

Disturbing

Thoughts and Conversations
about Commemorations
of the Shoah and
Commemorations of Slavery

Judy Jaffe-Schagen

Tensions

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Preface

This volume brings together a collection of personal thoughts, observations, fragments of conversations, questions, and more questions. Trained as a historian, working as both a historian and a heritage professional, and participating in commemorative practices, I have become conscious of an urgent need in Dutch society to address the troubled relationship between two sets of commemorative practices.

For three years, from September 2021 to September 2024, I engaged in a series of encounters with people, objects and locations. As I worked through my findings, I came to understand the role of heritage professionals in contemporary Dutch commemorations of the Shoah and commemorations of slavery and the disturbing tensions that grip this corner of the heritage world and society as a whole. *Disturbing Tensions* is therefore the title I have given the topic, the study, and this collection.

My aim was to develop tools to enable heritage professionals to address these tensions and approach commemorative practices with greater empathy. The various non-chronological sections each address a specific topic and may be read separately, however the experts interviewed here are introduced only once, where they first appear. I have arranged selections from their interviews to present the words of the interviewees through my own lens. Most of the conversations I had were in Dutch. I have translated them into English to enable comparisons in a European context. The transcribed conversations have been edited in the interest of clarity and readability, and submitted to the interviewees for any requisite adjustments.

Authors generally save their acknowledgements until the end, but I would hardly have been able to begin without the help of the many who agreed to share their time, thoughts, emotions and expertise, for which I am deeply grateful. This subject is not always easy to discuss, to say the least. Thank you.

Overview

This volume is based on empirical research conducted from 2021 to 2024 into the perplexing relationship between two sets of commemorative practices. It is arranged neither chronologically nor thematically, in unnumbered sections, to emphasize the non-hierarchical order of the book. Each section addresses a specific topic. Taken together they highlight the vast landscape in which commemorative practices are performed and where tensions occur.

Disturbing Tensions focuses on why it is imperative that we study the tensions between commemorations of the Shoah and of slavery.

Heritage Professionals discusses what is understood by the term “heritage professional” and what role heritage professionals can play in addressing societal issues such as commemorative practices.

Positionality. Conversations with Heritage Professionals considers how positionality forms part of discussions on interventions in commemorative practices.

Tension. Conversations with Heritage Professionals analyzes how tension is understood in relation to commemorative practices.

Multidirectional Excursions looks at public space as a manifestation in practice of the theoretical notion of multidirectional memory.

The Absent Monument asks how to address the relational aspect of heritage and how to establish a relationship as a prerequisite for an intervention.

Glossary

Apologies Offered and Displayed examines what happens when rituals performed outside the museum are addressed in a museum setting.

Keti Koti Dialogue Table as a Museum Object looks at “color blindness” as an aspect of interpersonal relationships.

Are Jews White? considers how “race” is part of commemorative practice.

These Words Matter Too considers the significance and impact of phrases such as “victim,” “perpetrator” and “implicated subject.”

Heritage Arena features an address and a summary of the subsequent debate about how and why we commemorate.

Speeches features excerpts from speeches given at ceremonies on May 4 and July 1.

A Place to Perform Libations and Lay Stones focuses on performative rituals.

From MUPI to Memorial is about memorials in public spaces.

Time and Trauma discusses how trauma affects the way history and memory are experienced.

The *Epilogue* contains reflections on the way the past will be viewed in future.

The volume ends with *Recommendations for Heritage Professionals* providing directions for heritage professionals on how they can play a role in commemorative practices.

Slavery in the present context refers primarily to the enslavement of Black Africans, the transatlantic slave trade and the exploitation of enslaved Africans in the Americas.

Black is written with a capital B when referring to people of African descent. Because race is a social rather than scientific concept, and has no legitimate definition, the word appears in apostrophes when used in this sense.

I refer to the Shoah rather than the Holocaust. Etymologically, Holocaust suggests that six million Jews died for a reason, even that their deaths were a necessary sacrifice. Although the word’s origins are obscure to most audiences, many scholars prefer sho’ah or shoah (Hebrew for catastrophe) since it has a specifically Jewish connotation. I use Holocaust when it occurs in quotes and citations.

Disturbing Tensions

“The Holocaust is just a cover-up for stupid sheep. ... What happened in the concentration camps is a joke compared to our slave trade. ... Gassing people, I know that’s sad but, for a laugh, try learning about the torture techniques.”¹

The original Dutch lyrics are from a 2012 rap by Darryl Danchelo Osenga. The city of Haarlem selected Osenga for poet laureate in September 2020. Two days later, the appointment was cancelled, partly because of this text.² I quote it here to show how some people juxtapose the histories of the Shoah and slavery. Comparisons like these are at the heart of this discussion.

My contention is that commemorators of the Shoah and slavery interact in ways that reflect and encourage tension. This is evident from the word choices, artistic expressions and rituals employed at commemorations. That same tension is also evident in areas other than commemorative contexts, for example in discussions about apologies and restitution, in exhibitions and in educational programs. It is the reason for this study, in which I look at ways heritage professionals are able to recognize aspects of commemorative practices that fuel disharmony between commemorators of the Shoah and slavery.³

At the heart of this research is the proposition that this tension relates to a perceived disparity in the struggle for a place in the Dutch memorial landscape. This is linked inextricably to a failure to recognize and acknowledge

the ongoing trauma, to endemic antisemitism and racism in society, and to the existence of diverse repertoires of institutionalized or non-institutionalized historical knowledge of irreparable past events.⁴

The emotion and interest aired in public forums today make research into heritage dynamics and the social, cultural and historical context of heritage formation an urgent necessity: heritage connects people, but increasingly also polarizes.⁵ When emotions become fraught, dividing society, I believe it is time to consider changing the way we deal with heritage – which is where heritage professionals can contribute.

An advisory report issued jointly with the Cultural Heritage Agency shows that heritage professionals need more information about effective strategies to deal with emotionally charged heritage.⁶ This has also been noted by institutions such as the Netherlands Knowledge Centre for Immaterial Heritage and the Meertens Institute. Heritage professionals deal with concrete historical issues in a complex society.⁷ In 2023, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) responded with a report entitled *Unstable Pedestals: Controversial Monuments in Public Spaces*.⁸ KNAW's Controversial Monuments Committee studies the history of the Dutch colonial empire, Dutch involvement with slavery and wars, and genocide in the twentieth century. These traumatizing events have profoundly affected the lives of many people and their descendants.⁹ The report shows that:

Debates and conflicts about statues and monuments have intensified in the Netherlands in the past decade. Some pedestals have become unstable. ... Public officials can respond in several different ways: do nothing, place an explanatory text alongside the monument, change its function and name, create a critical artistic conceptualization of the monument, remove it to another location, or remove it altogether. In an effort to offer stakeholders some guidance, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences established a Committee on Controversial Monuments to examine what makes monuments controversial and how to engage in a well-considered conversation about them.¹⁰

KNAW concludes that controversies about memorials often result from a lack of understanding of history and imagery, location, ownership and decision-making procedures.¹¹ The committee suggests that a way to tackle this is to develop tools to turn confrontation into balanced conversation.

An illustration of a balanced conversation is the response King Willem-Alexander gave when that quintessentially controversial historical object, the Golden Coach, was retired in 2022:

The Golden Coach can only be used again when the Netherlands is ready, and that's not the case at the moment. ... All citizens of this country must be able to feel that they are equal and have fair opportunities. Everyone should be able to feel part of what we have built in our country and to be proud of it. Including people with ancestors who were unfree, in the East or West. Beautiful laws, like Article 1 of the Constitution, do not suffice. As long as there are people in the Netherlands who feel the pain of discrimination every day, the past still casts its shadow over our time and it is not over yet.¹²



Fig. 1. King Willem-Alexander with Amsterdam Museum director Judikje Kiers at the opening of the *Golden Coach* exhibition, Amsterdam, June 17, 2021. Photo by Mischa Schoemaker.

Where the king sees a shadow, others see something more sinister. Irreparable historical events are experienced by some, not as incidents in the past, but as part of the present. This is about more than the pain that people feel today; it is about recognizing that those events took place, and about how they are recorded and commemorated.

A certain ambiguity surrounds who is responsible for recognizing what needs to be recognized, and precisely who and what should be recognized. In this regard, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's Cultural Heritage Agency writes in *Erfgoed om bij stil te staan (Heritage to Commemorate)*:

When erecting memorials and initiating and conducting commemorations, the government generally takes a back seat and adopts a detached stance. It is society that “owns” commemoration, which owes its existence to a certain collective awareness. Yet governments existed in the past, just as they do today. When the state has needed to emphasize its national sense of identity or when historical perspectives change, it is the government and other national institutions that lead the way. ... In commemoration, and especially remembrance, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's role is to provide context and explanation. After all, its focus is education and culture. The ministry becomes involved by providing structural subsidies to institutions. ... The minister is also responsible for the preservation of the country's memorials.¹³

The way we deal with our physical or tangible heritage is a product of the way we deal with history in contemporary culture. Heritage objects, and the way we treat them, often become the subject of public debate. This is part of the dynamic and occasionally volatile relationship that people, groups and society have with heritage. The Cultural Heritage Agency points out that intangible aspects of commemoration are the state's responsibility: “National commemorative culture is a collective culture made up of largely intangible elements. Rituals depend on public involvement. Collectively performed actions, rites and emotions play a key role, while the actual physical heritage plays a supportive and facilitative role.”¹⁴

This implies the existence of certain collectively experienced emotions, to the exclusion of competing, incompatible emotions. Moreover, it takes no account of the existence of rival repertoires of knowledge.

The *Unstable Pedestals* report also focuses on tangible heritage and controversies within certain areas, such as the commemorations of the Shoah and slavery, while ignoring the tensions that exist between the various commemorative constellations. These tensions are also part of the disparate and potentially contradictory purpose of various memorials in the public space.

This volume brings together the results of empirical research I conducted between 2021 and 2024 into the perplexing relationship between these two sets of commemorative practices. My discussion homes in on commemorative practices in the Dutch capital, Amsterdam, and the interaction between commemorators and commemorations of the Shoah and slavery. The focus is on intangible heritage as well as intangible aspects of physical heritage, especially language, rituals and art. An important aspect of the creation of meaning in commemorative practices is the choice of words, and the way specific words are used in certain rituals. Art includes dance and theatrical performance, music and film. Rituals may range from fixed routines to spontaneous improvisations.



Fig. 2. Photo taken after the signing of the certificate by Urwin Vyent, Linda Nooitmeer and Hendrik Henrichs, adding Ketu Koti to the Intangible Heritage Inventory of the Netherlands at the Amsterdam City Archives, December 2, 2023. Courtesy of the National Institute for Dutch Slavery Past and Heritage. Photo by Jörg Bernsmann.

This exploration of the way heritage professionals view tensions in commemorative practices is based on a series of in-depth interviews with heritage professionals about commemorative practices and their own role in these practices. The matter discussed in these interviews reflects the context in which the conversations took place. I offered all interviewees the possibility to read how I juxtaposed the various extracts in my argument, and to comment on that. Subsequently, some interviewees have rephrased the comments they made in conversation.

This volume attempts to locate the historical origins and contemporary triggers of today's tensions, and to contribute in turn to the ongoing debate on political aspects of citizenship in a personal journey made up of deliberate and chance encounters with people, locations and objects that have enabled me to examine my own thoughts about dynamic practices relating to the ongoing cultural impact of these two histories.

