The account book of its third journey is displayed in the

museum. What makes this item special, is that many of these accounts are lost due to the bombing of Liverpool in WWII (text in museum). What makes this item interesting is the economic story behind it. An account book was used to detailly track expenses and incomes, and important dates. The first page gives the dates of departure and arrival from and at several ports and lists important events that occurred during the journey. The page on display in the museum lists the cargo the ship carried to acquire slaves in Africa. The most important trading goods for Africa were: cotton produced in Manchester, alcohol, firearms, beads and metals (Morgan 2007, 68; Smith 2010, 67). In Africa, these goods were traded for gold, slaves, and ivory (Postma 1990, 85). The composition and mortality rates of live cargo were tracked in the account book; i.e. the total amount of slaves, the percentage male, female and child and the mortality rate (www.slavevoyages.org). The slaves were transported to the Caribbean where they were sold and raw materials replaced them for the journey back home. If the ship returned safely to its home port, profits of one voyage could mount up to £10,000. Today, this would be approximately £550,000 (information slab Museum of Liverpool).

As can be seen in the table in Smiths' dissertation (2010), cotton took up the majority of the cargo to be shipped to Africa. Cotton was one of the highest demanded products of the triangular trade and this in turn influenced the intensity of the slave trade (Rönnbäck 2018). The European power in the global supply and demand chain was one of the elements that spurred the Industrial Revolution (Stearns 2007, 48). Though the influence of the slave trade on the originating of the Industrial Revolution is highly debated, it is undoubtedly true that coercion and exploitation of the slaves was the foundation on which thousands of people were able to sustain themselves (Rönnbäck 2018, 327).

The account book tells the story of personal gain and the economics involved in the trade. However, it also bundles together the many aspects of the triangular trade and in this, shows that European development and its rise to world-wide power was a world effort that would not have been possible without slave labour. The attention for this latter aspect is lacking in the museum and the discussion of the relation between the Industrial Revolution and the slave trade is not touched upon, despite the fact that it is an important debate within the academic world and one of the reasons many descendants ask for repatriations.

3.4 Discussion

The study of the highlighted objects exemplifies that objects can convey different stories. These stories vary depending on the scope within which the objects are regarded. In the sensitive heritage of the history of slavery, objects such as chains can stand for oppression and cruelty, but resistance and believe in one's owns worth as well. Religious objects can symbolise lost religions, misuse of belief systems and the forced acceptance of Christianity, but they also represent the fluidity of African religions and the creativity and openness towards those who have other beliefs or rituals. This might in turn stand for a greater acceptance of 'that which is different', although further research is needed to make any kind of a statement about this. The account books of the slave voyages give a shocking image of the numbers of enslaved that were transported, how many died on the journey across the ocean, and the economics that are were involved in carrying out a voyage. However, these numbers might also give understanding about why black communities call for reparations. Despite the controversies around this subject, the numbers show that the colonies depended highly on the work of enslaved to make their economy profitable and European homeland in turn benefited from it. The technological developments that were made to answer the supply and demand chain spurred on the Industrial Revolution. The triangular trade shows how the developments of the New World exploitation are the result of global processes and developments and cannot be fully attributed to one or a few European countries. The depiction of black people in history was often in the context of slavery or an inferior position.

Undoubtedly, there are many more stories than those that have been researched or touched upon in this chapter. This abundance of stories is not fully used in the ISM. Although the museum touches upon all aspects of slavery and the slave trade and covers a wide geographical area, the perspective is predominantly Eurocentric. The descriptions that accompany the objects focus on one aspect of the object in question, rather than highlighting different perspectives; the shackles are talked about in relation to confinement, the figurine is a visual tool to tell the story of misuse of African religious beliefs and the account book highlights the economic aspects of the trade. Many other objects in the Middle Passage display are presented the same way. The display of coins fails to have any explanation of meaning, in spite of explicitly mentioning the slave tokens,

whose meaning cannot be common knowledge. The luxury objects present the increasing richness of European citizens, without referring to the acquirement of materials for these objects or the environmental impacts. The story of the West Africa room is a simplified depiction of the richness and sophistication of African cultures. And the Legacy displays fail to mention the many aspects of racism.

The ISM has been awarded for its efforts to fight against modern legacies of slavery, such as racism, injustice and contemporary forms of slavery in 2009 (Benjamin 2012, 186). The museum is to commended for the wide range of the story they display. Most aspects of slavery and the slave trade are addressed. However, thirteen years after their opening, their perspective is noticeably Eurocentric and fails to visibly display a black voice. An exception is the heritage room, where black achievers are celebrated and elements of black cultures are mentioned. Nonetheless, even here the chosen perspective seems predominantly to show how black cultures have influence the life of Europeans and white people, generally positive. This Eurocentric approach can have an effect opposite of the goal of the museum: the attention to the cruelties of slavery displays the enslaved as victims, who need to be pitied, which might increase the distance between black and white, rather than diminish it.

The museum works together with human rights organisations such as Stop the Traffik and Anti-Slavery International and their aim is to use the museum to campaign the problems of modern slavery (Carl-Lokko 2013, 74). The involvement of these organisations and members of the black community of Liverpool mean there is a multivocality in the development of the exhibition. However, this is not visible in the eventual displays, nor have I detected a mention in the museum thanking their contributors, naming the different stakeholders involved. Both this and the singular point of view of the exhibition might be due to a lack of space. Several academic sources (e.g. Benjamin 2012 and Carl-Lokko 2013) state that a secondary location was to open in 2013 and is to provide education and research facilities, a multimedia centre, a collection's centre and community spaces, addressing topics such as modern racism and modern slavery into detail. However, upon my visiting the museum in 2019, the entrance was still in the building of the maritime museum and there were no more than three exhibition rooms. Possibly, various topics will be discussed more detailed if and when the new building becomes accessible.

The Middle Passage room displays the history of slavery, whereas the Legacy room focusses on legacies in contemporary society. Noteworthy is that a mention of racism is absent. Rather, the Legacy room focuses on positive achievements; the Black Achievers Wall, the influence of African people on modern music, dance, and food. According to Carl-Lokko this is because the museum had to find a balance between the cruelties of the history and the resistance and achievements of black people (*Ibid.,* 72). This search for a balance is to be admired and praised. Focussing on the negative effects of the trade would enforce the victimising of black people and would not be productive for an equal society. However, because of the different set up of the Middle Passage room and the Legacy room, a distance is created between the two themes. The Middle Passage room is dark and has a more classical set up of display cases. Elements that can be touched or opened look over-used and outdated. The Legacies room is light, modern and contains many objects that can be moved or touched, all of which look new. Despite the fact that both rooms use the same multimedia tools, the dark vs. light set-up creates such a change of environment that a connection between the two is lost. This alteration in lay-out is, however, understandable, as it wants to show that the African descendants are strong and thriving, in spite of their history. Despite this, due to this set up, the severity of modern consequences of this history fails to receive enough attention. Therefore, a balance between oppression and resilience which is visible throughout the entire exhibition rather than between different rooms and themes would is recommended. This would, in my opinion, enforce the link between the past and the presence, because it shows a constant thread of oppression and resistance from the beginnings of slavery to today.

Another improvement that might be part of the move to a larger building is public engagement. Although there is an opinion board near the entrance/exit of the current exhibition, there is little else that encourages the visitor to involve themselves in the dialogue. The opinion board is mostly a modern presentation of a guest book and does not invite the visitor to engage in the discussion about the history of slavery and its legacies. In addition, the exhibition is, aside from acknowledgement of European cruelty in the past, hardly provocative. As these aspects fit the presented accommodations of the new building, there is an expectation of more public involvement in the future.

3.5 Conclusion

The ISM is, in spite of its use of multimedia, still a relatively static museum, in which a story is presented to the visitor rather than that it recalls different accounts to invoke a discussion and rethinking one's own opinion. It is important to note that my impression of the museum is subjective. As the European side of history is best known to me, it is understandable that I see these stories first. In addition, I may have been even more biased because I had already visited the exhibition 'the afterlives of slavery' in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, an exhibition which focusses completely on the legacies of slavery, both positive and negative (see chapter four). Reviews on Google and TripAdvisor for the ISM are predominantly positive and as an informative museum I agree with the positive comments. For those who know little about the history of slavery, the museum is an eye opener and presents to the visitor how much the triangular trade has influenced life in Europe, the colonies, and Africa. This is enforced by the fact that the museum is currently the only museum in Europe focussing on the triangular slave trade. However, the museum fails to link the history to the effects of slavery such as racism and biased behaviour towards minorities, nor does it have space to address the history of slavery in other places in the world in and is therefore not likely to contribute significantly to the efforts to counteract racism. Nonetheless, the expectations for the new museum, in a new, larger building with more interactive tools, are high.

Chapter 4 - The memory of Transatlantic slavery in the Netherlands and its museums

The previous chapter has discussed the presence of commemoration of slavery in Britain and case of the International Slavery Museum. The chapter below will discuss the ways in which the Netherlands allots attention to their involvement in the slave trade and slavery. In accordance with the previous chapter, the chapter will start with a discussion on the presence of monuments erected in memory of slavery and the point of view they intent to convey in the Netherlands. After this, the chapter will move to a walkthrough of the exhibition *Heden van het Slavernijverleden* (AoS) and its analysis. The analysis will involve a comparative element wherein the exhibition is measured against a number of other exhibitions and museums in the Netherlands: The Rijksmuseum, the temporary *Grote Suriname Tentoonstelling (Big Surinam exhibition)* and the Westfries museum. Although the focus will be on the transatlantic side of history, several East-Indian collections will be touched upon as well, if and where they contribute valuable insight to the discussion. Of each museum or exhibition, the amount of attention towards the history of slavery will be discussed, as well as the chosen perspective and the associations that have been made between slavery, the Dutch involvement, and modern implications and effects.

4.1 Commemorating slavery in the Netherlands

The Netherlands was one of the first countries to involve itself in the slave trade on a large scale. Although many people are familiar with the triangular trade, the trade below the equator, from the African coast to Brazilian ports, is less well known. Even fewer people know that the Dutch were the most powerful nation of this trade route between 1629 and 1645 (Harrison 2015, 250). The Netherlands was never able to measure itself with the bigger nations, but parts of their two most important trading companies (the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie,* or VOC, and the *West-Indische Compagnie*, or WIC) involved themselves in the slave trade to the East and West until the abolition of the trade in 1814. It was not until 1863 that the Netherlands abolished slavery (*Ibid.,* 423-7), although enslaved were forced to work under the pretence of apprenticeships for ten years after that (Nimako *et al*. 2014, 42-44).

One of the he strongest critiques on the Netherlands has been that it ignores or minimizes its partaking in the trade and, as a nation, refuses to take responsibility for the events that have taken place. There was no substantial anti-slavery movement in the Netherlands to fight for abolition and it took 130 years before the abolition of slavery was commemorated in the Netherlands itself (*Ibid.*). Even now, where and when this history is acknowledged, this is done with a sense of superiority towards other European nations, because the Dutch were not as present as others where it concerns the system of slavery (*Ibid.*, 35). Slavery is regarded with a greater negative attitude than the slave trade, which was 'merely' part of a large-scale trading system and the Dutch argue that they treated their cargo with more care than other nations (*Ibid*.). However, Surinam, one of Dutch colonies, was notorious for their cruel treatment of enslaved and on transports, the nation still packed six to seven hundred African people together to sell them for their own profit (*Ibid.,* 2014*,* 39-40). The Netherlands has no reason to place themselves above other European nations. For the nations' size, the involvement in the slave trade and the system of slavery is considerate and has influenced the life of countless African people and their descendants.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the attention towards this part of history is growing, slowly but steadily. In 2002 Beatrix, then queen of the Netherlands, and the then prime minister J.P. Balkenende were present at the reveal of the national slavery monument in Amsterdam, the creation of which was an initiative of Afro-Dutch organisations (Balkenhol 2010, 77). The monument represents the history of slavery, the fight of breaking through the chains, and the hopeful looks towards a future of freedom (www.buiteninbeeld.nl). This was the first monument for commemoration of the history of slavery in the Netherlands and the opening has been criticised for its focus towards the European Dutch community rather than the Afro-Dutch (Balkenhol 2010, 77.). Since then, three other memorials have been opened in Amsterdam, Middelburg, and Rotterdam where the Afro-Dutch community has been taken into more account (*Ibid.*). All three monuments are located in port cities that were a central part of the triangular trade. The *levensboom* (tree of life) in Amsterdam is a monument of the communal history of the Netherlands and its former western colonies and does not specifically mention slavery (amsterdam.buitenkunst.nl). The monument in Middelburg includes the four cardinal points and was inspired by an expression from

Guadeloupe: ‘If you know where you’re from, and know how far to go, the road towards the future becomes clear and hopeful’ (www.stichtingmonumentmiddelburg.nl; translation by author). In Rotterdam, a steel monument in the form of a ship with dancing people on it, was presented in 2013, one hundred and fifty years after the abolition of slavery. The monument stands for a transformation from industrial to cultural and celebrates the Rotterdam-identity of the descendants of the history overseas while also remembering this history (www.bkor.nl). Although the memorial in Rotterdam commemorates the descendants of indentured workers in the Caribbean and Surinam (often from East Indian territories), there is no national monument designed to commemorate the history and events of the East Indies. The mix of positive and negative responses to King Willem Alexander's apologies for the nations excessive violent actions in its East India colonies in March 2020, saying ‘the past could not be denied, but should be acknowledged’ (www.theguardian.com) are indicative for the sensitivity of this part of history and is an important indicator of why this geographical location deserves specific research and attention.

Nonetheless, one aspect of this history is worth mentioning here. The statue of Jan Pieterszn Coen on the square in front of the Westfries museum in Hoorn. Coen was a central figure for the early settlement of the Dutch colonies in the East Indies in the early sixteenth century. On the 300th anniversary of his birth, in 1887, the statue was erected in celebration of his accomplishments (Johnson 2013, 587). However, from the beginning, the statue has been subject to an ongoing discussion, which has been gaining momentum over the past decade. Rather than the image of Dutch successes in the East, J.P. Coen is regarded a mass murderer by those who are in favour of removing the statue, referring to his actions on the Banda islands (*Ibid.*). Counter arguments addressed the fact that his actions should be placed in the context of time, thereby not justifying the violent actions he carried out, but rather considering that the contemporary frame of reference is very different from the historical one. In addition, the heritage status of the statue itself was mentioned. The statue had been part of Hoorn for over a hundred years before the discussions commenced in earnest, giving the object meaning in itself, aside from the person it depicts (*Ibid.,* 587-91). Currently, the statue remains, although the information accompanying the statue had been

adapted and refers to the violent actions of Coen. Additionally, the discussion has gotten new fire after the death of George Floyd and the actions of removing statues in Britain (see chapter 3). The statue in front of the Westfries museum is an indicative example of how sensitive heritage is not contained to the museum, but goes beyond walls and borders. The discussion of the Tropenmuseums' *AoS* will make a comparison with the Westfries museum in Hoorn and its awareness of these walls and borders.

A discussion on slavery in museums in the Netherlands has many limitations, as the Netherlands does not possess a museum devoted to the history of the transatlantic slave trade and the number of temporary exhibitions focussing on this subject are limited. According to an article in *Vrij Nederland*, the Netherlands is far behind in dedicating museums or exhibitions to slavery (www.vn.nl). However, Van Leeuwen, author of the article, fails to mention the existence of the National institute Dutch slavery and heritage (NiNsee). Although the institute had a lifespan of merely 10 years, the duration of government funding, it housed the semi-permanent exhibition '*Doorbreek de Stilte*' from 2004 to 2012 and the temporary exhibition '*Kind aan de Ketting*' (Jaarverslag 2012, NiNsee). The *Scheepvaartmuseum* in Amsterdam housed the short-term exhibition '*De Zwarte Bladzijde*' in 2013 (www.hetscheepsvaartmuseum.nl) and the Tropenmuseum had several temporary exhibitions, such as '*Zwart en Wit'* (Van Stipriaan 2016, 100). Additionally, attention towards this part of history should not be valued by its earliest appearance, but rather by the efforts and angles the museums choose to take towards an inclusive exhibition. The limited and celebratory attention for the history of slavery in other countries has been discussed in the previous chapters, and it is better to have a few well considered exhibitions rather than a permanent misguiding one.

Aside from exhibitions in the past, the Netherlands is introducing several changes in a short period of time (Schmieder 2018). The AoS in the Tropenmuseum opened in 2017, the Rijksmuseum is creating an exhibition on slavery to be accessible for the public in 2020, and the Tropenmuseum is developing a new exhibition for 2021 titled 'Heritage' which will focus on the unrecognised side of colonial history (interview with Robin Lelijveld, appendix A, page 111). In addition, plans are made for a museum in Amsterdam exclusively dedicated to slavery, although it is currently unknown on which aspects of slavery

the museum will focus (Van Leeuwen, 2019). On October 5th 2019, a temporary exhibition in the *Nieuwe Kerk* in Amsterdam opened called '*De Grote Suriname Tentoonstelling*' (the big exhibition of Surinam). Rather than attempt a comparison between past exhibitions and current ones, the paragraphs below will discuss the content about the history of slavery of the Netherlands in these museums which was available in 2019-2020, focussing on perspective, inclusivity, and connections to modern issues.

4.2 Walkthrough of the 'Afterlives of Slavery' in the Tropenmuseum

The Tropenmuseum finds its roots in the collection that Frederik van Eeden assembled from 1864 onwards, consisting mainly of objects from the Dutch East Indies. Thanks to his efforts, a museum opened its doors in Haarlem in 1871; the first Colonial Museum of the World (www.tropenmuseum.nl). After approximately fifty years the collection had outgrown the available space and was moved to a specially designed building in Amsterdam, where it is located to this day a (*Ibid.*). In 1950 the museum changed its name to Tropenmuseum and proclaimed a new purpose: to show that, despite our differences, we are all the same: human (*Ibid.*). Since then, the museum has worked towards a non-judgemental and open-minded approach in its exhibitions and though it still mainly displays the past and cultures from former Dutch colonial areas, it also addresses contemporary ethic topics and issues such as religion and gender. The museum has been visited on several occasions, most recently on October 17th 2019. In addition to AoS, the other historical exhibitions - all found on the second floor of the museum - have been visited, in order place the approach of AoS in a broader context. AoS focuses on the effects of slavery the descendants from enslaved people still experience today. However, it also wants to address the creativity and resilience these people have shown, and an important aspect of the exhibition is the legacy they have scattered around the world. The description below follows the exhibition as started from the right, but the exhibition can be entered from three sides and has no specific order.

From the right, the first room is a small one where a short movie is playing featuring a direct descendant of an enslaved person, urging the visitor not to forget this part of history, as the effects are still palpable in today's society. The next room is the exhibition space, and is broken into sections by strategic placing of the exhibition cases. Rather than employing class cases, the displays are made of a

wireframe which in this context might evoke the image of a cage or confinement (personal interpretation). Plaques in different colours in the frames indicate different topics. The pink displays introduce the visitor to intangible heritage such as the music genre Tambú and Anansi the spider. It describes how these and other cultural aspects were often a way to resist the established order (see below, paragraph 4.2.3). Objects that accompany this theme are musical instruments, a headdress called *Angisa*, and a comb (Fig. 26, page 67). An explanation of the *Winti* religion is part of this display as well. *Winti* is a religion that developed in Surinam and is the result of the mixing of different African belief systems with new practices developed in the New World (Stephen 2013, 1107). White slave owners, who called themselves Christian, branded this "pagan" religion idolatry. It was criminalised for a long time and it was not until 1971 that it was reinstated as a recognised religious practice. However, the illegality of the religion shapes the relation many descendants of enslaved have with it today (Text in the museum, Taylor and Case 2013, 276-7).

The next display is in front of one of the entrances and consists of a large text explaining the objective of the exhibition, inviting the visitor to leave a comment, which they will use for the 'Heritage' exhibition which is being developed[4] (Fig. 27, page 67).

To the left of this explanation is a yellow display section about race and the World Trade Fairs. It explains how race was made a power structure, rather inherent biological fact and how inhabitants of the colonies were literally exhibited as curiosities in European countries (texts in the museum). Objects in this section include: instruments to take people's measurements (Fig 28, page 67), photographs of humans on display, and artifacts that were used to recreate a native environment at the World Trade Fairs (Fig. 29, page 68). A diorama of a Du is displayed in a darkened glass box (the visitor can push a button to light this) (Fig. 30, page 68). A diorama is a display construction with a painted background and often a type of optical illusion to increase the realism of the object(s) on display (Halloran 2009, 80). This particular one is a miniature depiction of a dance at a

[4] in October 2019, it was no longer possible to leave an opinion on the exhibition; the pens and papers had been removed from the display. Possibly, this is because a significant amount of responses has been gathered and more cannot be processed or add valuable new information.

plantation; a Du. These miniatures – which presented an idolised version of the truth – were popular souvenirs amongst Europeans. They were they were made by special order and with the purpose to take home (information in the museum).

At the left back of the room cases in the same yellow colour as the section about race give an overview of the treatment of black people after the abolition of slavery. The most prominent examples are the Dutch 'Black Pete' discussion and ethnic profiling by authorities such as the police (Fig. 31, page 68). However, there are also older examples of separation, such as black musicians hired as a curiosity. Objects in this section are old posters, the shoes of the Main Black Pete, as well as protest flyers, buttons and petitions to show that the fight against racism has been an ongoing process (Fig. 32 and Fig. 33, page 68). This corner of the room also houses a large touchscreen on which the visitor can zoom in on different regions and cities of the Netherlands and see what phenomena, mainly architectural structures, these places contain that have a connection to slavery.

The light blue display in the back-right corner of the room - behind the pink display) gives a historical framework of transatlantic slavery, which focuses on the devaluation to property and the escape of enslaved people. Though Surinam is the main source of information of this part of the exhibition, the general order of events applies to all colonies, both of the Dutch and of other European countries. Together with the expected objects such as branding irons and shackles, documents that are proof ownership and a staff that was used as denotation of authority in Maroon communities (information in museum) (Fig. 34, page 69; Fig. 37, page 72) complement the story the museum portrays here.

On the back of the front cases of the room is a series of silhouettes, *en profil* portraits in an eighteenth-century fashion. These tell the personal story of a number of people who were in some way connected to the slave trade: not only the enslaved or the plantation owner, but also women, a trader, a freedom fighter, a student, and someone who took advantage of the situation when it was suitable for him (Fig 35, page 69) These silhouettes depict how deeply imbedded slavery was into society and how much it influenced the way people thought.

When one leaves the main exhibition room one enters a smaller room which is devoted to commemorating the abolition of slavery and the fight it took to get there. It discusses the need for admission of guilt and reparations. Few objects accompany this theme, but there are photographs of people who stood up for the

rights of the descendants of the enslaved and against racism, as well as houseware and a puzzle to show how the colonies were present in daily life.

Figure 26: Banjo, peddle, and angisa in the resilience display (photo by author).