Heritage Professionals

It was around the time that I started work on my present study that I joined Reinwardt Academy's Cultural Heritage Research group in Amsterdam. Conversations with other members of the group naturally affected the way that I came to view heritage and the role of heritage professionals. A key aspect of the group's research is its dynamic concept of heritage: heritage is the present iteration of an ongoing negotiation process involving a range of factors and stakeholders.¹⁵ Identifying and treating objects as heritage raises practical, ethical and theoretical issues.¹⁶ At Reinwardt Academy, therefore, a heritage professional has to be socially engaged, aware of the relationship between theory, practice and ethics; they have to know that heritage can be both tangible and intangible, movable and immovable, and understand that practice which involves a physical, material or spatial dimension is merely the start, while contexts such as time, place and social group are key when engaging with heritage.¹⁷

Despite this general idea of a heritage professional's function, no clear definition or code of conduct exists.¹⁸ That is because the work depends on its context, which differs from case to case. Discussions about heritage professionals in heritage literature are therefore mostly about heritage itself.¹⁹ Nevertheless, it is not the heritage object, but the elements of heritage practice that determine the skills needed for professionals to do their job.²⁰

At Reinwardt Academy, prospective heritage professionals learn the skills needed to work in the world of heritage and museums. Those skills include a sound knowledge and awareness of current affairs and issues, and how these affect, and are affected by, museum and heritage work, a basic knowledge of the historical framework and an awareness of the way history is structured.²¹ For heritage professionals it is important to recognize that there are different kinds of knowledge and different ways of knowing, and indeed to acknowledge the effect that emphasizing one particular kind of knowledge can have. It matters if professionals rely on institutionalized knowledge or whether they

consciously confront it with non-institutionalized, experience-based knowledge.²² This particularly holds true for the commemorative practices marking the Shoah and slavery. Moreover, acknowledging that there are different ways of knowing reminds us that all knowledge is situated in time and space – and that it is known by individual people and that it is constantly changing and emerging.²³ Moreover, the circumstances in which different kinds of knowledge are produced and emerge are political. An awareness of the existence of different kinds of knowledge is a precondition for present-day solidarity.²⁴

The focus of Reinwardt Academy's curriculum has changed since its foundation in 1976. It has moved on from its original concentration on the museum sector to encompass different kinds of heritage, exploring the emotions that go with this and the broader social, cultural and historical context.²⁵ In the late twentieth century, identity discourses began to play a more significant part in discussions relating to cultural and political conflicts. Some casually dismissed the phenomenon as “identity politics,” as essentialism, as the “special pleading” of minority groups. However, as Nancy Fraser and others have shown, it may be more usefully understood as the “politics of recognition.”²⁶ In this sense, heritage is a discourse that legitimizes and underwrites claims to identity, an essential part of the search for social justice.²⁷ Commemorative practices are a textbook example of this discourse. They complicate the heritage professional's work and their role, and they make it all the more urgent.

Heritage formation invariably involves conflicting interests and emotions: some people may cherish an object while others regard it as painful, offensive or petty. Indeed, heritage objects may harbor both (collective) memories and repressed trauma. Commemorative practice, a subgroup of heritage practice, is no exception. Here too, heritage professionals need to take a range of interests and emotions into account. They can make a difference by applying critical reflection and meaningful intervention when heritage interactions and issues become complex.

Commemorative practices are some of the most urgent and relevant heritage issues now facing society. Training heritage professionals, equipping them with the expertise and knowledge they need to work as commemorative professionals, is the first step towards addressing tensions. Crucially, commemorative professionals engage with commemorative practice, rather than with commemorators. Psychologists examine and treat trauma in individuals; commemorative professionals study the loss or damage that lies behind the trauma and deal with the relevant commemorations. Around 2020, psychologists started to become interested in the emotional impact that commemorations of the Second World

War have had on the post-war generation. A study by Anna de Vries discusses the need to examine the effect commemorations have and to help policymakers incorporate the findings in commemorative programs, taking the demands of the most vulnerable into account.²⁸

Commemorative professionals therefore study the tensions inherent in commemorative practices at a social rather than an individual level. While Reinwardt Academy's curriculum is designed to provide heritage professionals with a set of basic competences and knowledge, commemorative professionals require an additional set of skills and knowledge of the related historical repertoire for educational and practical use. To develop this, they study the various components of specific heritage practices. The basic elements of commemorative practice are threefold: language, artistic expression or performance, and ritual. Commemorative professionals need to be able to recognize and acknowledge these elements. This is essential to be able to develop interventions in commemorative practice. The present research is based on the premise that these elements convey and create tension, individually and collectively. These skills and additional knowledge enable heritage professionals to develop an awareness and sensitivity to tensions in society and commemorative practice, which is what defines the commemorative professional.

To learn more about the commemorative professional's role and who is suited to fulfil this role, I approached Linda Nooitmeer, chairman of the board at the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery (NiNsee) and in that capacity, one of the organizers of the annual Ketj Koti (breaking the chains) commemoration. Ketj Koti marks the day when slavery was outlawed in Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean territories in 1863:

JUDY:

Historians don't have to look at heritage, but heritage professionals have to engage in history. You can't look at the present, at heritage, at why it plays a role and has value without knowing about its history, and therefore its ancestry. Are heritage professionals involved in negotiating between these two groups? Or between these groups and policy?

LINDA:

Look, historians are not going to take on that role. They say: we just describe, we make no judgment. I think it's a missed opportunity, but that's inherent in historians. Heritage professionals are able to judge because they

also look at heritage in the present and the role it plays now. As a heritage professional you're involved in the debate. And heritage professionals are allowed to raise questions. So, in the sense that they raise questions, yes, certainly. They put it on the agenda. Because heritage is acquiring a new role, a new function. And a new place. Where historians draw a line, heritage professionals may for example offer recognition. So Winti religion is part of our heritage, but it isn't fully recognized, especially not in Europe. Why is that?²⁹

JUDY: You talk about questioning and the agenda. Maybe we could add facilitating?

LINDA: As soon as one asks that question... One needs an audience to ask it, and that's when one facilitates a meeting. Your research is about more than just studying literature and written sources, it's also about oral sources, it's about society, it's about so much more. It's also increasingly important because of the work that needs to be done... We have to decolonize and create a new framework of social norms; somebody has to do it. Historians aren't going to do it. That's a task for the heritage professional.³⁰

The subject of empathy came up while talking about the role of the heritage professional with Wayne Modest, Wereldmuseum's director of content and professor by special appointment of Material Culture and Critical Heritage Studies at Amsterdam's Vrije Universiteit:

WAYNE: What, or more correctly, who is a heritage professional? Laurajane Smith's concept of authorized heritage discourse defines this as someone who has trained in heritage studies, museum studies, archaeology... The question is where do we stop with this definition. For example, in my museum we just held strategic conversations about who we are as an institution, how the museum's history informs what we do today. When someone asked: "Do we all need to be interested in this history? What if some-

one's role has nothing to do with it, such as those who work in accounts or human resources?" My response was that everyone in the museum should be concerned with our mission, which is embedded in our history. If we are interested in fashioning empathy, or world citizenship, people in accounts and human resources should also ask themselves how they can contribute to this mission. They must also know that it is because of aspects of our history, people respond to us in particular ways in the present. If we as a museum claim that working with different communities is about achieving social justice, then our accounts department should be about more than applying its rules and methods, it should be about how those rules and methods help or limit communities flourishing. One of the issues I have with heritage, as we understand it now, is its framing in a language of preservation of things. This is not inherently wrong. However, I wonder if this framing places heritage outside the people for whom it is meant. It seems that we care more for things than for people. Things can be preserved in our museums, while people die in the Mediterranean, for example. I believe in things, I love things. As museums try to decolonize, we need to shift away from this overemphasis on preservation to a focus on care, for people and for the planet. Towards care that takes responsibility for the future. Assuming that heritage embodies, at least in part, the material realization of human capabilities – what people make, what they hold dear, what gives them life, what helps to make us human – then heritage professionals have to invest in life, in humanity and in our relationship with the more than human world, not necessarily only in objects. Today, unfortunately, there remains an overemphasis on the economics of heritage and less on the flourishing of the human spirit. For me, that's where the problem lies, because that's not something you can teach.³¹

WAYNE:

Heritage institutions are fundamentally political. We choose to serve particular communities and not others.

In a sense, we often follow the political discourse of the moment. Our cultural is political. As time passes these concerns have emerged in the training of heritage professionals. Only then heritage programs, like museums, will follow. We need to teach more in heritage programs about how power works, how racism works, how sexism or ablism works. And how power structures, through considering heritage, grant value and dignity to some lives and not to others. The point is not to see commemoration or heritage as more important than the people for whom they are important.³²

JUDY: But if you consider commemorative practices a form of heritage, and focus less on those practices, which you have said, are hierarchical, and focus more on the people...

WAYNE: How we understand ourselves as belonging to one community or another, comes into being through practices, including acts of commemoration. I do not walk around every day thinking that I am a Black person. However, through certain structures, practices and images, I become part of a community, both for negative reasons for example through racist exclusion -, or positive reasons - for example through commemorations such as Keti Koti. When I leave such a structure, like Keti Koti, I become an individual, or part of another community, for example, a gendered community.³³

JUDY: When I'm at the Keti Koti event in Oosterpark, I feel white and Jewish, and I think: is it right for me to be here? Why does that make me aware of my own identity? After all, I am someone who believes that commemorating slavery is important.

WAYNE: That's important, for two reasons. Commemorative acts performed by others are an invitation to empathize with other people's need to remember, as part of their strug-

gle for belonging. We often speak negatively about others' identity politics. When it's about ourselves, we take it for granted: it isn't identity politics. Identity politics is something other people do. For the normalized, the powerful, it's self-evident. So, the second point is that commemorations should be about reflecting about ourselves. Instead of seeing it as just "not my history, not my pain" we should also empathize with other people's pain: it's our pain, humanity's pain.³⁴



Fig. 3. Slavery commemoration at Oosterpark, Amsterdam, July 1, 2022. Photo by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.

Positionality

Conversations with Heritage Professionals

Whenever I'm in Amsterdam on Remembrance Day, I attend the small gathering at the war memorial on Apollolaan and lay flowers. I never ask whether it's appropriate for me to be at the ceremony. It's a given. Then recently, I started going to the annual Ketí Koti festival, which marks the abolition of slavery in the former Dutch colonies. First in Oosterpark, now on Museumplein. But I always hesitate. I wonder whether my presence is appreciated, whether I'm intruding, since I don't have the same emotional experience as the descendants of those being commemorated. Is it a national event, open for everyone? And if certain people attend, or stay away, does that cause tension? What about heritage professionals? Can they, by virtue of their profession, attend every event?

Annemarie de Wildt is a curator Amsterdam Museum. I asked her whether she felt she needed to justify her presence at the ceremony commemorating Elieser, supposedly an enslaved African,³⁵ who died in 1629 and is buried at Beit Chaim, the Portuguese Jewish cemetery in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel.

ANNEMARIE:

Well, I didn't feel that at all, because Perez just asked me if I wanted to come along.³⁶ Since I had helped Perez realize the Elieser statue, I took it for granted that I should be there; I remember being there, standing somewhere while behind me there was a group of people from the Jewish community who managed the cemetery or had something to do with it; they said libations are prohibited there. So, we would place stones; it made me feel tremendously uncomfortable. Whether it was those stones... And I thought, just let these people do their libations. Although I have no idea how sensitive it is. Maybe there's

something in the Jewish religion that makes it wrong. I'm not a believer and I feel, well, we place stones and we lay flowers.³⁷

We also discussed the Ketu Koti Dialogue Table at Amsterdam Museum, first held in 2013.