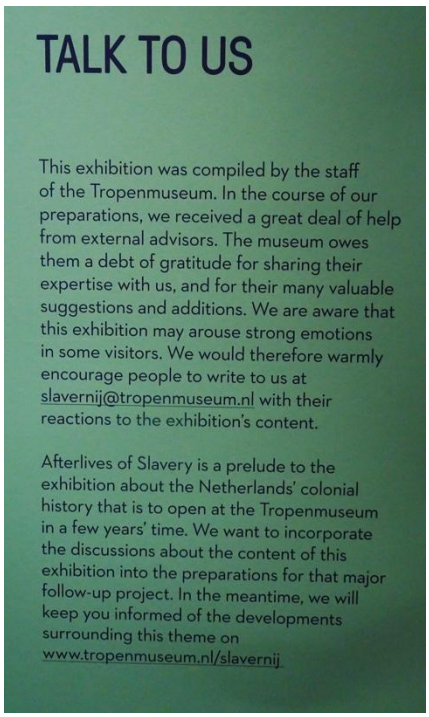

Figure 27: Explanation of the objective of the exhibition (photo by author).

Figure 28: Measuring of the human skull (photo by author).

Figure 29: Photographs of humans on display and a selection of props that were used to bring reality to the picture (photo by author).

Figure 30: Diorama of a Du by Gerrit Schouten (photo by author).

Figure 31 (left): newspaper articles about ethnic profiling (photo by author).

Figures 32 and 33 (right): Objects used in protests about the history of slavery and modern racism (photos by author).

Figure 34 (above): Shackle and branding iron (photo by author).

Figure 35 (left): Example of one of the silhouettes on display (photo by author).

4.3 Highlighted objects

There are relatively few objects in this exhibition and even fewer that have a historical origin of over 50 years. However, some objects are interesting subjects for closer analysis and will be discussed into more detail in the paragraph below. It will describe how the objects are displayed in the museums, including the stories they want to tell and it analyses whether there are other stories that can be connected to the objects.

4.3.1 Musical instruments - performing a persistent tune

Figure 36: Instruments used in African music styles, including the African drum (photo by author).

According to historical research, once they arrived on a plantation, the enslaved were less likely to kill themselves (Lester 1998, 3). Something that has presumably contributed to this decline in mortality is that on these plantations the enslaved were able to form a kind of community. Despite their varieties in origin, the enslaved were unified by their circumstances and their cultures creolized (De Jong 2012, 16). An important aspect that created a connection was music, especially as the enslaved did not speak a common language. The museum has displayed several musical instruments that are used for the genre Tambú, a typical Netherlands Antilles music style, related to the *Montamentu* religion (Fig. 26, page 57, and Fig 37, page musical instruments) (Gangelhoff and LeGrand 2013, 17; De Jong 2012, 16). The museum describes how Tambú music was forbidden until 1952 and how Tambú feasts were strictly regulated until 2012, only opening up due to the continues efforts of the musicians and their desire to preserve the connection with Africa (text in museum).

The condemnation of music that has a connection with African culture started during the age of slavery. The African drum was banned, as well as wind instruments such as horns (text in museum). In Europe, the Church considered the African drum an instrument of the devil, used in heretic religious practices, a notion

that was brought along to the New World (Sublette 2004, 74). In addition, the instruments are said to invoke fear; plantation owners were afraid of them as they might have been means of communication during slave uprisings (Johnson 1999, 48-52). Many laws against the 'Negros' using such instruments are known, but very few incidents of revolt with the use of drums are recorded. According to Johnson, the explanation for the existence of the laws is that the white people did not understand the original intent of the instruments and therefore assumed the worst (53). This line of thought may have been reinforced by the fact that in Europe, the use of drums and wind instruments was strongly associated with war (Sublette, 74). However, for African people music was not a negative practice. It was part of most of their ritual practices and they used a variety of musical instruments. Aside from the instruments in the exhibition, the diorama by Gerrit Schouten is also connected to this heritage, as the *Du* is a dance guided by music (see paragraph 4.4). Although not really understood, the music and practices it accompanied intrigued the colonists, and evoked emotions, both good and bad.

Additionally, many people do not realise how much African people have influenced musical developments. For almost a thousand years, the Church condemned music, especially in relation to religion, as it supposedly stimulated erotic intentions and lewd behaviour (Sublette, 74). It was black people from the African continent that introduced music to the Iberian people, brought it with them to the New World and used it as a way to connect to each other and escape the struggles of their daily life (*Ibid.;* Text in museum). And rather than being downcast by the restriction of their instruments, enslaved people developed string instruments and other, smaller, versions of the large drum known as the African drum (text in museum). As explained in chapter three, African cultures were much more dynamic than those of Western Europe and because of the easy incorporation of various African rhythms as well as European musical influences, new music genres developed in the Americas and the Caribbean. Despite this, the influence of the Christian attitude towards music, dance and African religion and rituals has been persistent, which is evident in the prohibition of Tambú until the second half of the twentieth century and the regulations that accompanied the genre until the twenty-first century. Music genres that are strongly connected to Africa have to fight for their right to exist, but many contemporary music genres have been strongly influenced by 'slave music' as well. Jazz is probably the most

well-known example, but blues, rock & roll, as well as country and bluegrass are all a mixture of ‘black’ and ‘white’ music (Johnson 1999, 48-52). It is not long ago that music genres such as hip-hop and rap were considered unsuitable for “proper people”, especially in Christian circles. The influence of music developments as well as the acceptance of genres finds its roots in the age of slavery and has spread all over the world. The musical instruments are therefore a representation of escapism from reality, keeping a connection with the homeland, imposing threat on the oppressor, and of resilience through the ages.

4.3.2 Staff of Authority - power relations between Maroons and the colonists

Next to the display about ownership, there is a small case that addresses the Maroons. The Maroons were those who were able to escape enslavement and build a life in the hinterlands of the Caribbean (text in the museum). They have been around since the beginning of the system of slavery and are named after the Spanish word cimarrón, meaning runaway cattle (text in museum). The only object that accompanies the display about maroons is a brass staff (Fig. 34, page 69). The staff was a sign of authority and was carried by a *gaanman* or a *kabiten* (Jie Sam Foek 2003, 30, text in the museum). The text in the segment explains how Maroon communities would attack plantations and that this was the reason for the colonial power to seek peace with the largest Maroon communities, such as the Samuuka, the Matawai and the Okanasi/Ndyuká. Because of this peace treaty, the Maroons had to return runaway enslaved (text in museum).

Figure 37: Staff of authority used in Marron communities (photo by author).

Although the single cabinet in the museum contains a large amount of information and gives a basic understanding of who Maroons were, there are several elements that are not touched upon. First, the diversity of the Maroons is hardly addressed. Aside from literally naming the three largest groups of Maroons in Surinam, there is no explanation of the cultural diversity of the Maroons, even within these larger groups or the existence of Maroon communities on the islands.

However, there is a variation of language, culture, and expression of dance and arts between Maroon tribes, which can be explained by the diverse heritage of the escaped enslaved and the composition of these within Maroon communities (Jie Sam Foek 2003, 27). It is these variations that have created cultures that can be distinguished from each other, influenced by their life experiences in the New World and their contact colonial powers. An example of this is the hierarchical structure of Maroon societies, a second element that is not addressed in the museum. The matriarchal shape of the African political system is mixed with the layered authority system of colonial powers (Strange 2016, 65). Additionally, the Maroons earned a right of existence and thereby a form of peace by signing peace treaties with the colonial powers. The staff in the museum is a formal insignia that the colonial government gifted to the Maroon authorities. Aside from a recognition of title, the staff is also a reminder of the conditions of the peace treaty, such as bringing back escaped enslaved to the colonial territories (*Ibid*., 66). The staff is therefore both a sign of right of existence and of the uncertain life of the Maroons. The uncertain life of the Maroon communities is also not touched upon in the museum, but is an important aspect. Without this uncertainty of continued existence there would be little reason for the Maroons to sign peace treaties with the colonial powers. Life in Maroon villages was sustained by agriculture and fishing (Jie Sam Foek 2003, 26-7), but because of the continued threat of manhunts organised by plantation owners, villages were founded and deserted frequently (*Ibid.*; Fatah-Black 2018, 101). The manpower of these hunts predominantly existed of black people, enslaved who were sold to the army with the purpose to find Maroons (Fatah-Black 2018, 101). Although enslaved could earn their freedom by serving time in this army (known as *redi misu*), they were often mistrusted by white and black people during and after their service (*Ibid.,* 113-8). However, it was not only the Maroons that lived in insecurity. Because of the frequent attacks on plantation and parts of colonial cities, the colonists were under constant threat as well (Cummings 2018, 50). Because of these threats, they were forced to develop surveillance methods to protect their property. Peace treaties were an option, but simultaneously, methods to manage and track enslaved were developed and improved and have on set modern security methods, influenced by the constant uncertainty of which black was a terrorist and which a free man by colonial laws (*Ibid*., 51). It is understandable that the museum

did not have the space to take up this extensive aspect of Maroon communities. However, they also fail to mention Maroon communities still exist in Surinam (and other former colonial places) today and make up part of the diverse culture of the country today. Nor does it speak of the continued fight for existence and territorial ownership of these Maroons or the influence modern western commerciality has on this. By referring to Richard Price, Ronald Cummings connects the insecurity of existence to the mining of the rainforest by Chinese and Canadian based multinational companies (54).

The staff in the museum is therefore not only a sign of authority in Maroon communities, but a representation of power relations between Maroons and colonial governments as well, power relations influenced by the insecurity of existence on both sides. It also stands for an acknowledgement of earning freedom by running away, an acknowledgment that was partially counteracted by enlisting black people to capture runaway enslaved and Maroons as another way to freedom, with a more secure existence after serving time. The power relations have always been precarious and remain so to this day and the staff can be considered an image of a constant discrepancy between Maroon communities, former colonial powers and other cultural groups.

4.3.3 Anansi - Visualising intangible heritage

Although intangible heritage often is unconnected to objects, the AoS exhibition has attempted to visualise the art of storytelling by caricaturing a story of Anansi the Spider. Storytelling as African cultural practice is strongly connected to ritualistic practices around death (Marshall 2010, 177). Stories about Anansi, known as Ba Anansi in Surinam and Kompa Nanzi on the former Netherlands Antilles, evolved to a means of making fun of the oppressor (*Ibid.*; text in the museum). Anansi is a trickster spider who finds his roots in West Africa. He is a cunning creature who uses his wit to get his way and create chaos (*Ibid*., 177-9). Originally, his stories were used to reinforce the power of the main deity and promote the importance of social order and family bonds and they were often recited during funeral rites (M'baye 2009, 97; Van der Pijl, 2013, 20). In the colonies, his stories evolved to be crueller and Anansi often triumphed over creatures stronger than him (Marschall 2010, 180-3). He became a symbol for standing up against the white oppressor using the 'weapons of the weak'; stealing,

lying, cheating, working beneath capability, self-mutilation, sabotaging tools and machinery, and setting fire to fields and storage rooms (*Ibid.*, 183). In the analogy, Anansi is the slaves who used their ingenuity against their slave masters. Like Anansi, they are physically weak, but the stories present them as intellectually superior. Anansi is not the only trickster figure that features in resistance stories. In his *The Trickster Comes West: Pan-African Influence in Early Black Diasporan Narratives*, Babacar M'Baye analyses the work of six writers for the influences of icons of black folklore like Anansi; *Leuk* (a rabbit), *Bouki* (a Hyena), and *Mbe* (a tortoise). In addition, M'Baye compares the writers themselves with these tricksters, as they are all writers of the African diaspora and stood up against the evils of slavery and racism (M'Baye 2009, 3). For example, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, who was born free in what is today Ghana, sold as an enslaved when he was thirteen, was brought to Britain, and became a free man less than ten years after his arrival, is compared to Anansi, because both used a tool (resp. a tree and a book) to seek wisdom in order to free their community. They both saw intelligence and logic as tools of liberation (*Ibid., 94-7)*. In the Netherlands, the stories of Anansi are listed as immaterial cultural heritage (text in the museum). This accentuates that there is a certain awareness of the value of this heritage. However, the knowledge about these stories is limited. Intangible heritage is always a complicated element of culture to display in the museum, but the video with the storyteller is a good way to visualise this important aspect of Afro-Dutch culture.

In addition to a visualisation of intangible heritage, the video about Anansi is a way to improve knowledge about immaterial heritage. The stories themselves speak of the oppressed and the ways in which the enslaved found ways to resist. Additionally, they are an example of the fluidity of African cultures and show their capability to adapt.

4.4 Other visited exhibitions

To place the exhibition AoS in a broader context several other museums have been visited. This was done to increase the understanding of the situation in the Netherlands, as well as to be able to compare the modern development of AoS to other institutions and thereby other thought processes and presentation decisions. This paragraph will summarise the visits to the remainder of the historical exhibition in the Tropenmuseum, the Rijksmuseum, and the Big Surinam

Exhibition. The Westfries museum will not be discussed here, as upon visitation, it had little to no connection to the history of transatlantic slavery. However, where relevant, comparisons between the Westfries museum and the other museums will be drawn in the discussion section of this chapter.

4.4.1 Historical exhibitions Tropenmuseum

The remainder of the historical exhibitions in the Tropenmuseum revolves around the history in the East Asia territories. The objects in these sections have little relevance for the discussion on transatlantic slavery. However, the presentation of the exhibitions does provide some interesting thoughts. The displays of these objects are fairly static, especially compared to AoS, and follow a more traditional museum set up. They are displayed to the visitor rather than that they invite the visitor to engage in the history. An exception of this is the room with mannequins. Seven realistic looking human figures are displayed in circular plexiglass tubes, including an environment, which gives the impression of a terrarium (Fig. 38). Because of their lifelike looks, the visitor is more immersed into the exhibition here than at other places, in spite of the fact that the room features only one non-European person.

Figure 38: One of the mannequins in the East Asia exhibitions of the Tropenmuseum (photo by author).

Several aspects of the cultures on display are addressed, such as ritual, childhood, and collecting, although the cultural diversity within these aspects is hardly touched upon. This gives a unified impression of the geographical areas on show, which is a misguided one. Nonetheless, the texts that guide the visitor through the cultures are worth mentioning. Rather than describing the objects or events subjects of the exhibition as objectively as possible – an approach which, as discussed in chapter 2, is not actually objective – the texts specifically mention cruelties that have taken place and condemn them, although at times still incomplete and misleading (see below, paragraph 4.4). These texts have been adapted after opening of the exhibition, to answer to the needs and actualities of

society. In general, the setup of these historical exhibitions is more traditional than AoS and although texts have been changed to acknowledge the truth of events, there is much more room for multivocality, multiperspectivity, connections between past and present and visitor engagement.

4.4.2 Big Surinam Exhibition

The Big Surinam Exhibition ran from October 5th 2019 until March 1st 2020 in the New Church in Amsterdam. It was developed because there is little attention for the history of Surinam in the Netherlands, despite its historical ties. The exhibition guides the visitor through the modern history of Surinam, from the native inhabitants before colonisation to the Paramaribo of today. The exhibition appears to be divided into approximately four segments: native inhabitants, colonial history, a diversity in environment, arts, and crafts, and transition to the independent nation Surinam is today. The segment on colonial history had to summarise a history of four centuries into one room. This includes Dutch investment in the colony, addressing the plantation system and slavery, profit for the Netherlands and the bringing in of labour forces after the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. Interesting elements are the necklace that was used during the *Du* (Fig. 39, page 78), and the two texts about life on the plantation; one about the enslaved workers and one about the Europeans (Fig. 40, page 78). The transatlantic slave trade is addressed separately, in a small, enclosed room. Here, the architecture of the church has been used to create an artistic memorial of the oppression of black people (Fig. 41, page 78). The diversity of Maroon communities is shortly addressed by text and is accompanied by woodwork crafts that are a way of earning money for these communities. At the same location, less traditional artworks are presented. The exhibition ends on the historical developments that led to the independence and the current cultural diversity of Paramaribo. Its focus is predominantly on positive effects and outcomes, which manifests itself in the display of the colourful and culturally diverse city Paramaribo (Fig. 42, page 78). Because of the abundance of colour is impressive and the visitor leaves on a positive note. However, modern issues in the nation that are connected to its colonial history are not addressed. This leaves the visitor with a misguided impression of Surinam: one of a country where all live happily together without conflict (Ter Borg 2019).

Figure 39: Necklace used during the Du (photo by author).

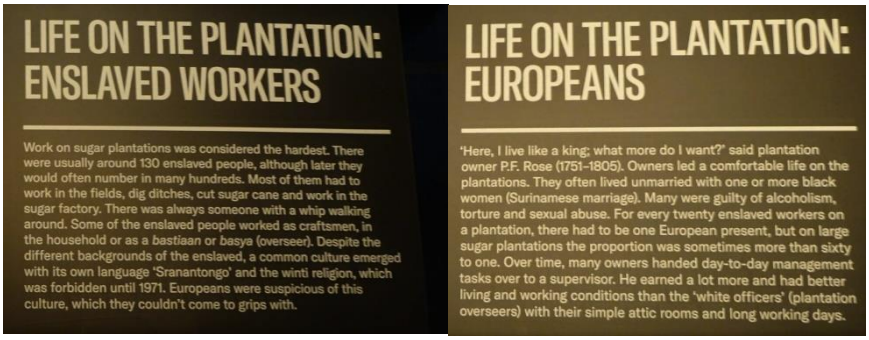

Figure 40: Dual perspective of life on a plantation (photos by author).

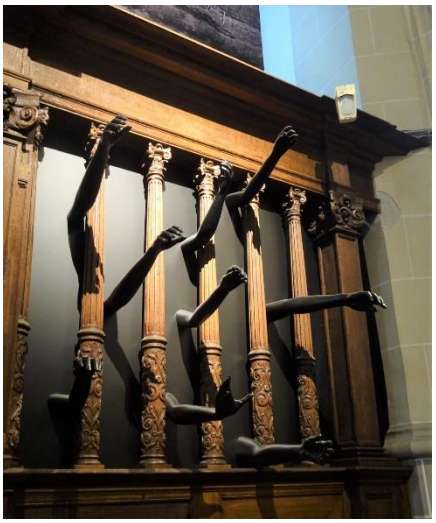

Figure 41: Artwork commemorating the struggles of enslaved Africans (photo by author).

Figure 42: Display of colourful Paramaribo (photo by author).

4.3.3 Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam opened its doors for the first time in 1800. It is by nature a national museum and was called into existence to celebrate the nations' achievements and create a national identity (Edwards 2005; 55-6). Today, the museum is mainly an esthetical representation of what the Dutch people have collected over the ages, still celebrating achievements, despite its relatively recent restorations between 2003-2013. Bloembergen and Eickhoff describe the impression of the museum as follows: 'How is the visitor to understand that the restored 19th century hallway with the image '*zelfopoffering'* (self-sacrifice) is suddenly to be taken in with irony? The meaning of restorations is never self-explanatory.' (Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2014, 3 (translation by author)). The misconception carries through the historical exhibition. Little to no attention is given to the artistry of other cultures, even though many of the objects are not of Dutch origin. Heroes such as Michiel de Ruyter are celebrated, despite his part in the recapturing of an African fort to distribute enslaved to the New World. Only one corner of a relatively small room is devoted to life in the West India colonies, which is mainly filled with dioramas by Gerrit Schouten and a couple of objects directly connected to slavery and the life and opportunities of enslaved, of which a medal given an enslaved who gave information that enabled the crushing of an uprising of enslaved (Fig 43).

The attention towards the history of slavery and the slave trade in the Rijksmuseum is almost negligible, especially compared to the extensiveness of their collections. The museum could benefit from explaining indirect links between many of their objects and the history of slavery and the slave trade. Including de Ruyter's involvement in the African colonial conflicts in the story about his successive would improve the multiperspectivity of a historical person who is still considered a hero by many. However, the museum is aware of its limitations and is currently working on an exhibition exclusively about slavery (see below, paragraph 4.5).

Figure 43: Medal given to enslaved whose loyalty lay with the colonists (photo by author).

4.5 Discussion

Despite the limited floor space of the exhibition, the Tropenmuseum has managed to create an exhibition that is both inclusive and educational. Several groups have been involved in the development of the exhibition (Walet 2017, 23; Interview with Robin Lelijveld, appendix A page 112-3). Of these groups, descendants of the enslaved are visible in the exhibition in the form of videos where they tell their personal story. Additionally, at the (respectively) beginning and end of the exhibition videos featuring a black person calling the visitor not to forget or ignore the past are played on repeat. The contemporary black voice is evidently present in the exhibition.

Aside from multivocality, the exhibition is also multiperspective, with a black voice as the primary one. As this predominantly black perspective is in contrast with most other exhibitions, for example the Rijksmuseum and the Westfries museum (see below), this is commendable. One set of items in the exhibition that combines all these stories, is the shackle and branding iron display. During development, the curators were told that the perspective of these always came from the victim, the one to be branded. The person doing the branding and confining remained anonymous and faceless (Walet 2017, 23). In the exhibition, therefore, the description is from a dual perspective; the actions that the person buying and selling undertook and how these took away identity of the enslaved is described. However, in the object description of the branding iron, which contains a citation from a slave trader, there is no mention of a name or nationality. Although the dual perspective of the subject has resulted in a more inclusive story, there remains a certain distance between the white visitor and the European of the past. The visitor can still come away with blaming a different nation for this treatment. More specific details, although confronting, might diminish this distance and therefore the option of denial in the present.

Additionally, the exhibition fails to add detail or nuance to several elements: there is no mention of the continued existence of Maroon communities in Surinam and the visitor gets the impression that these communities are part of history. However, the struggle for existence and rights of the Maroons continues to this day and is still very much influenced by the needs of consummative nations of the Western world (see paragraph 4.3.2). Unfortunately, there is no distinction between Surinam and the Caribbean islands in the exhibition. Although, this can

partly be explained by the limited access to objects this area and the fact that objects on loan could not be acquired due to the short development time of the exhibition (interview with Robin Lelijveld, Appendix A, page 110-1), the lack of distinction between Surinam and the individual islands generalises the impression of former colonial territories. However, every location has its own unique heritage which is deserving of attention. Despite these flaws, the multiperspectivity of the exhibition is present in virtually every segment of AoS. Elements of history with contemporary heritage such as *Winti* and *Tambú* are described, including both the persistence of these elements and the fight people have had to put up to maintain and increase its right of existence. *Winti* and *Tambú* are also interesting because they are clear examples of a regenerated past combined with new cultural forms with which they came into contact (Modest 2015, 262). It would, however, have aided the efforts against modern racism to include more information on the fluidity of these cultural aspects, as they may give valuable insights into how one can look at the world and society (*Ibid.*). The persistent superior and Eurocentric view towards the world and history is mentioned, featuring the displaying of “exotic” people on World Exhibitions and the science of race. This perspective is given more depth with the presence of the silhouettes of historical figures. These silhouettes show that instead of ‘good’ versus’ bad, the historical situation was more complicated. These complicated matters are also present in modern society, which the exhibition shows with displaying elements of contemporary heritage, such as architecture and statues connected to Dutch people who enriched themselves with the slave trade, but are considered Dutch heritage, as well as more social heritage such as racism and ethnic profiling. Upon leaving the exhibition, the visitor is invited to leave their opinion on the exhibition and it is explained that these opinions will be taken into consideration for the new exhibition ‘Heritage’ which is to open in 2021. Unfortunately, it was not possible to gather opinions from TripAdvisor or Google review, as the exhibition is part of the Tropenmuseum and cannot be reviewed separately on these websites.