ANNEMARIE:

It was an emotional moment. That sense of ancestry. I thought, wow, we're dealing with history. Later I thought about the story of the descendants, the descendants of the enslaved. And about the descendants of the perpetrators, the plantation owners. Which I find complicated. Who am I descended from? It feels lame to say these are my ancestors, poor farmers in Haarlemmermeer, but that's what they were. And it's not only then that I get that feeling, that sense of a responsibility for history often plays a role.³⁸

To discuss the heritage professional's role, it is necessary to address the concept of positionality. To reflect actively in this context is to engage in a dynamic, ongoing, fluid interrogation of our own assumptions regarding positionality, how others experience the positions we take, and the impact this has on our research.³⁹ As a historian and heritage professional, my work is suffused with ideas about inclusion and diversity. A sustained awareness of the positions people take is essential to recognize these elements, to explore the dynamic realities in which people hold or shift multiple positions. The way privilege, social positioning and political power interconnects shows how people benefit directly or indirectly from asymmetrical power structures, from structural inequalities over which they themselves exercise little or no control. Positioning is an ongoing relational process, which demands that we start by asking questions about ourselves. Is it appropriate that I do this research? What kind of narratives and histories should I be listening to, where have they been collected?⁴⁰

As Seta Low explains, "reflexivity, the ability to examine one's feelings, reactions and motives, and how these influence the research process, is essential for ethnographic fieldwork, especially in public spaces where one's public and personal personas are on display."⁴¹ It isn't easy to remain actively reflexive. Openly acknowledging our positionality can leave us vulnerable and force us to deal with our taboos. I spoke about this at a conference I organized with Gregor

Langfeld: *Taboo in Cultural Heritage: Reverberations of Colonialism and National Socialism*:

For the last two days we have been talking about taboo in cultural heritage. A remarkable endeavor. Does that mean that the subject itself is no longer taboo? Maybe it was never taboo for us. Perhaps we happened to be in a geopolitical, social, economic place that allowed us to feel comfortable discussing it. "It" being the reverberations of colonialism and National Socialism. Maybe some of us were brave or desperate enough to address it. Even though I'm one of the convenors, I'm not so brave and I don't want to be that desperate, but at the same time I can't say there are no taboos for me. Yet, here I am, because, once again, I haven't managed to shield my senses from the reverberations; not as a historian, not as heritage professional and not as me. Or more positively, here I am because I am trying to make the best of life, despite the ongoing taboo of actuality.⁴²

At the conference I chose not to be transparent about the social political context to which some might consider I belong. I was protecting myself, and I had decided that I could be aware of my own positionality without sharing this. Needless to say, not everyone has the luxury of not having their positionality decided for them by other people as soon as they walk into the room.

I may unconsciously use part of my persona that is affected by trauma to connect with people who deal with trauma relating to other histories.⁴³ Moreover, because of who I am, I imagine that I am part of the societal issue I am addressing in this project. My position as a second-generation survivor of the Shoah affects my repertoire of experiential knowledge and the way I ask questions, the kind of questions I ask, which in turn affects the kind of answers I receive.⁴⁴ When I asked Linda to elaborate on the relationship between commemorative practices relating to the Shoah and slavery, I found the answer illuminating:

LINDA:

Your question needs to be asked. The subject needs to be on the table, but I'm not sure that this is the right time to address that topic. I try to stay ahead of the curve, but

the society we live in is complex... In this country, people worry about keeping their job, their status, and what happens when we ask these questions.⁴⁵

I mentioned something I had raised earlier with Wayne, namely whether antisemitism and racism are part of the same phenomenon.

JUDY: I understand that you don't think the time is right, but I don't think we can afford to wait. If we want to show empathy towards each other's histories, towards each other's position and ongoing trauma, we need to share and empathize in all directions, to ensure that we don't lose our sensitivity and are able to discuss the issues.

LINDA: Look, you're right to say that we can't afford to wait. But we can't afford to say straight out what we're thinking either.⁴⁶

From this I realized that I hadn't really understood what the time not being right meant. It shows that antisemitism and anti-Black racism, both crucial issues, are complicating our efforts to address the tension between commemorators of the Shoah and commemorators of slavery.⁴⁷

In the course of this study, it became clear that positionality always becomes part of the conversation, however surreptitiously. An awareness of our own positionality is only the first step in considering the role we play in commemorative practices and in studying these practices. Discussion can provide an insight into the origins of these tensions. Some people experience these tensions within themselves, as remarked, when we discussed apologies, by Gloria Wekker, Emeritus Professor of Gender and Ethnicity, who as a social and cultural anthropologist, specializes in Gender Studies, Sexuality Studies, African-American and Caribbean Studies:

GLORIA: For me as an individual, I received an apology to the part of me that's Jewish. So, I picture my great uncle who lived in Amsterdam being deported to Auschwitz. But not to the part of me that's Black. How am I supposed to respond? It's ridiculous!⁴⁸

Tension

Conversations with Heritage Professionals

When I began this study, I already had a sense of the tension in commemorative practices, especially commemorations of the Shoah and slavery. I take reflexivity seriously, so I felt I ought to discuss my impressions with other people. Most of the people I interviewed are involved with museums and heritage; many are also personally and professionally involved in commemorative practices.⁴⁹ It would be inappropriate to ask the questions I am asking at a commemoration, certainly not those about the tension between commemorators of different histories. The trauma is still too raw for interventions, even for simple questions. When it comes to commemorating irreparable historical wrongs, the tensions and the trauma are connected. Yet these need to be addressed if we are to reshape society and adjust our vision of citizenship and our understanding of humanity.

At the top of the chat bar of the webinar on how to teach the present-day effects of slavery are the words "Remember to be cool and play nice!"⁵⁰ Yet playing nice by repressing and avoiding tension is not what I consider the best way to address the problem. For me, playing nice means allowing inequality, racism and antisemitism to go unchallenged. Conflict and negative emotions have a productive potential. Feelings that many might consider impolite can contribute towards social progress. Although constantly experiencing and expressing tension may not only be harmful for individuals, but for society as a whole. A first step towards talking about addressing tension without tone policing, is therefore to recognize and acknowledge its source.⁵¹

In my interviews, I have set out to discover whether others shared my sense of pervasive tension and, if so, how they experienced this. I wanted to find out at what point cross-references in terminology, ritual and performance cease to be innocuous social mechanisms and become an indication of underlying problems that reveal and cause negative tension. I began most of the conversations

by asking how my interlocutor would describe the relationship between commemorators of the Shoah and slavery, and whether they thought tensions existed between commemorators of the Shoah and slavery. I followed this by asking how these tensions, if any, could best be described and what they based this on, and what is, or could be the role of heritage professionals in this respect. All the interviews were conducted in a one-on-one setting. Sometimes, it may seem as if the interviewees are talking to each other, but this is not the case. The following fragments of conversations link to the questions mentioned earlier.

I asked Emile Schrijver, general director of the Jewish Cultural Quarter in Amsterdam and professor by special appointment of Jewish Book History, do you think there's tension between commemorators of the Shoah and slavery?

EMILE: Yes, I think there's some tension. If only because a kind of competition has developed. I remember sitting at a Ketu Koti meal in 2016. A Ketu Koti talk. It must have been on July 1, at the Ketu Koti festival in Oosterpark. That's where I first noticed it. Someone buttonholed me and said that the Jews had done quite well with their Jewish Museum, and that a museum of slavery had yet to be built. That's when it struck me, and I said it at the time, that it has to do with representation, the extent to which you manage to represent your interests. It also has to do with a growing awareness in the Black community. And it's interesting to see where that awareness comes from. Whenever I'm invited to address a few unifying words at a Ketu Koti commemoration I always accept. I don't hesitate for a second. It's an honor... I think the competition for prominence, whether the Holocaust gets priority or slavery, and the pain this reflects... I think that is felt more profoundly in the Black community than in the Jewish community. True, Jewish culture has a high profile. Television plays a role in this. Plain visibility. After all, Dutch TV broadcasts the National Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony live every January 27. I don't understand why they don't make July 1 a national memorial day too. Why can't the prime minister attend both ceremonies, on January 27 and July 1? What difference would that make?⁵²

Later, I discussed my research on commemorations of the Shoah and slavery with journalist Patrick Meershoek.

PATRICK:

It's a brilliant combination. Not least because of the tensions. It's been that way since the start. Especially in the Surinamese community. There has always been a certain resentment: people were desperate to gain the recognition that the Jewish community had received. Ten or fifteen years ago, meetings would invariably end in a comparison between slavery and the Holocaust. That would cause a commotion. And those meetings were over as soon as the dreaded words were uttered. That's when emotion took over.

At first, I was surprised, and indignant... Although I understood that this was a way of bringing slavery to the attention of Dutch society, because at that time [championing the acknowledgement of slavery] was a bit of an exotic hobby. Authors wrote books, museums held exhibitions, but these were of little interest to the general public. That has changed dramatically in the last ten years, which has a lot to do with the discussion surrounding Zwarte Piet [Black Pete]. Like the Holocaust comparison, that was mainly a way to make a point, and it has had an amazing impact. Not least because the new generation of activists knows their way around the Dutch media world. Once you get that ball rolling, there's no turning back. In the past few years all the major institutions have gone beyond demanding an apology, they want to take this further. So, tension has always been present. There's something distasteful about it too: that's what happens when you compare one suffering with another... Then they bring in the heavy artillery. It's all down to the emotionally charged nature of that history and the desire for recognition. In the end, emotions find their way out. And emotion has become a valid political argument.⁵³

In my conversation with Wayne I asked for his take on what's been happening between these two groups of commemorators, and whether he had noticed anything in particular.

WAYNE: That there's tension is clear, and it's a pity really. And it can be dangerous because it can limit our ability to act. There are a couple of reasons for this. Theoretically, it's about the framework we have used to discuss the Holocaust: for a long time, the narrative was that there could be no comparison, it's the ultimate evil. I think that Hannah Arendt held this position. The result was a kind of hierarchy of evil, and of what's memorable and is able to be commemorated. For example, I was at a discussion at the Holocaust Museum [in 2019], in its programming prior to the refurbishment. One of the propositions we discussed was whether antisemitism is the worst form of racism. This was an uncomfortable moment for me. I remember wondering why ask which is worse. After all, if it's racism, then it's racism. But one person became especially angry when I refused to call antisemitism the worst form of racism. For some, there is a hierarchy. And it's both theoretical and emotional.

At the same time, while for many people in the Netherlands and Europe the need to remember the Holocaust, or the end of the Second World War, is a given – that is what they mean by commemoration – groups who consider themselves post-colonial feel left out: why isn't 'our holocaust' being commemorated? Why is it not a national commemoration? That brings these two acts of commemoration into an unhealthy rivalry. I have been asked why we don't recognize, and I've heard it mentioned, why we don't use the term Black Holocaust to describe slavery. For me, we do not need the term Black Holocaust to make slavery an evil.

What makes it complex is that it is not only competitive; there is also a sense of, what I could call "positive jealousy". A Black Jamaican artist I have worked with pointed out that yes, the Jewish people have put com-

memoration for atrocity on the map. So, if they can do it, he said, then why can't we? These complicated emotions and different ways of comprehending the system, the nature, of commemoration, have made all this extremely difficult.⁵⁴

JUDY: So when slavery is commemorated, people in the Jewish world who are proud of what they have achieved feel that this will detract from their commemorations.

WAYNE: Which is how this has become racialized. This is a kind of competitive racialized politics. It's the same racialized politics that prompts those of mixed Dutch-Indonesian descent, for example, to claim that Blacks have hijacked anti-racism. This is also a comment that I have heard. What about us, they ask? This creates a competitive framework reflecting the hierarchy of various social groups: a hierarchy of suffering, even of humanness. This way of thinking is embedded in what I call a scarcity framework: if you get too much, then I get nothing. So, when we reflect on these ideas about collective humanity, as David Scott has tried to do, it should not be about whether Black activists have hijacked anti-racism, it's about how to understand and how to fight racism from different perspectives.⁵⁵ Bringing all this together, we can see what racism is in all its forms.⁵⁶

LINDA: There's a tension. And that tension isn't about envy or anger towards the Jewish community. It's not. It's an indictment of the system we live in.⁵⁷

I talked about this project with Eline Jongsma and Kel O'Neill, makers of immersive documentaries and AR/VR, who were developing their exhibition Loot-10 stories for the Mauritshuis museum in collaboration with Humboldt Forum while participating in the Reinwardt Academy's Artist-in-Residence program.⁵⁸

ELINE: Part of the reason for this tension is probably that both groups feel unacknowledged. There's not enough oxygen

to keep all the issues people are trying to address going. So naturally, they battle it out. To put it simply.⁵⁹

KEL:

The tension is interesting because people need a sense of equivalence to feel empathy. They need to recognize their experience in other people to find common ground. But that equivalence makes people uncomfortable because it implies that our tragedy is like their tragedy.⁶⁰

ELINE:

While at the same time, they are still not sufficiently acknowledged.⁶¹

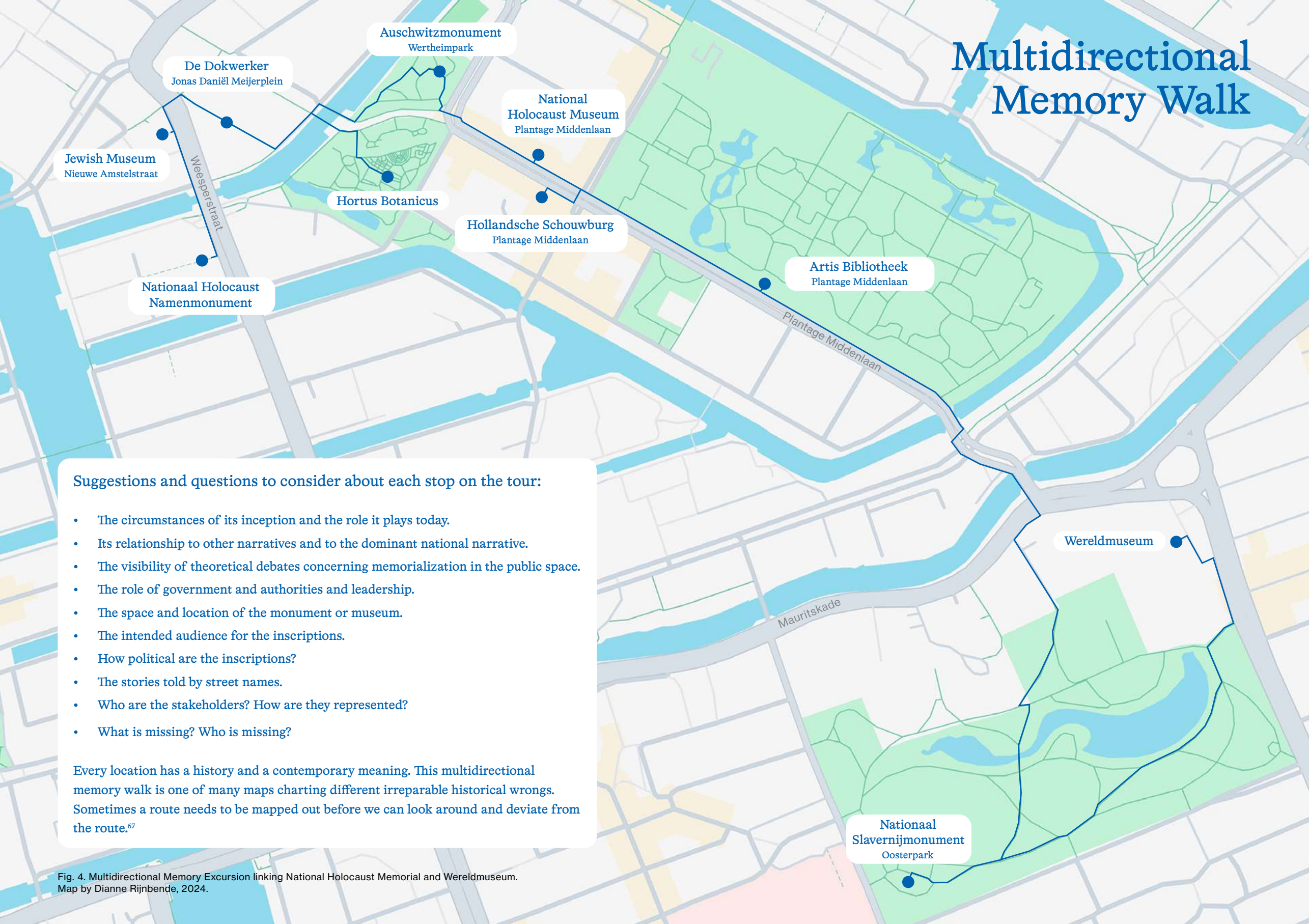
Multidirectional Excursions

Michael Rothberg coined the phrase “multidirectional memory” in his 2009 discussion of Holocaust memory and colonial memory to conceptualize the idea of different histories of extreme violence confronting each other in the public sphere.⁶² Rothberg compares this to what he calls “competitive memory,” based on the logic of a zero-sum game. Competitive memories try to force each other out of the public sphere – so that increasing emphasis on the Holocaust marginalizes other traumas, while adopting Holocaust terminology to describe other traumas reduces or denies the Holocaust’s uniqueness.

Rather than accept the logic of a zero-sum game, Rothberg suggests that “memory works productively through negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; the result of memory conflict is not less memory, but more – even of subordinated memory traditions. Thus, collective memories of seemingly distinct histories are not easily separable from each other, but emerge dialogically.” The danger inherent in the concept of uniqueness is that it can lead to a hierarchy of suffering. So instead of competitive memory, Rothberg proposes multidirectional memory, to draw attention to “the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times in the act of remembrance.”⁶³ Accepting the idea of dissimilarity – since no two events are ever identical – Rothberg investigates these transfers further.

Multidirectional memory is not a smooth process. While most remain unaware of its dynamic impact, the tension it causes is palpable. In fact, it has been described as a nightmare process.⁶⁴ Public space is a perfect example of Rothberg’s hypothesis. A walk in Amsterdam’s city center shows how the timing and placing of monuments are semi-permanent outcomes of multidirectional processes. I designed the following multidirectional memory excursion for a multidirectional memory module in the Decolonizing Europe summer course at Vrije Universiteit,⁶⁵ updating it slightly for my MA students in Applied Museum and Heritage Studies at Reinwardt Academy.⁶⁶

Multidirectional Memory Walk



Suggestions and questions to consider about each stop on the tour:

- The circumstances of its inception and the role it plays today.
- Its relationship to other narratives and to the dominant national narrative.
- The visibility of theoretical debates concerning memorialization in the public space.
- The role of government and authorities and leadership.
- The space and location of the monument or museum.
- The intended audience for the inscriptions.
- How political are the inscriptions?
- The stories told by street names.
- Who are the stakeholders? How are they represented?
- What is missing? Who is missing?

Every location has a history and a contemporary meaning. This multidirectional memory walk is one of many maps charting different irreparable historical wrongs. Sometimes a route needs to be mapped out before we can look around and deviate from the route.⁶⁷

Fig. 4. Multidirectional Memory Excursion linking National Holocaust Memorial and Wereldmuseum. Map by Dianne Rijnbende, 2024.

The excursion works best when participants form two groups, starting from opposite ends of the route. In the discussion after the tour, it becomes apparent how each memorial influences the way participants experience the next memorial. Each route creates its own narrative.



Fig. 5. Sign outside the National Holocaust Names Memorial building site, Amsterdam: "We are building the National Holocaust Names Memorial here with reverence and respect. We apologize for any inconvenience. You will soon be able to visit this unique memorial. Keep history alive! www.koninklijkwoudenberg.nl." Photo by Judy Jaffe-Schagen, August 30, 2021.

The Absent Monument

Heritage professionals can make a difference in complex societal heritage issues by engaging in critical reflection and intervening in meaningful ways with the people and organizations involved.⁶⁸ Intervention implies that a relationship is formed, although that may prove difficult, especially where a heritage issue concerns irreparable historical wrongs with an ongoing impact, and it may also be hard to know when to intervene, who should intervene, and who would benefit in a meaningful way from an intervention. From November 2021 to February 2022, Reinwardt Academy ran a Cultural Heritage course entitled *The Absent Monument*, exploring ways to address "that which is not there" in the public space, which I designed to raise awareness of key professional skills relating to commemorative practice and to discuss the knowledge repertoire, ethical considerations and politics of commemorative practice. The following is a summary of the impressions I formed while developing the course, a brief description of the classes and a detailed report of the first and last day of the course.

In late January 2020, Knowledge Mile board member Taraq Hok-Ahin⁶⁹ contacted Marit van Dijk, coordinator of Reinwardt Academy's Heritage Lab, to discuss a project involving post-colonial and other forms of memory in the public space, particularly in Knowledge Mile – which brings together the educational and cultural institutions and businesses on and around Amsterdam's Weesperstraat and Wibautstraat.⁷⁰ Van Dijk asked me to present a proposal for a course on the dearth of monuments to Second World War resistance fighters

of Surinamese origin in the city. I called it *The Absent Monument*, borrowing from the title of a poem by Jasper Mikkers.⁷¹ Its final stanza reads: “But since I know that it doesn’t exist / I’ll make it myself; when it’s ready / I’ll put it at the end of each street / and around one, at the end of my bed.”⁷²

The curriculum states: “In this elective interdisciplinary course, we examine commemorative design in the public space, asking who decides who is commemorated, where and how. Teachers and guest speakers from the world of dance, theatre and music, as well as heritage design, discuss the public commemoration of Surinamese resistance fighters. A relatively large number of Surinamese in the Netherlands were active in the resistance during the Second World War. Especially well-known is Anton de Kom. Design of public areas lags behind the growing demand in society for more research into this history and more information to justify recognition of this history in the public arena. In this course, Amsterdam University of the Arts students from all disciplines are invited to view the city’s memorial landscape and to consider how best to commemorate Surinamese resistance fighters in Amsterdam.”⁷³

Taraq Hok-Ahin’s response to my proposal was: “I’d like to see more Black lecturers, at least 60/40.”⁷⁴ Recognizing his criticism, I became aware of my own position. With some trepidation, I set out to find other contributors from the Black community. Many lecturers and artists responded positively, and we set up a course that was genuinely interdisciplinary and multivocal.

First Day

However, I had failed to consider the students, and as the room filled, the goal and content of the course changed: none of the students were Black. Subsequent classes addressed issues such as, how does positioning relate to professionalism, how do you see your role as a heritage professional, what kind of knowledge repertoires do we need to address this issue, and how do we make an intervention relational? The course started with a multidirectional tour of Knowledge Mile, which includes the Jewish Cultural Quarter and its many monuments relating to the Second World War. In the afternoon we visited Anton de Komplein in Amsterdam Zuidoost to discuss the Anton de Kom statue and its location. De Kom was a Surinamese author, political activist and freedom fighter. Born in Paramaribo in 1898, he moved from Suriname to Haiti in 1920 and to the Netherlands in 1921. In 1933, back in Suriname, he was arrested and exiled without trial to the Netherlands. In the Second World War, he joined the Dutch

resistance. On August 7, 1944, De Kom was arrested and sent to a concentration camp. He died at Sandbostel camp in Germany on April 24, 1945.

Sculptor Jikke van Loon discussed the selection process: when she was invited to make the statue in 2005, the failure to choose a Black artist had sparked a debate. The commission, issued jointly by Amsterdam Zuidoost and Amsterdam Fund for the Arts, required “a full-length statue of Anton de Kom, resistance hero, poet, writer, trade unionist (1898–1945).”

Van Loon noted that she “went to Suriname to find a tree from which to carve a statue of Anton de Kom, inspired by his poems and his clear view, his independent outlook. A wooden sculpture would do justice to him as a person and to his cultural background, and to the fact that he had played a major role in the emancipation of Suriname. The statue was cast in bronze and placed on Anton de Komplein. At the unveiling, several people voiced fierce opposition to the design. They used the term “colonial gaze” and referred to differing realities (including mine). Today, the monument continues to be cited in discussions about colonial history and the white bubble.”⁷⁵



Fig. 6. Jikke van Loon (b. 1971), *Model for a statue of Anton de Kom (1898–1945)*, 2005, gele kabbes wood, Rijksmuseum object no. NG-2008-4. Photo by Erik Smits (Rijksmuseum).

The original carving in *gele kabbes* wood was acquired for Amsterdam Rijksmuseum in 2008.⁷⁶ Its description in the museum database states: “The unveiling of the bronze final version of the sculpture in April 2006 sparked controversy mainly because of the man’s partial nudity and the consequent link to slavery, which some felt degrading.”⁷⁷ There is no mention whether the controversy affected the decision to accept the statue. Note that the description refers to “the man” rather than to De Kom in person. Some might consider that offensive too.

Survey of Classes

Later, course participants met Mitchell Esajas, an anthropologist and one of the initiators of The Black Archives, Kick Out Zwarte Piet and New Urban Collective, who introduced the students to the Black Archives in Amsterdam.⁷⁸ He discussed the role of Surinamese resistance fighters during the Second World War and the need to recognize and commemorate their contribution. This was followed by a visit to the archive exhibition *Surinamese People in the Netherlands: 100 years of emancipation and struggle*.⁷⁹ On my way to the lecture, I passed Lush, a shop that sells handmade soaps and cosmetics. The shop window featured a poster of an empty white book with the caption “Black history is Dutch history,” designed together with the Black Archives⁸⁰.