The inclusiveness of AoS becomes more apparent when it is compared to other exhibitions. Although the Rijksmuseum only has a small number of objects on display with regard to the history of slavery and although their descriptions of the objects and locations are “objective”, they do know that the subject could not completely be avoided. This was done in the Westfries Museum. Promoting itself

as a museum of the ‘Golden Age’ is does indeed only cover the golden part of the age, and only covers the East India area. There is very little mention of negative aspects and the exploitation of non-Europeans, aside from one commemorative artwork about the genocide on the Banda Islands and acknowledgment of the existence of a discussion about the status of J.P. Coen. Apart from this, there are no objects from non-European people, nor is there any mention of them. Even the attention for the negative side of history in the new ‘Batavia 1627’ virtual reality exhibition is limited and only addressed if the visitor selects a specific point in the display. According to the director of the museum, who appeared in a radio debate on the 24th of June 2019, the museum has attempted to remain objective. However, as discussed in this thesis, a museum is never objective and the museum fails to address the history in multiperspective or inclusive manner.

In contrast to the Westfries museum, the Rijksmuseum does acknowledge their limited attention for the history of slavery. It is currently developing an exhibition featuring the personal stories of ten historical figures, who lived during between the seventeenth and nineteenth century in West India, East India or Holland (www.rijksmuseum.nl). Because of this approach, the exhibition will be multiperspective on several levels. The exhibition will close with the possibility for visitors to engage in a creative matter and make an artwork related to one or more of the personal stories of the exhibition. The site also explains how the museum consults people of different backgrounds and skill to help develop the exhibition. The considerations presented on the website, display the awareness of the museum that this concerns a sensitive part of history which lives through into the lives of people today. Nonetheless, it will not be until the exhibition opens that it is possible to assess whether or not the museum has achieved the goals mentioned on the website.

These considerations show that multiperspectivity is becoming more important in modern museology. The Big Surinam exhibition, for example, - the most recent exhibition of this research process also displays a multiperspective approach, although this is predominantly chronological rather than cultural. Because of this, the visitor feels more like a spectator usurping information rather than a participant invited to take the knowledge outside the exhibition and stimulated to take the information to adapt their frame of reference. Despite its modern approach, the exhibition is more one-dimensional than AoS and there is

little connection to contemporary Netherlands. The website explains that the purpose of the exhibition is to increase the knowledge of the colourful history of Surinam in the Netherlands (www.nieuwekerk.nl), but this is not evident in the exhibition, nor does the exhibition state why it is important that the Dutch know about the history of Surinam, despite a shared history. But if the nation is to celebrate 45 years of independence, why is there a wish to tell their story in the Netherlands? By explaining the contemporary connection between the nations and by explaining that there are many Dutch-Surinamese people in the Netherlands who experience negative effects of this ignorance in the Netherlands, the importance of this exhibition would be better understood.

Despite the missing connection between contemporary Surinam and the Netherlands, the exhibition did succeed in expressing the cultural diversity of the nation. Following important historical events, the presence of Native inhabitants, Jews, Maroons, Creoles, Indian-Surinamese and Dutch people is explained. Praiseworthy is the attention for native people and Maroons. In relation to the history of slavery, the attention for Maroons is particularly interesting. In contrast to AoS, the Big Surinam exhibition does explain that the Maroon communities, of which there is a variety, still live today. The exhibition also displays a number of crafts of these Maroons, explaining the importance the Maroon give to aesthetics and the variation in details for different people within the Maroons. This importance is highlighted by not only featuring wooden crafts, but also the works of artist Remy Jungerman, descendant of a Maroon freedom fighter, who uses elements of his heritage in his artworks. The different focus on perspective between AoS and the Surinam exhibition is explained by the different people involved in the organisation of both. Nonetheless, both exhibitions display considerations of modern museology such as multivocality, multiperspectivity and acknowledgment of mistakes.

4.6 Conclusion

Afterlives of Slavery can be considered an exemplary exhibition, following the principles of modern museology such as multivocality, multiperspectivity, and creating a link between past and present. In placing historical invents in a contemporary context an understanding of the roots of modern problems is created. Compared to other exhibitions, AoS links the history of slavery clearly to

modern racism and thereby attempts to create understanding as to why certain elements of Dutch culture are perceived so sensitive. This link between history and racism is missing in the other exhibitions, although the Big Surinam exhibition distinguishes itself from the Rijksmuseum and the Westfries museum in its multiperspectivity. AoS is also dominant in its engagement of the public for future exhibitions. By explaining the purpose of the opinion board, they stimulate the visitor to leave a message. It promises to use these opinions in future exhibitions and they thereby acknowledge the importance of the visitor's opinion, rather than that they consider themselves the teacher and the visitor the student. This is an important step for creating even more inclusive exhibitions. Nonetheless, there is room for a more active visitor involvement and for ways to stimulate the visitor to take the heritage outside the museum.

This chapter has compared the approach of Dutch museums and the attention of the Dutch nation towards the history of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery. The concluding chapter of this thesis will compare the Dutch and Britain situation to assess each nations' strengths and weaknesses, and attempts to make recommendations for the development of future exhibitions.

Chapter 5 Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to analyse the way in which museum in the Netherlands and Britain curate the history of transatlantic slavery and to what extent the museum as a space could be used to counteract contemporary racism. The research started by exploring the meaning of three important concepts: sensitive heritage, the ideology of race and museum as a space for starting a dialogue and induce change in behaviour.

Sensitive heritages are those heritage that are regarded with different emotions by different (groups of) people. The age of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery is a part of history that European nations have long preferred to ignore or forget, something that is now creating feelings of guilt. However, descendants of the formerly enslaved are present all over the world and their call for recognition is gaining strength and support. Because of this louder voice, Europe is forced to look critically at their involvement in and responsibility for these traumatic events in history and the way in which they have regarded these until recently. Some nations, such as Spain and Portugal have more recent complicated histories which take up their attention and they are not yet ready to look at their role in the slave trade. Other nations, such as France, have national values so deeply imbedded in the history of the slave trade and slavery that a complete admittance of guilt could tore at the foundations of their republic. Compared to these, the Netherlands and Britain appear more willing to discuss the history of slavery, although until very recently Britain focussed on abolition rather than the events in the age of slavery, and the Netherlands downplayed their involvement in the trade. But this part of history can no longer be ignored, because the consequences of European actions are visible in todays' social behaviours. People who look like they are related to African people, e.g. because of their black skin, their type of hair of facial structure, are discriminated against in both obvious and subtle ways. This type of racism developed because of Europe's superior attitude in the age of slavery and was enforced by the segregation measurements after the abolition of slavery.

Museums were used as a means of creating a nationalistic feeling amongst the subjects of a nation. In this function, they have contributed to the inequality between cultures in the world. By presenting non-European nations as more primitive and incapable of "modern" developments in museums and World

Exhibitions, the division between “us” and “the other” was enforced. However, over the last fifty years, the museum undergone several transformations. It went from a place to display success in collecting, to a place to educate, study with a self-proclaimed responsibility to preserve and be enjoyed to its current objective of being a space that wants to invoke a critical dialogue about pasts and futures. The purpose of the museum is, like society, dynamic and changes according to societies priorities. The museum can aid in making taboo topics debatable, by exhibiting them in an inclusive manner. Where they used to be a place to create inequality, they now have the potential to be a space to create equality.

5.1 Comparing the ISM and AoS

With these concepts defined and the objectives of modern museology in mind, the International Slavery Museum (ISM) in Liverpool and the Afterlives of Slavery (AoS) exhibition in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam have been analysed, in an attempt to answer three main questions: (1) How are multivocality and multiperspectivity visible in the exhibitions? (2) How is the connection between past and present presented in the exhibitions? And (3) Does the museum invite the visitor to engage in the discussion and take it outside of the museum? This paragraph will discuss the situation in both the ISM and AoS for each of these three questions.

5.1.1 How are multivocality and multiperspectivity visible?

Chapter three argued that the ISM uses a predominantly Eurocentric perspective, whereby the enslaved is portrayed as the victim of what has been done to them. There is little visibility of a multivocal approach in development or a clear presence of a black perspective. AoS has managed to visualise this multivocality and multiperspectivity more clearly and the dominant perspective of the exhibition is a black one. It is important to keep in mind that the ISM opened about ten years earlier than AoS and chapter two has shown much has changed in museology since then. Multiperspectivity, however, is visible in other ways in the ISM. The exhibition covers the entire geographical scope of the transatlantic slave trade and discusses it from the beginning to the end. Additionally, it addresses modern heritages (see below, paragraph 5.1.2). Each aspect is accompanied by several objects. Although these objects are predominantly one-dimensional in

perspective, the abundancy of objects does create a complete image of the age of slavery for the visitor. In contrast, AoS contains very few objects and, due to its short development time and limited floor space, covers selective elements of the history of the transatlantic slave trade. In addition, they focus on contemporary legacies and connections with the past. Because of this, they have forfeited a comprehensive display of the history that created these legacies.

5.1.2 How is the connection between past and present presented?

The objective of AoS is to display the heritage of the history of slavery. Therefore, the connection between past and present is one of the focal points of the exhibition. This is visible in the explanation about the history of *Winti* and *Tambú*; the museum explains where these elements of culture find their roots and the resistance and misunderstanding with which they are met, even today. The position of black people is discussed, and mentions oppression during the age of slavery, an exotic interest in the age segregation and modern issues such as ethnic profiling and racism. Nonetheless, the connection between past and present is not always made. The topic of Maroon communities is discussed in a historical context, even though these communities survive until today and are struggling with consummative societies, an issue that would fit very well into the objective of the exhibition.

In the ISM, the connection between past and present is more separate. Although they discuss both history and modern legacies, the contrast between the rooms seems to increase the distance between than and now, rather than close it. Nonetheless, this contrast does celebrate the resilience of the descendants of slavery and displays that they did not perish under pressure but persevered. This is reinforced by the focus on positive legacies in the room.

5.1.3 Does the museum invite the visitor to engage in the discussion and take it outside of the museum?

Both museums make use of multimedia tools such as touchscreens where the visitor can find more information on historical information or legacies of the age of slavery in modern society. Additionally, each exhibition has an opinion board, inviting the visitor to leave a comment about the exhibition. The opinion board in AoS differs from the one in the ISM, because it clearly explains the purpose of the

comments left behind and the intent to use them in the development of new exhibitions. Although the lack of explanation in the ISM does not exclude a similar purpose, the transparency of the AoS stimulates the visitor to consider their impression and leave a constructive comment. However, beside these small interactive elements, there is little that invites the visitor to actively engage in the exhibitions and take the stared dialogue outside of the museum. Although this is not the responsibility of the museum, it is an objective of modern museology and in each museum, there is room for a more active position for the visitor (see below, paragraph 5.2). This is also not the purpose of museums, but it would be an interesting avenue to research the short term and long-term effects of visiting an exhibition about sensitive heritage.

By addressing the sensitive heritage of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in an inclusive, multivocal and multiperspective manner, the museum can create context and an understanding of behaviour and thereby contribute to a more accepting modern society and a reduce in racist behaviour. AoS and ISM show, each in their own way, that there are many elements of the history of slavery that invoke mixed reactions and that we need to create an understanding of the extent of these legacies and the modern implications. Whereas the ISM covers the extent of the influence of the transatlantic trade and the impact of the system of slavery on many aspects of daily life, AoS focuses on the links between past and present and the heritage of descendants of formerly enslaved.

5.2 Reflections and recommendations

Like a museum, this thesis is not objective and is influenced by my own frame of reference and personal preferences. The analysis would be more inclusive, if, in addition to comparing my own opinions to literature studies and documented descriptions, a quantitative study on the opinion of the exhibition and its effect on people would have been possible. However, such a study with a comparative component of short term and long-term effects, has not been conducted before. Developing a trustworthy questionnaire and gathering a body of data large enough lead to valuable insights, is not the work for a master thesis but requires more time and attention. PhD research into the influence of the museum on long term change in opinion would therefore be very interesting.

During the period of research and writing of this thesis, several events took place that influenced the approach of this text. The most important of these is the dead of George Floyd and the protests that followed. These protests, aside from protesting against racist behaviour, centred around the presence of statues of colonial achievers, who in contemporary society are considered more bad guy than hero. With the discussion about racism and statues gaining new fire, the commemoration in the Netherlands and Britain outside the museum was considered necessary, especially if the objectives of modern museology take the museum outside the museum. Additionally, it is not unlikely that over the next years or decades, many of these statues will be removed from their public space and moved to a museum. This gives museums a new opportunity to act as a space for an inclusive story rather than a place to display.

Based on the research I have conducted for this thesis, I would say that museums are transforming in a positive manner. They are becoming more inclusive and more dynamic. However, museums should not wait for the voice of a minority to become strong enough to be heard. The planned museum about slavery in Amsterdam would become all the more relevant if, rather than only covering transatlantic slavery, it would also cover and research the even more sensitive heritage of East Asia legacies. Additionally, when topics that are relevant in contemporary societies are discussed, there is more room for active participation of the visitor and a greater stimulant to take the topic outside the exhibition space. It will be very interesting to see how the curation of sensitive heritages will develop over the next years.

Abstract

Racism is a significant problem in modern societies. People of all, although mainly non-Western European cultures, are discriminated against on a daily basis, based on their skin colour, religion and other characteristics. This thesis aims to assess the suitability of the museum to counteract racism against people of African descent. Placing museum exhibition into the context of modern museology and social priorities it asks: How are the memories and legacies of the transatlantic slave trade as an example of sensitive heritage curated in museums in the Netherlands and Britain today, and how could this be used to counteract modern racism? In this context, sensitive heritage is that heritage which is embedded with conflicting emotions on different sides and should approached sensibly. The racism debate restricts itself to racist behaviour against people of African descent, because racism based on external features developed during the age of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

Two exhibitions, Afterlives of slavery in the Netherlands, and the International Slavery Museum in Britain, have been subjected to analysis based on their chosen perspectives, the connection they made between past and present, and the extent to which they actively engage the visitor in the exhibition and beyond. The ISM has a broader geographical perspective, but is mainly Eurocentric. AoS is multiperspective in point of view, but lacks detail due to its small scale. Both exhibitions create a link between past and present, although the ISM focusses on the positive legacies, whereas AoS specifically addresses racism. Although both museums invite the visitor to leave their opinion, there is little other active engagement and there is no stimulation to take the dialogue outside the museum. Nonetheless, the analysis has shown that a museum, by its intrinsic subjectivity does have the potential to contribute to the understanding of the origins of racism and its modern consequences. This understanding, if taken outside the museum can contribute to the diminishing of racism.

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Appendix A - Interview with Robin Lelijveld op 29 april 2019

Robin: ik kwam terecht bij Wayne (Modest), Wayne is de baas van, hoofd van het researchcentrum. Hij, na mijn afstuderen - ik heb mijn scriptie bij hem geschreven - toen ben ik steeds een beetje op projectbasis, los en vast, weet je wel, steeds weer terugkomen

Ik: En nu wel vast dan?

Robin: niet vast nee, wel op een langer contract, maar geen vaste aanstelling.

Ik: is dat nog in de museumwereld, vaste contracten of eigenlijk niet meer?

Robin: gebeurt wel, niet heel veel, het is niet, zeg maar, de regel, maar de uitzondering.

Ik: Maar vooral voor mensen die er al zaten.

Robin: Ja. Vaak conservatorenposities, zeg maar, seniorposities, die zijn wel vast, maar wij hebben nu heel veel juniorconservatoren aangenomen dit jaar en dat is allemaal gewoon voor 2 jaar. Dus dat wisselt steeds.

Ik: Ja, precies. Maar nou vind ik 2 jaar op zich ook al een goed contract hoor, je wordt zo vaak op een half jaar of op 0 uren aangenomen.

Robin: Ja, dat had ik in het begin hier. Maar dat is steeds verlengd, dus uiteindelijk zit je hier dan 2,5 jaar, maar dat wist ik van tevoren niet.

Ik: En nu ben je er totdat de nieuwe tentoonstelling er is?

Robin: Ik weet het niet zo goed, mijn contract loopt nu tot het einde van het jaar, maar ja, je weet nooit wat er daarvoor of daarna gebeurt. In principe, ik zou het leuk vinden om te blijven tot Erfenis opengaat, die opent in 2021, maar dat is over 2 jaar pas.

Ik: Ja, dat is nog lang inderdaad.

Robin: op een gegeven moment moeten ze me wel in vaste dienst nemen volgens mij. Desnoods vaste dienst voor een paar uur. Maar ik ben begonnen met ‘heden van het slavernijverleden’ dus het zou een mooi start- en eindpunt zijn.

Ik: want daar ben je 2,5 jaar geleden mee begonnen dan?

Robin: Ja. Of 2 jaar geleden denk ik. Toen waren Richard - tentoonstellingsmaker - en Martin - conservator - die begonnen aan een tentoonstelling en ik ben er íets later bijgekomen en toen hebben we met z’n drieën de tentoonstelling gemaakt. Die moest in hele korte tijd gemaakt worden,

dus er was iemand echt nodig om te ondersteunen met onderzoek en qua schrijven en dat heb ik toen gedaan.

Ik: Want een jaar voor een tentoonstelling dat is wel kort dan bedoel je?

Robin: het was zelfs minder. Ik denk dat we het uiteindelijk in 8 maanden ofzo hebben gedaan. Het idee was er wel al, het concept lag er in principe al wel, maar de invulling ervan en de verhaallijn, dat moest allemaal nog uitgewerkt worden. Het ligt er een beetje aan hoe lang de tentoonstelling duurt. Kijk, dit is een tentoonstelling die staat dus 4 jaar en dan is het eigenlijk raar dat we zo kort de tijd hadden, want normaal gesproken, heb je wel iets langer.

Ik: Maar was dat vanaf het begin af aan al het plan dan? Want volgens mij heb ik ergens in een nieuwsartikel gelezen dat de tentoonstelling tot april van dit jaar zou lopen.

Robin: Volgens mij was het vanaf het begin af aan nog niet zo duidelijk wanneer de Erfenis open zou gaan, en dacht, volgens mij, maar dat weet ik niet 100% zeker, maar omdat Erfenis eerder open zou gaan, zou deze ook minder lang staan. Maar je bent altijd een beetje aan het schuiven in tentoonstellingen, dus uiteindelijk is het 2021 geworden. Maar als je kijkt naar het Rijksmuseum bijvoorbeeld, die krijgt ook een tentoonstelling over slavernij natuurlijk, volgend jaar en die zijn al 3 jaar bezig, dus dat is een andere manier van werken, denk ik en voor ons werkt het heel goed, het team werkt heel goed. Het is ook goed om het te moeten doen in een korte tijd.

Ik: Dan ben je gemotiveerd om het snel af te krijgen natuurlijk.

Robin: Ja, en daardoor konden er ook veel dingen.

Ik: en die Erfenistentoonstelling, hoe is dat anders dan wat er nu staat?

Robin: de Erfenistentoonstelling is anders qua ruimte, want Heden van het slavernijverleden - Heb je hem al gezien?

Ik: Ja.

Robin: Die is vrij klein. En Erfenis komt op de hele eerste verdieping. Dat is 1400 vierkante meter. Dus dat is veel meer ruimte om te vullen. En dat gaat ook niet alleen maar over slavernij, niet alleen maar over Trans-Atlantische slavernij, maar ook over koloniale geschiedenis. En dat is natuurlijk veel breder, dus daar zijn we in principe mee begonnen, nu, we hebben een start gemaakt. Maar dat is een enorm proces.

Ik: Wordt de opzet een beetje hetzelfde als bij Heden van het slavernijverleden dan?

Robin: dat weten we nog niet. Ik denk wel, laten we zeggen Het zet wel de lijn voort. Het is een bepaalde manier van tentoonstellen en we hebben best wel

nadrukkelijk gezegd van ‘we proberen echt te focussen op het perspectief van de nazaten van de slavernij en de tot slaaf gemaakte personen. En niet te focussen op slachtofferschap, maar op creativiteit en op veerkracht. Ik denk wel dat dat iets is wat we door gaan zetten in de nieuwe tentoonstelling. Maar nogmaals, we zijn echt net net begonnen, dus hoe dat eruit komt te zien weten we nog niet.

Ik: en die tentoonstelling, waarom is ervoor gekozen om eerst ‘heden van het slavernijverleden te doen en daarna Erfenis. Waarom hebben jullie niet, zoals het Rijksmuseum 3 jaar genomen om 1 ding op te bouwen.

Robin: Eigenlijk omdat, ik weet even niet meer precies wanneer dat was, maar door renovatie van het hele museum of van de opstelling, verdween slavernij uit de presentatie, wat niet echt kan en wat we niet wilden als museum, ook als voormalig koloniaal museum. Dus er kwam iets wat dat gat op een bepaalde manier opvulde en ook om te kijken - dit is op zich een volwaardige tentoonstelling, maar het wordt ook gezien als experiment over ‘hoe werken we met mensen samen, wat wil het publiek zien’. Er zijn verschillende manieren waarop we input verzamelen. Omdat deze tentoonstelling klein is, is dat makkelijker te doen dan bij de grote. De tentoonstelling op de eerste verdieping gaat waarschijnlijk wel 7-10 jaar staan. Dus dat is een andere manier van opzetten.

Ik: dat gaat dan wel vrij permanent worden.

Robin: Ja, we noemen het dan semi-permanent, hij zou 5-7 jaar moeten staan, maar in de praktijk staat het soms langer.

Ik: en echt permanent.. Een tentoonstelling is tegenwoordig nooit echt meer permanent toch?

Robin: nee, dat is een heel oud idee, dat je iets heel lang laat staan. Niet alleen hier, maar overal. Dingen veranderen zo snel. En ik denk dat wij ook intern in een proces zitten, ook na de fusie enzo, van ‘wat is de identiteit van het museum, wat betekent ook onze geschiedenis voor hoe we met het publiek omgaan. Dat is wel iets waar we natuurlijk al heel lang over nadenken, maar ik denk dat, de fusie was wel echt een moment dat heel actief weer gekeken werd naar de herprofilering.

Ik: ben jij heel erg betrokken geweest bij die discussie over welke doelgroepen betrekken we en hoe krijgen we hun mening en dergelijke?

Robin: Je bedoelt vanuit het museum of?

Ik: Ja, in de ontwikkeling, zeg maar, want ze hebben er natuurlijk voor gekozen om sowieso de nazaten erbij te betrekken, maar je hebt het ook over publiek enzo. Ben jij betrokken geweest bij die keus van bij welke doelgroepen leggen we de focus en welke zijn wat minder belangrijk?

Robin: niet zozeer bij welke doelgroepen, maar het is heel erg een proces, het is een beetje organisch. Dus je start niet met 'Welke doelgroep ga ik doen en wat gaat dan de inhoud zijn, maar dat vloeit allemaal een beetje in elkaar over. En ik was erbij betrokken voor zover - ik kwam natuurlijk iets later binnen, dus en het concept lag er al en het concept ging ook uit van dat perspectief en je weet dat als je dat perspectief kiest, je er ook andere doelgroepen bij kan betrekken die je misschien eerder niet had betrokken. Dus ik ben erbij betrokken geweest, maar ik kwam pas later binnen, dus ik zou de credits meer aan Martin en Richard en Wayne geven dan aan mezelf. Maar dat wil niet zeggen dat ik niet zelf over dacht.

Ik: precies, want bijvoorbeeld zoiets als het discussiebord dat nu boven in de tentoonstelling staat, is dat iets wat later bedacht is of zat dat al in het concept?

Robin: dat zat er al in. En dat is uitgewerkt met educatie. Dus educatie gaat heel erg samen met bezoekers. We hebben samen met educatie de vragen bedacht en de vragen die slaan weer op thema's van de tentoonstelling. En we zijn nu heel erg aan het nadenken van wat betekent het nou, want het is een hele algemene manier om feedback te verzamelen.