Note that Mitchell Esajas was granted an Orde van Orange-Nassau medal in 2023 for his work opposing racism and promoting diversity and inclusivity. While he expressed delight at the king’s recognition for his efforts, Mitchell confessed to a certain ambiguity about accepting the honor since the Dutch royal family had yet to apologize for its part in the slave trade.⁸¹

Mitchell’s decoration drew a fierce response from people who consider him a nuisance and a troublemaker. Three others who had earlier received a similar medal returned their award to the king in protest: the first time anyone had ever done this in the Netherlands. Others confided their displeasure on social media with some particularly disgusting racist remarks.⁸²

Emma-Lee Amponsah subsequently compared the government’s approach to racism in general with its policies regarding antisemitism. “Gestures and honors do not in themselves lead to systemic change without policies to tackle the root causes of structural racism, including education reform, reparations and serious sanctions, similar to those imposed to deal with antisemitism. Unfortunately, a substantive conversation has remained absent.”⁸³ Esajas

himself commented in the Dutch press that the response is yet more proof of the pressing need for him and organizations such as Kick Out Zwarte Piet to continue their work. “It is worrying and problematic that people who have devoted their lives to public service feel that I and others like me are out to destroy Dutch culture. If they were more aware of the history and knew more about our colonial past, I think they would be more open to other voices and perspectives.”⁸⁴

Other lecturers included Cecilia Hendrikx of Pink Pony Express, who explained how to develop a draft design and discussed the politics of public space.⁸⁵ Storyteller and spoken-word artist Onias Landveld explored ways in which speech can shape thoughts to convey commemoration, while also showing how ideas and feelings that inspire a design for a memorial can be expressed through the spoken word.⁸⁶ Alvin Williams, Academy of Theatre and Dance lecturer and core member of the National Committee that organizes the Remembrance Day observance on May 4 and the Liberation Day celebration on May 5, spoke about performance and commemorative practice. Theatre producer Toni Blackwell discussed theatre’s role as a bridge between art and society and guided students in using their body to feel and express commemoration.⁸⁷ Marit van Dijk discussed the connection between public space and cultural memory. Jules Rijsen of Imagine IC examined the role of music as a historical source. His background is in cultural anthropology and he is working on a book about Suriname and the Second World War. My own presentation was about academic theories of memory studies.

Final Day

While each student developed an idea for a monument, how they created their design was more important than the result. It had to answer many questions. With whom had the students engaged in conversation? Which knowledge repertoires had they accessed? Who was the monument for, what was its story and who was telling it? Who would take their ideas further to address invisible histories in the public space? All the students left contacting the local community to the end. We discussed this, especially how and why it had made them feel awkward. Learning to face and embrace this difficulty was a challenge for these future heritage professionals.⁸⁸

Rade Eijkelhof and Sofie Gombert explained their design: “This monument is for the Surinamese fighters who fought for the Netherlands in the

Second World War and risked their lives when they opposed the occupying forces. It also commemorates the help Suriname provided to the Netherlands during the war. The empty plinth symbolizes the long absence of a monument and the associated knowledge and stories that have not received the attention they deserve. It offers people an opportunity to commemorate this in their own way. To render the resistance heroes visible, their shadow falls behind the plinth as we shine a light on the Surinamese resistance fighters who stood in the shadows for so long.”



Fig. 7. Design by Rade Eijkelhof and Sofie Gombert for a memorial to Surinamese resisters in Wibautpark, Amsterdam, 2022.

Steve Hulsbergen described his design as: “A temporary home for two urns with earth from Suriname and the Antilles. A beautiful, sustainable, green location. A contribution to positive change and completeness of national commemoration. A place for lasting remembrance, but also for new life. For Suriname: a large stone made of bauxite where the urns are kept. Bauxite was an important raw material during the Second World War. For the Antilles: two divi divi trees merging together. Made of willow in the shape of a divi divi tree.”

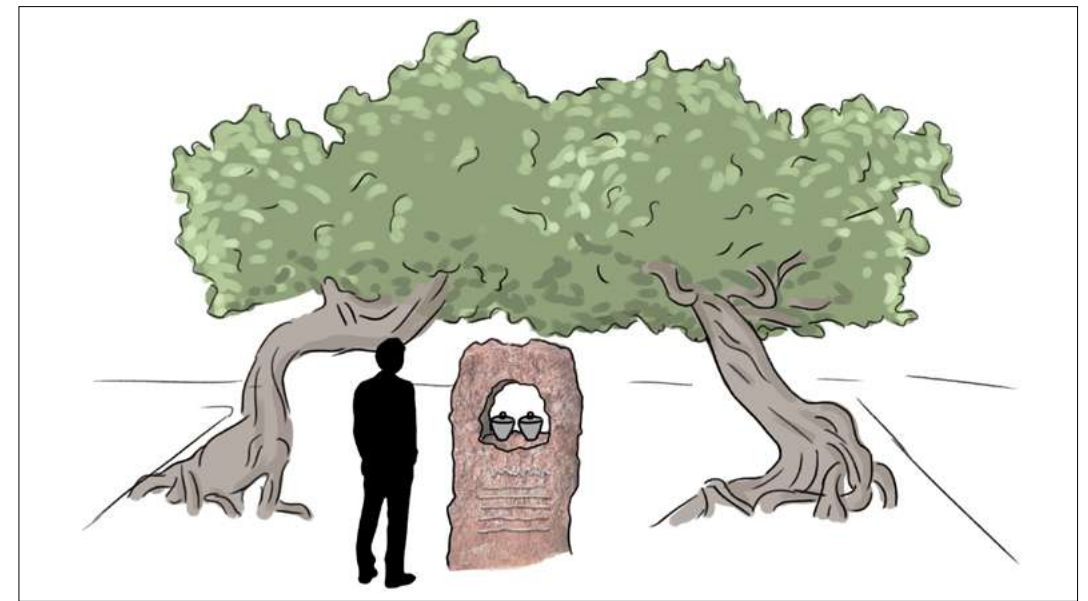


Fig. 8. Design by Steve Hulsbergen for a memorial to Surinamese resisters, 2022.

Merav Krone explained her design as: “A niche, based on the guest lecture by Jules Rijsen who spoke about the empty niches in the war memorial on Dam Square: those of Suriname and Antilles have been left empty.”⁸⁹ Merav’s design refers to the failure to recognize the part that the colonies played. The context is told around the niche: stories are told visually and audibly inside the niche, which is large enough to walk through. Merav chose to locate her work on Jonas Daniel Meijerplein, close to the Dokwerker (Docker) memorial, which also relates to resistance.⁹⁰



Fig. 9. Design by Merav Krone for a memorial to Surinamese resisters, 2022.

Summary

The Absent Monument showed that an interdisciplinary approach combining artistic and academic practice can help open doors and establish relationships, while teaching students how awareness of their own positionality should be an intrinsic part of heritage studies, especially in relation to heritage linked to irreparable historical wrongs. Several designs included trees and shadows. These reflect ideas about positionality formulated in the course. The designs required students to recognize, consider and discuss voids in society: heritage professionals have to be able to ask questions and start a conversation to establish a relationship.⁹¹

Apologies Offered and Displayed



Figs 10 and 11. Visitors to Wereldmuseum Amsterdam watching Bibi Fadlalla's *Prelude to a Nation at Our Colonial Inheritance* exhibition prologue, 2022. Photos by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.

In an age in which public remembering plays a prominent role, people can reflect on their history and find ways to put past wrongs right. In Germany, for example, the nation has found ways to deal with its Nazi legacy. By contrast, there is little evidence in contemporary Spain of a desire to come to terms with the country's former dictatorship. "Unlike Germany, where military defeat forced Germans to confront their past, Spain chose a different route when General Franco died in 1975. Spain, which had been neutral during the war and had surreptitiously cooperated with the Axis powers, has preferred to remain silent in a political arrangement known as the Pact of Forgetting, a tacit agreement to bury the hatchet and allow the country to move on."⁹² Yet some aspects of history refuse to be forgotten, and as long as society fails to acknowledge them there can be no shared present and no shared future. To achieve reconciliation, the focus must be on a future that is shared, on a combined effort to address past injustices in a way that lays a foundation for that shared future in which old wounds are allowed to heal.⁹³

Can judicial bodies ever help lay the foundation for a shared future if the legacy of unreconciled historical wrongs continues to contaminate the present? How useful, or indeed relevant, is the law in overcoming these obstacles? Elizabeth Anstett argues that justice is about more than just law: it is too serious to be left to a single discipline. It is about how people regard each other.⁹⁴ Discussing colonial domination, Anthony Bogues insists that critical theory must shed its western influence and embrace the perspective of those who have experienced colonialization if it is to provide an insight into the way different forms of humanization develop and emerge.⁹⁵

So, does this apply equally to victims of the Nazi regime? Hannah Arendt responds in the affirmative, suggesting that the roots of European totalitarianism, especially Nazism, lie in European colonialism: the boomerang thesis.⁹⁶ I agree with Bogues who points out that "at the base of the critical theory lies an intense dedication to the production of new ways of living that can overcome colonial violence not by covering over the past, but by listening to its echoing cries into the present."⁹⁷ As we listen, we should be aware that one person's cry may trigger another's, and to soothe one person's pain while ignoring another's hurt may worsen that hurt.

Memory and memorialization are inextricably bound to power and the struggle for recognition of historical wrongs that continue to impact in the present. Aleida Assmann states that "nothing will really change as long as the victims are the only ones ready to break their silence and to claim their rights."⁹⁸ To which I would add that some victims may make claims that society

considers illegitimate; society may not even acknowledge them as victims. Assmann continues, "It is the collective will of society alone which can change the situation."⁹⁹ Unfortunately, for this to happen, new ways of living together have to be established and society must acknowledge its responsibility.¹⁰⁰ As Linda remarked when we discussed the subject of apology:

LINDA:

I admit that I didn't expect there to be so many... That by August 3, 2022 we would have banks investigating [their involvement in] slavery and apologizing. Yet apologies, research and monuments should not become the mirrors and beads of our times. Why do I say that? Because despite the apologies and all these developments, the real work has yet to begin. It's all so abstract: the Netherlands accepts responsibility; certain families have benefited from slavery – then the next day it transpires that descendants of Holocaust victims have received yet more reparations, or that the matter is being investigated. There's an imbalance, an inequality which is not accidental. It suggests that the suffering of people with African roots is different and less important: they don't need solidarity or empathy. And if we question the status quo... I'd like to write a column about that every week, every time I think it's unfair. It's openly talked about in the organizations, but those aren't the people at the table: we're at the table. And we're cautious. We don't have the luxury. There are consequences. And it's about sensing when the time is right. We're balancing on a tightrope. Here in the Netherlands people worry about losing their job, their status, and what happens when we ask questions. We have seen what happens when people from our community raise their head above the parapet. So, we hesitate. You're right, there is tension. And that tension isn't about envy or anger towards the Jewish community. It's not. It's an indictment of the system we live in.¹⁰¹

Apologies Displayed

Emile commented in *Het Parool* in 2021 that “the state encourages museums to discuss difficult topics, but takes no responsibility for [its own historic involvement in] slavery. That’s unacceptable.” He called for an official apology because “even if [we] are not actually culpable, it helps heal communities, and that is reason enough.”¹⁰² Three years separated the Dutch monarch’s apology to Jewish victims of the Shoah in 2020 and his apology to victims of slavery in 2023. I asked Emile what prompted him to publish his views.

EMILE:

It stems from an awareness in the museum world of the need to create an environment in which socially complex topics like these can be addressed in a safe way. That’s why we incorporate this in our programs. We have a responsibility to play a part in this. It’s an explicit instruction by the government. So, it’s extremely disturbing that the government dodges the issue when it’s the state’s turn to take responsibility. The government has given the institutions it subsidizes a responsibility, and then it remains silent itself. It’s clear that the apology to the Jewish community for the government’s questionable conduct after the war, and that of the royal family, has helped. In what way it helps, I don’t know, but at least it was done, at least the people who received the apology appreciated it. So why on earth would they choose to remain silent?¹⁰³

Most memorial sites and museum exhibitions are created after the fighting ends: musealization generally follows after conflict.¹⁰⁴ When it comes to slavery and the irreparable damage it caused, the post-conflict phase has yet to begin since the wounds are still infected by racism and the state’s failure to accept responsibility, just as antisemitism has infected society’s response to the Shoah. Yet these historical events are already being examined in museums and marked in commemorations. Indeed, museums are playing an increasingly active part in commemorating through research and presentation of heritage, often under government pressure.¹⁰⁵

Amsterdam Wereldmuseum’s Research Centre for Material Culture treats museum objects as testimony, preserved in the present, bearing witness to history. Its objects are the relics of colonial history. New museum acquisitions

relating to commemorations testify to the processing of history. So, what happens when an official apology is incorporated into a video installation or is stored in a museum depot? Or – borrowing from Kenneth Hudson’s dictum “A tiger in a museum is a tiger in a museum and not a tiger” – can an apology in a museum be an apology?¹⁰⁶

Displayed Apologies

Contemporary art can explore the remnants of colonial history. One such installation is *Prologue to a Nation*, the first exhibit in the new permanent presentation entitled *Our Colonial Inheritance* at Amsterdam’s Wereldmuseum, formerly Tropenmuseum.¹⁰⁷ The new display, which opened on June 24, 2022, shows how colonialism helped shape today’s world, and how people endured colonialism, portraying colonial history as an unfinished past, stimulating debate and the search for a more just society.

Wereldmuseum commissioned Bibi Fadlalla to create the installation especially for the exhibition. The museum website features an interview with Fadlalla about her work:

When they invited me to create the prologue, I was triggered by the lasting influence of the colonial past. Straightaway, it evoked images in my head... The continued influence is inherent in all kinds of systems in society. I wanted to make it palpable, visible... For the film, I was looking for a symbol of history and identity... Contemporary identities are hybrid; people have been shuffled around in colonial times. A national flag does not always correspond to that level of complexity. That’s what I tried to express in the installation.¹⁰⁸

Susie Protschky, who studies colonial history and visual culture in Southeast Asia, notes:

Bibi Fadlalla’s *Prologue to a Nation* ... Which frames the whole exhibition, shows visibly diverse peoples symbolizing the postcolonial communities of the Netherlands planting the flags of their various nations of origin in a

quintessentially Dutch dunescape. We see Dutch officials addressing the state's responsibility for colonialism. The mayor of Amsterdam, Femke Halsema, acknowledges the city's historic role in slavery (2021).¹⁰⁹ King Willem-Alexander apologizes to Indonesia's President Joko Widodo for Dutch forces' 'extreme violence' during Indonesia's National Revolution (1945–49) (2020). Prime Minister Mark Rutte adds his apology for the same (2022).¹¹⁰

The officials are not in the dunescape; they are not part of the people. The solitary apology, once part of another time and place, enters the museum on film where its elusive, intangible form becomes continuously visible: a permanent testimony in a new iteration.

What do we learn from this about the role museums play in commemorative practice? Does it change the meaning of an apology when a different audience sees it in a different place at a different time?¹¹¹ Does it matter what kind of museum shows the apology? Would visitors respond differently if the apology for slavery were shown in the Jewish Museum or Stedelijk Museum? I don't have an answer to this.

Regarding the museum's role in commemorative practices, I asked Wayne about Femke Halsema's speech at the Ketu Koti event on July 1, 2021, in which she apologized as mayor of Amsterdam for the city council's involvement in the commercial system of colonial slavery and the global trade in enslaved people.

JUDY: I was surprised to see Amsterdam's mayor apologizing on a big screen as I entered the new Wereldmuseum presentation, and I wondered how this act of apologizing displayed in another context and being displayed as a museum object, affects that initial apology.

WAYNE: In a sense, displaying the apology sets out the exhibition's intention. By placing it at the start we are trying to first address the fact that our exhibition was intervening in a discussion about how, as society and as a museum, we are coming to terms with the question of the colonial past and its afterlives in the present. And second, the fact that

this is an unresolved past, a past with which we need to reckon. The apology has an impact on how we respond to the effects of colonialism in the present. To start with the apology from those elected officials or those in responsible positions is to acknowledge that this is not just about individual responsibility. Rather, there is a systemic and structural responsibility that is important to account for as well. The visitor who sees the exhibition asks, how am I implicated in these structural afterlives? The mayor takes responsibility from her position, and she opens the space for thinking about our individual responsibility – not for the past, but for the present and the future. There is often a way across Europe to want to move on, without attending to these afterlives. But an apology says, we need to attend to these issues in order to move on.¹¹²

Wayne notes in the catalogue how the presentation was created in a moment of apologies.¹¹³ As Wendeline Flores writes: "We felt that it was important to acknowledge those moments."¹¹⁴

WAYNE:

The permanent place accorded to the apology in the museum is a reminder for visitors that this is just the first step in fulfilling the intention of that apology, and this will remain until we reach the post-conflict moment. By displaying the apology, the museum holds those who apologize to account. The museum establishes a direct connection to commemorative practices performed at other times and in other parts of the public space. The museum also retroactively influences the value and impact of those ceremonies. The role museums play as actors in commemorative practice should therefore not be underestimated. Collecting and exhibiting ceremonies pertaining to commemorative practice as museum objects affects both those commemorative practices and the role museums play in society.¹¹⁵

Another example of the way museums and commemorative practice connect is the presentation by the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and



Fig. 12. King Willem-Alexander at the wreath-laying ceremony on Slavery Remembrance Day in Amsterdam, 2023, where he apologized for the country's involvement in slavery. Photo by Mischa Schoemaker.

its Legacy (NiNsee) of the ribbons from the wreath that King Willem-Alexander laid at the Ketu Koti ceremony in 2023 to the Rijksmuseum.¹¹⁶ That was the year in which the king apologized and asked for forgiveness:

Today I stand before you. Today, as your king and as a member of the government, I make this apology myself. And I feel the weight of the words in my heart and my soul. As the Second World War highlighted more recently, you cannot hide behind laws when your fellow human beings are reduced to animals and subjected to the whims of those in power.”¹¹⁷ “But today, on this day of remembrance, I ask forgiveness for the clear failure to act in the face of this crime against humanity.¹¹⁸

NiNsee announced on LinkedIn that “the ribbons are entrusted to the Rijksmuseum collection.” Stephanie Archangel, the museum’s curator of history, agreed that “the ribbons bear physical testimony to the apology for the slavery... The ribbons ensure that we will be able to tell future generations about this

historical moment.”¹¹⁹ The ribbons became part of the museum collection with object numbers NG-2023-65 and 66.¹²⁰ An apology in a museum is an apology in a museum, and it is up to the museum to decide what it means both in and outside the museum.



Fig. 13. Linda Nooitmeer and Urwin Vyent from the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee) entrust the ribbons from the wreath laid at the Slavery memorial on July 1, 2023 to Rijksmuseum’s curator of history Stephanie Archangel. Photo by Isaac Owusu.

The Keti Koti Dialogue Table as a Museum Object

One of the events in the lead-up to Keti Koti is the Dialogue Table.¹²¹ It was first developed in 2012 by Mercedes Zandwijken and Machiel Keestra.¹²² Their aim was to raise awareness for personal and social struggles and blind spots associated with the Netherlands' involvement in slavery and colonialism and to gain new insights to build a society free of discrimination and racism.¹²³ The Dialogue Table has become an annual tradition featuring a meal, conversation, song, rituals and attributes. The discussions follow a set structure, based on cards with themes and questions on various subjects.¹²⁴

Before dialogue is possible participants have to reexamine their color blindness: their deliberate disregard for the skin color of the people around them. However well-intentioned and ideologically correct, based on a belief that people are equal whatever their color, for those who face discrimination and racism, color blindness can feel like a denial of that experience. It may even reinforce the sense of inequality they feel in society: failing to recognize difference can prevent people sharing painful experiences relating to skin color.¹²⁵ So another key ingredient at the Keti Koti table is the seating arrangement: Black and white participants sit opposite each other. Not to encourage confrontation, but to foster dialogue. "White people are often unable to feel Black people's pain. The dehumanization [of slavery] continues to impact."¹²⁶ Participants are often invited to ask someone of a different color to take part, ensuring an equal representation of Black and white at the table.

Annemarie was the first person I interviewed for this project. As curator at Amsterdam Museum, she was involved in organizing the first Dialogue Table in the museum. I felt, rightly or wrongly, that my connection to Amsterdam entitled me to discuss the underlying tension in the city's commemorative practices.

My sense of belonging gave me privileges and responsibilities. Perhaps talking to Amsterdam Museum's curator would be a safe prelude to my research.¹²⁷ We barely mentioned color when we discussed the event, perhaps because it had been by invitation only and the organizers had done the math. Or, maybe it was because Annemarie and I are both white. However, we did discuss the location and the date: May 5.

ANNEMARIE: The context was the museum's major 2013 exhibition on the Golden Age, a term we still unapologetically used, while 2013 also marks the 150th anniversary of the official abolition of slavery.¹²⁸

In 2013, the Amsterdam 4 and 5 May Committee invited the museum to organize a meal to celebrate Liberation Day. De Wildt used the opportunity to host a Ketikoti Dialogue Table organized by Mercedes Zandwijken and Machiel Kestra as an intervention in the Golden Age exhibition. She had discussed the idea with Mercedes at the previous year's Ketikoti table at Café Mansro:

ANNEMARIE: I found the story so interesting. It's remarkable that the Ketikoti meal actually has Jewish roots. When I met Mercedes and she said she wanted to do it in other places, bigger and in the city, I thought, why don't we do a Ketikoti Freedom Meal.¹²⁹

Ketikoti is held annually on July 1 to commemorate the abolition of slavery in the former Dutch colonies in 1863 and the ten years of compulsory labor that followed. But in 2013, the Ketikoti Dialogue Table was held on May 5, which is Liberation Day in the Netherlands, the day the country celebrates the end of the Second World War.

ANNEMARIE: Of course I knew that July 1 is the anniversary of the abolition of slavery because I had often attended the ceremony, and that May 4 is Remembrance Day and May 5 Liberation Day, commemorating the end of the German occupation in 1945. But I wanted to merge the dates in order to start a discussion about their relationship and about commemoration, and how commemorating the Second World War and the Holocaust differs from

commemorating slavery. I like to be a little provocative sometimes, like this is about remembrance and freedom, but what's going on right now? Well, this is definitely happening right now. I knew that commemoration can be a highly sensitive subject. People talk about the Second World War a lot, more so back then than they do now. The Second World War is featured prominently in history books and the city is full of monuments to the war and the Holocaust. At the same time, there is a National Slavery Monument and a memorial on Surinameplein. While I knew it was a sensitive subject for the Jewish community, I proposed, a little abruptly perhaps, [to juxtapose the Jewish] idea of escape from slavery and the Surinamese idea, the Jews were major slaveholders. I was aware of the sensitivity of the subject, but since we were sharing a meal, I thought it would be good to address this topic.¹³⁰

The meal took place in the museum's Schuttersgallerij (Civil Guards Gallery). A year earlier a carpet designed by Barbara Broekman had been placed there, giving the gallery a new twist. Now closed for renovation, the Schuttersgallerij used to be reserved for portraits of governors of civic charities and civic guards: confident men in extravagant hats, many of them responsible for the city's expansion in 1613.¹³¹ In what I interpret as a gesture of renegotiation, Barbara Broekman's carpet comprises 179 panels, each representing one of the many cultures that are living in Amsterdam.¹³² By the time the Dialogue Table was held on May 5, 2013, several seventeenth-century portraits had been replaced by group portraits from various periods through to the present.