Ik: ja, want je krijgt alleen maar 'random bezoekers' zeg maar, maar het lijkt me moeilijk om, ten minste ik denk dat er best wel veel - zeg maar de gemiddelde Nederlander komt er, maar dat er ook wel mensen zijn die veel meer affiniteit hebben met dat slavernijverleden omdat ze zelf er vandaan komen - maar dat verschil dat zie je niet echt in zo'n briefje of wel?

Robin: Nou, soms wel hoor. We vragen alleen om naam en leeftijd, maar je ziet wel vaak… Het zijn hele gemixte reacties. Het zijn natuurlijk ook hele gemixte vragen. De ene vraag is heel direct 'wat mis je in de tentoonstelling?' en daar komt een breed palet aan dingen uit. Maar anderzijds vragen we ook 'Wat betekent het voor jou?' En daar krijgen we soms, best wel vaak (persoonlijke) reacties. Er was een meisje van acht en die had geschreven 'Ik ben bruin en mensen lachen me daarom uit in de klas. Of 'Ik wist eigenlijk helemaal niet veel van dit verleden totdat ik een paar jaar geleden ging graven in mijn eigen geschieden en toen kwam ik erachter dat ik zowel afstam van slavenhandelaren alswel van mensen die tot slaaf gemaakt waren. Dus je kunt wel, uit bepaalde geschiedenissen lees je wel bepaalde achtergronden, maar het zegt niet zo veel over de doelgroep.

Ik: En wat zijn dingen die gemist worden door het publiek? Heb je daar voorbeelden van?

Robin: Wat veel gemist wordt is Indonesië. Het verhaal van slavernij in Azië. En dat wisten we van tevoren, dus hebben meerdere redenen gehad om dat niet te doen. Dat is een groot ding dat naar voren komt. Ook slavenhandel in Afrika wordt veel genoemd. Meer over de Afrikaanse diaspora. Nog meer over verzetsstrijders, Surinaamse verzetsstrijders, Afrikaanse verzetsstrijders etc. etc.. Moderne slavernij, hedendaagse slavernij. Dat zijn wel de grote dingen die we tot nu toe zien. En dan noemen mensen vaak specifieke namen. Het zijn vaak hele brede antwoorden.

Ik: Dat is wel heel interessant.

Robin: Het is heel interessant. Ik heb ze zelf, 1,5 jaar lang gedocumenteerd. Dat was echt vreselijk werk. Nee, dat is niet waar. Het was heel veel werk, want we typten alles over. En we zijn nu heel erg aan het bedenken wat we ermee gaan doen. Het is een hele waardevolle bron van informatie, van persoonlijke verhalen, van verbinding met het museum, dus het is heel waardevol.

Ik: En dan komt archeologie een beetje in het spel, want daar ben ik voornamelijk naar aan het kijken. Is er heel bewust voor gekozen om dat er uit te laten?

Robin: Dat is een goeie vraag. Ik denk dat Martin die vraag beter kan beantwoorden. Nou, ik denk dat we sowieso, dat het niet per se een hele bewuste keus is geweest om archeologie eruit te laten, maar we hadden sowieso met dit onderwerp - je bent altijd beperkt op een bepaalde manier tot je collectie. Wat heeft het museum aan objecten. Dit is een tentoonstelling waar ook minder objecten dan normaal in staan. En om dit verhaal te vertellen, we hebben best wel een grote Suriname-collectie, maar als je dat vergelijkt met Indonesië dan is dat helemaal niks. en als je weer kijkt binnen het Trans-Atlantische gebied gaat kijken, dan hebben we van Suriname wel redelijk wat, maar van de Caribische eilanden veel minder. Dus je bent altijd een beetje beperkt tot je collectie. dus daar is deze opstelling denk ik wel.. die laat daar wel iets over zien. Want veel mensen zeggen ook ‘ik mis heel erg het Caribisch verhaal, de Antillen’ in de tentoonstelling en dat weten we, dat is een terechte opmerking. Maar we hebben niet alle collecties, we hebben niet veel.

Ik: want jullie willen wel met de nieuwe tentoonstelling ook doen op je eigen collecties?

Robin: Het is altijd een mix van eigen collectie, bruikleen, veel AV en dat soort dingen.

Ik: hebben jullie contact met de musea op de eilanden of niet?

Robin: voor deze tentoonstelling niet.

Ik: en voor de Erfenistentoonstelling ook nog niet?

Robin: Dat weet ik niet. Dat is iets wat via de conservator gaat; Wendelien. We hebben allemaal wel persoonlijke contacten, ik dan meer met Suriname dan met het Caribisch gebied. Er zijn zeker contacten, maar we hebben bijvoorbeeld niets geleend voor deze tentoonstelling.

Ik: nee, voor hier niet, had ik inderdaad gezien. Maar ik dacht, misschien is het heel bewust gedaan, want jullie noemen het een organische tentoonstelling natuurlijk en archeologie kan daarin heel statisch lijken. Maar aan de andere kant dacht ik nou ja, voor de volgende tentoonstelling die daar verder op ingaat, zijn er misschien wel mogelijkheden, met betrekking tot digitale archeologie. Want als je

het hebt over bijvoorbeelde de eilanden waar ik op focus, je kan zo'n slavendorp kun je bijna reconstrueren. Er is wel zodanig veel opgegraven dat er veel over bekend is. Maar voor zover jij weet is daar nog niet heel erg in verdiept.

Robin: Nee, en wat voor deze tentoonstelling ook was, die richt zich heel erg op het heden. En het bruikleenproces dat is heel lang, dus ik denk dat we het niet eens hadden kunnen doen. En daarbij dus dat, met de insteek van de tentoonstelling, meer van het nu. Natuurlijk is er altijd een historisch deel van het verhaal, maar als de focus op het nu ligt, weet ik niet of archeologie daar… Ik ken ook de archeologische collectie niet. Want we hebben best wel veel archeologisch collectie, hoor, vooral in het Volkenkunde (museum) volgens mij. Ik ken die niet zo goed. Dus ik zou ook niet zo goed weten wat we daarvan zouden kunnen inzetten. Maar goed, Martin weet dat wel, volgens mij. Die is ook archeoloog natuurlijk.

Ik: Want als je nu naar de objecten kijkt, die komen dan uit het eigen depot, geloof ik?

Robin: Ja, vooral uit het Tropenmuseum, maar ook uit het Volkenkunde.

Ik: En waar komen die objecten dan vandaan? Want die zijn niet ontstaan in het museum. Zijn dat dingen die van mens op mens zijn overgegaan of toch ook wel archeologisch in een bepaalde zin?

Robin: Ik denk het wel. Er zijn veel verschillende manieren waarop de collectie er is gekomen. Dat is natuurlijk ook het hele restitutieverhaal dat nu speelt. Maar er werden bijvoorbeeld in de jaren 20 veel expedities georganiseerd, echt vanuit het Koloniaal Instituut, om dingen te verzamelen. Zowel vanuit etnografisch perspectief - gewoon verzamelen wat het dagelijks leven is van mensen, maar ook grondstoffen en dat soort dingen, meer de handels en economische dingen. Er moet ook wel contact zijn, of er misschien ook wel archeologische contacten zijn geweest of opdrachtgevers tot opgravingen. Maar dat weet ik niet precies, dat durf ik niet te zeggen.

Ik: en ik kan me ook voorstellen dat het voor deze tentoonstelling te kort was om te onderzoeken, maar ik kan me juist voorstellen dat in zo'n tentoonstelling als dit, dat je met eigendom en van wie is het object eigenlijk, heel voorzichtig om moet gaan. Ik weet niet of dat dan bij de objecten (die in heden van het slavernijverleden gebruikt worden) bewust niet erbij is gezet. Er staat dan bij de muziekinstrumenten bijvoorbeeld waar het vandaan kwam en uit welk jaartal het kwam, maar niet over de manier waarop het museum het verkregen heeft en of dat nu nog legaal zou zijn.

Robin: Nogmaals, dat is iets dat met herkomstonderzoek en dergelijke, dat is echt iets waar we nu mee bezig zijn: het restitutieverhaal. Ik denk dat je gelijk hebt. Je kunt daar een hele tentoonstelling op zich over maken en het probleem is vaak dat we het gewoon niet weten. En dat is heel typisch natuurlijk. Maar het is zeker niet alleen maar roofkunst, zoals we dat dan noemen. We hebben veel schenkingen gehad, ook nu nog worden er dingen aan het museum gegeven. Maar van heel veel objecten weten we het niet. En bijvoorbeeld het brandijzer;

we weten niet eens waar de letters voor staan. Het is waarschijnlijk een plantage-eigenaar geweest, maar dat soort dingen weten we dus ook niet. Dus dat maakt het ook lastig om te traceren.

Ik: En hebben jullie voor zover je weet objecten uit de collectie gelaten omdat daarvan de herkomst wel bekend is en niet zo ethisch is?

Robin: Nee.

Ik: Komen jullie dat veel tegen in het museum? Van die objecten die dan toch eigenlijk niet?

Robin: Ja, het is wel onderdeel van de geschiedenis. Dus dat is inderdaad waar iedereen het ook over heeft in de media. En niet alleen maar herkomst, het heeft er wel mee te maken, maar ook met menselijke resten. Hele ethische kwestie, dat gaan we niet tentoonstellen. We hadden in 2012 of 2014 een tentoonstelling hier ‘onverwachte ontmoetingen’ en daar hadden we… Het ging over objecten bij elkaar brengen, wat het doel is en wat de relatie tussen de objecten is, en daar hadden we ook, we hebben iets wat heet ‘Indiaantje op sterk water’. Dat is een foetus die een rokje aan heeft gekregen en die is echt heel bizar. En we hebben dat gevisualiseerd door een dichte kist neer te zetten. Om dat in ieder transparanter te maken. Het is iets wat we nu niet tentoonstellen, maar het is wel iets dat we hebben. Hoe gaan we daar mee om? Maar de tentoonstelling heden van het slavernijverleden is dat niet.

Ik: Nu zijn de meeste objecten daarin natuurlijk ook vrij neutraal. Met uitzondering van bijvoorbeeld dan zo’n brandijzer, maar er waren veel muziekinstrumenten, potten en pannen en dergelijke en ik kan me voorstellen dat de herkomst daarvan niet te achterhalen is.

Robin: Nee. En we hebben ook dingen in bruikleen, van de Black Archives bijvoorbeeld. dat is een archief voor de nalatenschap van zwarte schrijvers. En we hebben hen laten inspreken, dus we hebben echt geprobeerd om een soort selectie van objecten te maken die deels onze eigen geschiedenis ook zichtbaar maken. Bijvoorbeeld de Wereldtentoonstelling, het beeld van Codjo, dat jongetje dat op de wereldtentoonstelling tentoongesteld werd. Een van die objecten ligt ook naast de foto. En dat is omdat wij als museum, in onze collectie zitten objecten vanuit die wereldtentoonstelling die destijds verzameld zijn. Daar maak je ook iets zichtbaar mee van ‘dit is op deze manier in de collectie gekomen’. En het gekke is, omdat we nu met 4 musea zijn. In het verleden is er wel eens geschoven met collecties op een bepaalde manier. Maar nu we één zijn, zijn collecties die van tropenmuseum bijvoorbeeld naar het volkenkunde zijn gegaan ergens in het verleden zijn nu weer soort van terug op het honk, omdat nu alle museu 1 organisatie zijn. Dus dat is ook weer anders. Maar bij heden van het slavernijverleden was er niets zoiets (zo’n object), in elk geval niet in de tijd dat ik er gezeten heb.

Ik: En is dat iets waarbij jullie met Erfenis nog rekening mee gaan houden denk je? Omdat dat natuurlijk een lange tentoonstelling wordt.