ANNEMARIE: Marian Markelo [AKAWinti priestess Okomfo Nana Efua] did the libation. At one point, she literally said, "I ask forgiveness in advance from the ancestors who may find it hard that we are sitting here at the table with white people, because of what they did, but it's important and so we hope we have your blessing to do this." At that moment, although I'm not particularly spiritual, I suddenly had an awareness of ancestors: after all we were in a gallery full of portraits of people from the past – ancestors – while the ancestors [she was referring to] have

no portraits, but were nonetheless spiritually present. That's something I learned from Marian. These people are among us. They are present at events like these.¹³³

The Ketj Koti Dialogue Table returned to Amsterdam Museum in 2020, not on May 5 but on July 1, and not on Marian Markelo's carpet, but in the courtyard, opposite the Golden Coach which was on display from June 2020 to February 2021. "With its ties to the country's colonial history, it has long been an object of public debate, especially in relation to its ceremonial use and whether that should continue or not."¹³⁴ The reverberations of the museum's decision to stop using the term Golden Age with reference to the seventeenth century were palpable and were expressed by the multilayered narrative that the museum set out when the Golden Coach was displayed as a museum exhibit.¹³⁵ Holding the Dialogue Table opposite the Golden Coach reframed the ceremonial meal while simultaneously strengthening Amsterdam Museum's multilayered ambitions.¹³⁶

In the summer of 2022, Amsterdam Museum acquired the table for its collection. "It is also about the table, but more precisely it is about the intangible and non-visible aspect of the table," said Amsterdam Museum curator Imara Limon.¹³⁷ The table is now a museum object, on display for the price of a museum ticket, transforming dialogue into performance.¹³⁸

It remains to be seen how Amsterdam Museum's acquisition of the Ketj Koti Dialogue Table will change the way participants conduct themselves at ceremonial events.



Fig. 14. Ketj Koti meal in Amsterdam Museum's Schuttersgallerij on Liberation Day, May 5, 2013, with Hellen Palmtak, Nikki Pootjes, Joyce Edwards, Judikje Kiers, Annemarie de Wildt, Eva Firet. Photo by Monique Vermeulen (Amsterdam Museum).¹³⁹



Fig. 15. Amsterdam Museum's Ketj Koti Dialogue Table at H'Art Museum, June 30, 2022. Photo by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.

Are Jews White?

Following his visit to Warsaw in 1949, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote an essay entitled “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto,” published in 1952 in *Jewish Life*. As Michael Rothberg notes, it illustrates how the initial response to the Nazi genocide was to view it in conjunction with colonialism and anti-Black racism as a conceptual continuum. Against the backdrop of the Cold War and segregation in the United States, Du Bois reframed his concept of double consciousness to incorporate the experiences of other minority groups:¹⁴⁰ “I have seen something of human upheaval in this world: the scream and shots of a race riot in Atlanta; the marching of the Ku Klux Klan; the threat of courts and police; the neglect and destruction of human habitation; but nothing in my wildest imagination was equal to what I saw in Warsaw in 1949.”¹⁴¹

As Rothberg points out, the danger is to see these memories as competitive memories, as “a zero-sum struggle for pre-eminence.” Du Bois continues: “Then, one afternoon, I was taken out to the former ghetto. ... Here there was not much to see. There was complete and total waste, and a monument.¹⁴² And the monument brought back again the problem of race and religion, which so long had been my own particular and separate problem.”¹⁴³

His visit to the Warsaw Ghetto led Du Bois to cut across “lines of color” – with which he had previously defined certain categories of violence – to understand what had happened in the Warsaw Ghetto and how this related to other forms of violence.¹⁴⁴ I would add that this applies doubly to the remembrance of all catastrophes. As Rothberg explains, Du Bois expresses solidarity with the Jewish experience and displays a prescient grasp of the relationship between different histories of violence which brings him to a multidirectional understanding of “race.”¹⁴⁵

Half a century later, in the age of Black Lives Matter, as American Jews re-examine their privileged existence and compare it to the persecution suffered by Jews in earlier times, few turn to Du Bois to understand racial oppression as an asymmetrical, relational, historically specific phenomenon. Today, Jews struggle to understand their place in a racialized society, and how to choose whether to embrace that world or tear it down.¹⁴⁶

Relevant in this context as well is the exhibition that opened at Amsterdam's Jewish Museum in 2021 entitled *Are Jews White?*, conceived by Emile and based on an article published by Gideon Querido van Frank in 2019 exploring "how the Left also target Jews in the fight against white privilege."¹⁴⁷ In the show, journalist Querido van Frank, cultural program developer Lievnath Faber and television producer Anousha Nzume explored the position Jews occupy in today's politics of identity and representation, whether Jews see themselves as perpetrator or victim, as privileged or disadvantaged, and how non-Jews regard Jews.¹⁴⁸ It opened on June 10, 2021, a year after George Floyd's murder on May 25, 2020 and the subsequent protests around the world, including the demonstration on Amsterdam's Dam Square. The show coincided with the *Slavery* exhibition at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, opened by the Dutch king on May 18, 2021, which examined slavery in the Dutch colonial period,¹⁴⁹ as well as the *Golden Coach* exhibition at Amsterdam Museum, also opened by the king on June 17 of the same year.¹⁵⁰



Fig. 16. The Dutch-Jewish Oy Vey group produced a Black Lives Matter yarmulka in 2021. Object no. M015857, Jewish Museum, Amsterdam.

At the heart of the exhibition, a video installation showed Jewish and Black opinion makers among whom anthropologist Gloria, columnist Stephan Sanders and *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad* editor-in-chief Esther Voet addressing the question: Why are Jews generally seen as white oppressors rather than as a vulnerable minority? Their replies appeared under various headings: "Competition of suffering," "Jewish privilege," "Holocaust fatigue" and "Jews as perpetrators."

Gideon Querido van Frank is quoted in a newspaper review of the show as saying: "It's clear that young people have had enough. Shoah commemoration has become corny. It's no longer sexy. It's not woke. Let other people have a turn: LGBTQIs and people of color. Rightly so. But why can't it be both?" Emile sees an objective difference between antisemitism and racism: "Racists consider other races inferior. While Jews are attacked for their hold on power: They are cunning. They control the media."¹⁵¹ Meanwhile, the museum website proclaims: "Antisemitism is back: from 2017 to 2019, the number of antisemitic incidents in the Netherlands rose by 126 percent. At the same time, Jews and hatred of Jews are rarely mentioned, while anti-racism and other emancipation movements are expressing increasing solidarity with each other."¹⁵²

When I visited the exhibition, it seemed to me that Gloria's video installation had been edited to fit the exhibition narrative.¹⁵³ Could it be possible, I wondered, that by hosting an exhibition titled *Are Jews White?* at the same time as the Rijksmuseum's *Slavery* exhibition – however coincidentally – the Jewish Museum was emphasizing Jewish victimhood to counteract the focus on Jewish perpetrators? Emile responded that while the interviews had been edited, they had not been manipulated to accentuate a sense of victimhood.¹⁵⁴

A reader asked Kwame Anthony Appiah: "I'm Jewish and don't identify as white, why must I check that box?" In his *New York Times* column "The Ethicist" he gave the following response: "Being white is not just a matter of identifying as white; it involves being treated as white, and that isn't up to you. So, however you think of yourself, your whiteness is doing work in social life."¹⁵⁵ Gloria observed in her installation: "I think when you look at history, Jews were often considered non-white. They often constituted a separate category. Yet they are not a non-visible other group."¹⁵⁶ After the exhibition, she offered some comments that include her nuanced response to the editing process of the video installation.

GLORIA:

Gideon is an ex-student of mine. A Gender Studies student. It's important to note that this connection already

existed. He knows that I'm working on being Jewish too, that I also have an autobiographical connection to being Jewish. So, he thought it would be interesting to hear my views on the subject. I have a Jewish father and the book I'm working on now is about my four Surinamese grandparents. One of them, my paternal grandmother, is an Ashkenazi Jew. I considered this an important question that I needed to explore. As Gideon says in his article, he felt aggrieved that Jews are not automatically seen as allies in the anti-racist struggle. So, what is the bottom line in the exhibition? Are Jews white? Well, not as far as I know. Basically, Jews come in all colors. All shapes and sizes. It isn't really about a person's physical appearance, what color their skin is. It's about the power associated with being white. So, it comes down to this: if I only see a person's physical appearance, and have no idea where they position themselves in terms of power or who they express solidarity with or which struggles they are involved in, then I base my judgment on their appearance. What I tried to express in my conversations is that there's no point delving too deeply into that. The same goes for Gideon's indignation at not being embraced as an ally: there's no point delving to deeply into that sense of victimhood, of being excluded, if people don't know what your political stance is and the kind of power you exercise. That's what I wanted to explore.¹⁵⁷

JUDY:

The impression I took back from the exhibition was less about avoiding adopting the role of victim because non-Jews don't recognize Jews as allies, and more a sense that when asked whether they are white, Jews want to reply: we're not white, we're not the perpetrator in this debate about racism. Perhaps this also relates to your father being Jewish: it's also about that. Who has a right to speak? I often discuss this with students and heritage professionals: when do we have the right to voice our opinion on a topic, and when do we not have this right?



Figs. 17, 18, 19. Stills from *Are Jews White?* video installation, Aldus Productions, 2021. Photos by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.

GLORIA:

That's a lot to think about. I feel a certain involvement in Judaism, but I can't claim to be Jewish. Whereas you can. Do I acknowledge that if you have a Jewish mother, you can call yourself Jewish, but I don't so I can't? I don't want to acknowledge that, because it's sexist to insist that only a woman can provide access to Judaism. When the exhibition opened, I saw Gideon talking about the advantages he derives from his appearance and the way people address him, as he wrote in his article. He is conscious that his whiteness gives him privileges. Many of the participants talk about their sense of privilege in the documentary. That distinction is important. But what do you do with that sense of privilege? And why is it legitimate to demand that non-Jews see Jews as a special category of white? That's what this is all about. If you look at Surinamese history, and the memory of slavery, whites and Jews are separate. Jews are often described as the cruelest masters. I haven't researched that and I haven't found anyone else who has, but it wouldn't surprise me to find this is tinged with antisemitism. Jews are judged more harshly. I find that sad. It has to do with group-think: you feel the compulsion but it's dead and gone. Attributing characteristics to a group: that's a harmful side of groupthink.¹⁵⁸

In a separate conversation, Emile also talked about the exhibition.

EMILE:

Are Jews White? is also about how it's possible for emancipation movements to express such incredible solidarity while consistently ignoring what's happening to Jews. A virulent antisemitism is spreading today, yet Jews are still not part of that constellation. Is it because they're too white? Maybe we should rephrase the question. Are Jews too white? Because what's the point of making this a competition? There's room for both. They're just different. I had a similar discussion with regard to Nazi stolen art, and the comparison with the colonial theft of art. Colonialism and Nazism – ultimately, they both

destroy and appropriate the culture of the oppressed. In that sense they're the same. This isn't sufficiently acknowledged on either side. In the end, both are forms of victimization, culminating in the denial of the victim's culture and their right to exist. That the same tension underscores the juxtaposition of antisemitism and anti-Black racism, and the murder [of Jews and of Blacks] in different ways, maybe not always systematic murder, but certainly the systematic dehumanization of enslaved people. Yet both groups rarely recognize that similarity. It goes both ways. It's not only that the Black community fails to acknowledge Jewish suffering. It's important to get involved in this. It's not OK that Jews, who know how this feels, don't feel a need to get involved...¹⁵⁹

"Save Gaza" was sprayed on an *Are Jews White?* poster outside the National Holocaust Museum. It's now on show in the *Do you recognize antisemitism?* presentation.



Fig. 20. National Holocaust Museum display, Amsterdam, July 30, 2024. Photo by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.

These Words Matter Too

The Shoah has become the history – specifically the memory – with which other histories and memories invariably find themselves in dialogue. This has grown over time. Two decades passed before a consensus was reached on what to call the destruction of European Jewry and for a public discussion of the unprecedented magnitude of the trauma and the crime to emerge. As Aleida Assmann shows, initially historians treated it as part of the Second World War. It was not until the 1960s that it gained a unique place amid a broader moral awareness. That is when terms such as “victim,” “survivor” and “witness” obtained an acknowledged moral status.¹⁶⁰ Others were added later, such as “bystander” and “accessory,” while writers also used the term “evil” although in different ways. These words matter too, which is a phrase borrowed from an edited volume by Wayne Modest and Robin Lelijveld: *Words Matter: An unfinished guide to word choices in the cultural sector*.¹⁶¹

Amid the current antisemitism and racism, it pays to re-examine the terms that emerged to refer to various aspects of the Shoah, and which have also been applied to slavery and its repercussions. The effect of this typology has been to diminish the humanity of those it describes. Originally coined to cover certain historical events and situations, it has widened to include descendants of those who experienced these in a transgenerational embrace which some now reject.