Robin: Ja. Zeker. Dat herkomst verhaal dat is…

Ik: Valt daar nog mee te werken? Want je kunt het bijna niet meer goed doen. Als je zegt 'Ik weet niet waar het vandaan komt wordt het door de media vaak ook als fout opgepakt, want dan is het ooit onrechtmatig verkregen, al is het 100 jaar geleden geweest. Hebben jullie het idee dat je het als museum nog goed kunt doen?

Robin: Daar kan ik niet echt iets over zeggen. Dat wordt vanuit de directie gecommuniceerd. Maar we voelen wel de druk om er rekening mee te houden. Het is ook niet dat het nooit een issue is geweest. Maar ik mag niet heel erg lang over restitutie praten.

Ik: dat ga ik ook niet uitgebreid bespreken in mijn scriptie. Het is meer dat die objecten waarvan de herkomst onduidelijk is, of die van die verzamelaars komen, dat dat kan worden gezien als vroege archeologie, dan heb ik een hoek dat ik er in kan stappen.

Robin: maar hoe zou jij in heden van het slavernijverleden, wat zou jij aan archeologie ofzo, hoe zou jij dat vorm geven? Je had het over reconstructie van een dorp.

Ik: Nou, ik denk dat er voor digitale reconstructies een plaats is weggelegd. Ik ben voor mijn scriptie ook naar het Rijksmuseum geweest om koloniale collectie te bekijken, maar zeker voor Caribische en Surinaamse gebied hebben ze zeer beperkt aanbod. Volgens mij hebben ze 1 schilderij en dat is dan ook geen hedendaagse weergave. Dat is 100 jaar geleden gemaakt en ik denk dat met de kennis die we nu hebben, met de archeologie die daar gedaan is een realistisch en confronterend beeld kan geven van hoe het er nou uitzag. Want voor Nederlanders is het niet heel eenvoudig om naar de eilanden te gaan en ook daar is het niet zo dat op elk eiland een museum staat, van 'kijk zo ging het bij ons'. Maar ik denk wel dat het belangrijk is dat Nederlanders kennis hebben van wat er allemaal gebeurd is. Los van dat het gebeurt is, ook op wat voor manier en dat Amerika echt niet de enige was die plantagehuizen had met slavenhuisjes ernaast.

Robin: nee dat klopt. En wat voor soort - want het gaat nu natuurlijk heel specifiek over slavernij - wat voor soort dingen worden er nog meer opgegraven op de eilanden.

Ik: Volgens mij is er bewoning (bekend) vanaf 3000 of 5000 jaar voor Christus en dat was dan niet per se continue bewoning, maar wel dat ze bezocht worden en dat er van eiland naar eiland gegaan wordt. Dat is heel moeilijk nu op te graven en in beeld te brengen, want elk eiland hoort tegenwoordig bij een ander land en volgt andere regels, maar er is veel pre-historie en als er dan permanente bewoning komt dan is er ook veel landbouw.

Robin: dat is ook volgens mij, ik weet het niet zeker, maar zijn dat ook dingen die wij hebben in de collecties. Heb je wel eens in de collecties gekeken?

Ik: nee daar ben ik niet geweest.

Robin: We hebben wel echt van die prehistorische wapens en beitels en dergelijke. Maar ik heb daar weinig kennis over.

Ik: dat kan heel goed. En natuurlijk veel schelpenmateriaal. Maar ik focus daar ook niet op, dus ik weet er ook niet heel veel van. Want anders kan je over één eiland kun je hele Phd schrijven. Er zijn ook mensen die dat gedaan hebben, dus ik heb er een stukje uitgehaald. En het is wel interessant, maar voor Nederland wat minder relevant wat dat betreft omdat…

Robin: eigenlijk ook weer niet.

Ik: Toch wel, want wij hebben de eilanden vaak van de Spanjaarden en de Portugezen veroverd en die hebben de boel daar al uitgemoord, zullen we maar even zeggen. Dus wat dat betreft, dat maakt het wat ingewikkeld. Nederland heeft weinig inheemse bevolking op de eilanden doen vertrekken. Ze hebben wel wat er resteerde ook tot slaaf gemaakt en volgens mij is in Suriname het slavernijprobleem groter.

Robin: maar Curacao was het grootste handelspost.

Ik: dat klopt, maar vooral handel. Ze stuurden het grootste deel door naar de Spaanse eilanden en op Curacao zelf was relatief weinig slavernij.

Robin: vergeleken met Suriname.

Ik: Ja. Maar wat me vooral verbaast - en daarom wil ik het er ook graag over hebben, als ik het er met mensen over heb - op werk bijvoorbeeld, dat zijn mensen met medische achtergrond - die hebben bijna nog het lef om te ontkennen dat het erg is wat we daar gedaan hebben, zeg maar. Die doen daar zo nonchalant over. Maar het is niet nonchalant - of ze zeggen ‘dat was vroeger, dat bestaat nu niet meer’. En dan denk ik ‘Nee, doe even niet, het bestaat nog wel.’ En ook daar en omdat mensen vanuit Suriname hier naartoe komen.

Robin: Ja, het is een heel erg kop in het zand verhaal. En wat je noemt zijn precies de argumenten die we hebben proberen te weerleggen in de tentoonstelling. Want dat is ook precies de reden dat we op het heden focussen, om te laten zien dat het niet iets is van vroeger, maar iets waar doorleeft in de huidige samenleven en twee, het is niet hun geschiedenis maar ook jouw geschiedenis als iemand die nu in Nederland woont, die nu in Nederland geboren is, etc. etc. En drie, het is niet - want dat wordt ook vaak gezegd - een zwarte bladzijde. het is geen geïsoleerd evenement en oké het was wel donker maar voor de rest was het allemaal goed, zeker in het Gouden Eeuw Verhaal natuurlijk. Dus dat zijn echt de argumenten die we willen counteren.

Ik: precies. En dan denk ik dus dat het laten zien dat op die Eilanden hetzelfde speelde als bij de slavernij in Amerika, dat dat best een eye-opener zou kunnen zijn. Wij waren echt niet alleen die lui die mensen in bootjes zetten en dan

doorverkochten, maar we deden het zelf ook en ook dat handelen dat ging alsof het over goederen ging. En daar kan vanuit archeologie ook wel dingen laten zien worden. Want zo'n brandmerk, dik kans dat dat ooit opgegraven is of dat dat op zo'n eiland gevonden is en dan kan het al gezien worden als archeologisch object. En als je daar dan een verhaal omheen hebt, met wellicht de nazaten erbij - dan moet je weten waar het vandaan komt natuurlijk - maar ik denk dat het wel een toevoeging kan zijn. Maar dat ga ik nog verder onderzoeken, of dat ook inderdaad zo is.

Robin: Het is wel heel interessant. Ik zit helemaal niet in archeologie. Ik heb een keer een archeologische opgraving gedaan, in Rome, gewoon voor de leuk. Maar het is niks voor mij. Ik voel dan meer bij geschiedenis. Maar ik vind wel interessant om te zien hoe veel er nu opgegraven wordt. Want wie doen dat? Wat voor soort archeologen of wat voor bureaus.

Ik: opgraven op de Caribische eilanden bedoel je? Inmiddels, in de laatste 10-15 jaar, zeker na 10 oktober 2010, toen de hele kolonie daar ontbonden is, is er heel grote ontwikkeling geweest op het gebied van erfgoedmanagement. Eigenlijk heeft elk eiland zijn eigen instituut dat daar invloed op heeft en daarnaar kijkt van 'hoe kunnen we dat het beste doen'. Het staat nog wel een beetje in de kinderschoenen omdat voor die tijd was het nog niet echt als belangrijk gezien werd het gezien als 'we moeten het wel even bewaren, maar we gaan er niet heel grondig onderzoek naar doen'. En dat is ook wel een groot probleem, dat het op de eilanden vooral rescue archaeology is. Ze moeten voorkomen dat het vernietigt wordt en dan is uitgebreid onderzoek lastig. Maar in principe heeft elk eiland zijn eigen instantie en museum dat dat beïnvloed en vaak is dan het hoofd van het museum, of de conservator of coördinator iemand die ook roots heeft op dat eiland zelf en wordt er dan ook wel samengewerkt met bijvoorbeeld Universiteiti Leiden, ik weet dat zij heel veel doen in het Caribisch gebied. Alleen voor zover ik ligt de focus wel een beetje op de prehistorie maar dat weet ik niet helemaal zeker.

Robin: Het is wel interessant dat de focus daar ligt, want Universiteit heeft een vrij groot koloniale geschiedenis in het departement. Wel grappig dat de archeologie daar dan nu minder op focust.

Ik: misschien juist omdat ze vinden dat er al genoeg is, of ze vinden… Ik vind het ook lastig, want ikzelf vind historische archeologie heel interessant, dus vooral Middeleeuwen en later, maar wat ik vanuit Universiteit Leiden heb meegekregen is eigenlijk hoe ouder hoe interessanter, dus dat is wel hun focus. En natuurlijk over de jaren is er veel geschoven, want in 2011 toen ik begon met studeren was net master Egyptologie eruit gehaald en een paar jaar terug - die is volgens mij nu wel teruggekomen, maar ze hadden de master praktische archeologie eruit gehaald, omdat ze dan allemaal wetenschappers willen opleiden, terwijl ik dan denk, ja maar archeologie is *opgraven*, ik weet het niet. Er zijn heel veel andere aspecten, maar er gaan ook mensen archeologie studeren omdat ze wel willen opgraven.

Robin: ik zag dus wel in Suriname, je hebt daar Unesco wel zitten en je hebt in Paramaribo en daar omheen, veel oude plantages en plantagehuizen. Er is niet

zo heel veel over, en bij wat er over is, wordt daar vanuit de overheid niet zo heel veel aan gedaan. En als je door het centrum van Paramaribo loopt, al die huizen, super vervallen. Ik heb daar gesproken met iemand die woonde in zo'n oud plantagehuis en die heeft het van zijn eigen kosten opgeknapt en gerestaureerd. En dat is natuurlijk zo'n mentaliteit hebt, maar je mist dan steun van de overheid, heel lastig.

Ik: en je kan ook niet meer als Nederland daar komen van 'Wij gaan het allemaal even opknappen, want wij vinden dit belangrijk.

Robin: Volgens mij zijn er wel veel relaties met Nederland, want ik weet stadsherstel doet er veel, maar inderdaad, het is een hele koloniale gedachte om te denken, jullie doen het niet of jullie kunnen het niet, maar wij willen het wel.

Ik: Dat is op de eilanden inderdaad ook zo, dat je daar heel voorzichtig in moet zijn en dat ze daarom juist mensen erbij betrekken die roots hebben op het eiland zelf. Ik heb me nog niet helemaal verdiept in de politieke ontwikkelingen van de eilanden, maar Aruba was eigenlijk als eerste onafhankelijk en die discussie of de andere eilanden dat ook willen dat heeft heel lang gelopen en dat is deels vanuit Nederland ontwikkelt. Het was wel duidelijk dat ze die onafhankelijkheid wilden, maar allemaal op een andere manier. Want je hebt nu 2 eilanden die horen nog bij het Koninkrijk en eentje heeft affiniteit en weer een ander heeft echt onafhankelijkheid, dus het blijft heel ingewikkeld.

Robin: Het is daardoor ook heel lastig om te zien wat voor implicaties het heeft op politieke relaties en sociaal.

-- Afsluiting gesprek --

Belangrijke notitie: het is een heel educatieve tentoonstelling, veel kinderen van 4-16. Veel rondleidingen aan schoolklassen. Hier komt ook positief geluid uit. Afdeling Educatie is hier ook bij betrokken. Doelgroep eerst Nederlandstalige mensen, komen wel ook veel toeristen, maar het is wel voor de Nederlander.