Foremost is perhaps the term “victim.” Rosanne Herzberger refuses to accept the idea of a permanent wound and has called time on the continuing complaints. She is not interested in keeping past traumas alive.¹⁶² In 2019, Herzberger was invited by the National May 4 and 5 Committee to give the

keynote address on Liberation Day. She focused on this issue, rejecting the notion of permanent victimhood. One of her comments made headline news the next day: “I refuse to raise a fourth generation of victims. Let history be history.”¹⁶³

Author and comedian Micha Wertheim noted on VPRO’s radio program *Onvoltooid Verleden* (Past Continuous): “Unlike Herzberger, I don’t believe that victimhood is a matter of choice. ... Herzberger is right to say that for many Jews their mindset is still influenced by the horrors that took place here.” For Wertheim, one of the effects of the war is “how some Jews feel responsible for the way other Jews deal with the past.” Moreover, “the artificial optimism with which Herzberger wants to liberate herself from that victimhood” is another effect of the war.¹⁶⁴ He points out that Herzberger unintentionally shows that real optimism depends on not leaving the past behind and being willing to re-examine it over and over, even if that makes us more of a victim than we want to be.¹⁶⁵ Yet Younes Saramifar an interdisciplinary scholar who researches inhumanities, argues “the past has many facets: making it part of the present creates new facets in the present, which does little to heal the wound.”¹⁶⁶ Like Herzberger, Peggy Brandon avoids referring to descendants, and even ancestors, as victims. Peggy is quartermaster for museum content for the National Museum of Slavery, Amsterdam.

PEGGY:

No one wants to be defined by those terrible five or six years. [But rather by] strength, culture, civilization, learning, knowledge. That’s hugely different. There’s a similar concern at commemorative museums: how to express our identity, our existence? As I always say: I don’t want to be a victim and there doesn’t have to be a perpetrator. I don’t want that to define who I am. It’s a trap. As Emile says: we [at the Holocaust Museum] give people a sense of identity by allowing them tell their own story, restoring their humanity, giving them a past and a future. They run parallel. Joandi Hartendorp explains that Holocaust victims are represented in the school curriculum as stereotypes, as are the victims of slavery. This has resulted in an image of Black people as the eternal victim, as inferior beings waiting for Europeans to free them, even though resistance and emancipation [helped bring an end to slavery]. That aspect is ignored.

So that Africans are either victims or perpetrators, since [the textbooks explain that] African slave traders sold [captives] to Europeans, and Africans had been victimized for centuries. Holocaust education follows a similar pattern. Jews, just like African slave traders, are regarded as perpetrators of their own destruction, for example by being part of the Jewish Council. There’s no room for complexity in these representations of Jews and Africans or descendants of the enslaved. Unlike the more complex image of the Dutch, as with the image of collaborators during the Holocaust, where there’s plenty of room for empathy: the difficult circumstances and choices and the context which prompted people to collaborate. No such complexity is accorded to the Jewish victims: they’re all the same, unless they’re perpetrators. So too with slavery. Particular attention is paid to the context, that slavery was once the norm. Although hardly for those who were being enslaved. It’s a Eurocentric perspective: those who [bought, sold and exploited other people] are explored and explained to show why their behavior was normal. While all the enslaved were victims, like clones. That stereotypical image resulting from a failure to focus on the perpetrators is a similar feature in both histories.¹⁶⁷

Perpetrators

I asked Peggy Brandon why she insists that she doesn’t want to be called a victim.

PEGGY:

It’s because people often say that Black people see themselves as victims and that’s why they never make any progress, that’s why they’re still living in the past. If you take that away, if you say that’s not how we feel, it creates space to examine what’s different and what’s preventing people of color from establishing a position. Perhaps I say it because I don’t need to have that conversation. It’s like when I talk about the horror [of slavery]. What is

there to show? Do you want to see branding irons? It's similar to the Jewish memorial discourse: what should we show? When I ask people of color from the slave diaspora, they reply, it's to show them how bad it was. Who is "them"? They're the dominant white culture, white Dutch people. To which I say: do you think that matters? These days I show a picture. A well-known picture of a Black man with a back scarred by brutal flogging. It's the only picture there is. It's been printed everywhere. One man, one picture, representing 350 years. Do you know how much keloid hurts? Black people are predisposed to it, as are some Asians. It hurts because that's where the nerves collect. Yet people still manage to sanitize the picture: after all, the back has healed. But just imagine: this was the reality for a lot of people, for centuries. So, I have a picture and a handmade whip: the perpetrator's perspective. A person took a piece of leather, wedged it between two pieces of wood and attached bits of metal to the ends for extra effect [when striking] someone else. It's that awful realization that there's nothing people won't do. That's what I find hardest. It's true of the Second World War and it's true now.¹⁶⁸

JUDY: Who took that picture, and why?

PEGGY: That gaze is important. To me it's about a different aspect, it's about the person who draws up that list of punishments, in the same way as that person in a camp saying: I'll take those twins and do some tests on them. It's total disregard. And it carries on. That's the biggest realization in our kind of work. The realization that it's part of who we are. That's the hardest thing. The way to restore history is by restoring names and individuals. That's how to restore humanity. And the question is: what if those names can't be found, how can we restore humanity then?¹⁶⁹

JUDY: How do you define humanity if not through names?

PEGGY: That's where culture comes in.¹⁷⁰

And where the heritage professional comes in.

LINDA: Heritage professionals should be aware of every aspect of heritage. Regarding transatlantic slavery, it's not just about the history, it's about everything and everyone who was part of that history. Including the ancestors, and what they produced: language, clothing, religion. Everything. Because people often dismiss ancestors as victims, while it's a miracle that I'm here at all, considering the conditions of slavery. That's what I want to see from heritage professionals. We need to find each other. We should establish a platform to study the different histories. We can put our heads together, pressure the government to take responsibility, help each other mount campaigns. We can be strong together. It means knowing and trusting each other. We can do it, if we form a constellation together, put our feelings on the table honestly, agree on the right way forward and commit to holding on together, even if the government refuses to cooperate.¹⁷¹

Bogues has emphasized that "forms of solidarity are extremely important because they allow us to explore different practices that are not xenophobic, not driven by racial ideas, nor by patriarchal notions but driven by an understanding that somehow, we are all connected and that a society is about these connections." There is a remarkable phrase in the work of Frantz Fanon, a leading scholar of human life and possibilities of freedom. Writing in the middle of the twentieth century, Fanon asked: "Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the you?" In other words, one issue that faces us is that of building a different set of relationships between us, one that takes account of colonial history, but at the same time seeks to establish a different basis for living."¹⁷²

Linda referred to the first steps needed to establish this different basis for living:

- LINDA: It's an indictment of the system. Why do we have these double standards? What does it mean? Aren't we worth it? Why is that?¹⁷³
- JUDY: It's sad that people are afraid and that we hesitate to go down that road. I feel it may be naive of me to want to study this.
- LINDA: If I were you, I wouldn't let that become a problem. It's good that you pose the question. Once you understand the question, you can offer an answer, which is what you're doing. You make sure that there's an answer. And the question I asked – aren't we worth it? – is a rhetorical question, because the question – aren't we worth it? – is meant for the Netherlands, for policymakers.¹⁷⁴

Implicated Subjects

If society has yet to wake up to its conflicted condition, can implicated subjects be a part of this alternative set of relationships? Can the implicated acknowledge their part in the conflict?¹⁷⁵ Can they be aware and sensitive to other people's stories in which they have played a role? Or, as philosopher Paul van Tongeren asks: 'Do we dare to acknowledge that we do not just belong to the era in which we live, that we are not just that person, we ourselves can decide who that is?'¹⁷⁶ What role can commemorative practices play in fostering this awareness. I asked Sophie van den Bergh, researcher at the National May 4 and 5 Committee, to talk about the role the committee plays.

- SOPHIE: The goal is to ensure that as many people as possible, Dutch people, people who live in the Netherlands or have come to live in the Netherlands, feel invited to commemorate the Second World War. And reflect on the core values which were compromised during the occupation: democracy, rule of law, equality. It's also important that the years 1940–1945 are not just a period in history and it didn't happen in a vacuum. How can we place this in a broader historical context that includes colonial history

and situations in which the Dutch state was the perpetrator. For us it's increasingly about how we account for that and what our role should be.¹⁷⁷

- JUDY: How political are commemorations and how political is the National Committee for 4 and 5 May? To what extent is the committee politically connected?
- SOPHIE: Firstly, we see commemoration, participation in commemoration and studying the Second World War as forms of citizenship, as exercising citizenship. At the same time, that participation contributes to the development of citizenship. When young people – children of around eight or ten – attend a commemoration, it develops their sense of citizenship. It helps foster their social awareness and an interest in politics.¹⁷⁸

Another way to foster social awareness among adults and children is to teach historical empathy, as Joandi Hartendorp, independent researcher and policy advisor to the City of Amsterdam, discussed:

Historical empathy requires three things. One is perspective: an ability to take a different perspective is essential. Then there's historical context – an understanding of the way people operate in different historical situations. And thirdly, an ability to make effective connections. This is often where it goes wrong, so that people develop stereotypical images of descendants of enslaved Africans and Holocaust survivors. In Holocaust education, historical empathy is fostered especially with regard to perpetrators, in the interest of balance. Perpetrators are viewed without reference to their actions. These need to be ignored if we are to focus on how difficult their situation was. In slavery education, it's not about historical empathy, but attachment to a place. That's another teaching skill in history education where the historical context is bigger than the individual. For example, life was tough in the seventeenth century, when it was normal to [capture,

trade and exploit] enslaved people without ever considering what it was like for them. To empathize, you have to be able to detach from your own positionality, which is complicated, although this is encouraged when teaching about slavery. Not in Holocaust education, however. There one of the questions is invariably: what would you have done in the same situation? It's remarkably interesting that this is stimulated in one historical context and not in another, yet with the same purpose: to mitigate the culpability of implicated Dutch people. Because for one group, circumstances made their actions normal, while for the other the question is: what would you have done? So, remarkably, educators reach the same conclusion each time: the Dutch are without blame. One of the social images I have identified is an obsession with positivism: if you tell the facts, then your story is correct and everybody will understand. But that's not how it works if your class doesn't accept your truth. Educators need the pedagogical skills to hold an abrasive conversation.¹⁷⁹

Focusing on individual stories risks failing to address the systemic aspect of irreparable historical wrongs.

WAYNE:

I am concerned about how we individualized our approach to the colonial and slavery past. We see this in many exhibitions, for example, in the Rijksmuseum exhibition. I am not suggesting that we should not address the personal; however, in a context where we miss, even deny, the systemic workings of racism, of coloniality for example, foregrounding the individual runs the risk of pushing the systemic out of view. This can reduce colonialism or slavery to the acts of a certain set of individual (evil) actors. If we want to address this, we may have to attend more deeply to the systemic, to the structures of power, both past and present, and see how the individual is articulated with these structures, whether as beneficiaries, or even as victims.¹⁸⁰

JUDY:

Yet it's hard not to individualize when presenting history. Perhaps the right place for that is in commemoration.

WAYNE:

Yes, but there should be a balance between social structure and individual agency. Holocaust commemoration is a remembering of not just individual lives or atrocities against individuals, it is also a remembering of something so horrendous, done to so many people, to a group of people, that we must deal with the systemic ways in which such an atrocity could have happened and to ensure that this cannot happen again. Of course, this is a story of individuals, the many individuals who died, and we need to account for their lives, to remember them, to honor them. However, we need to contend with the fact of the systemic nature of such killings and how race and racism worked to make this happen.¹⁸¹

While implicated subjects in historical contexts and in commemorations also remain nameless, no attempt is made to address the system in which they operated, especially in commemorative practices, even though the implicated subjects are far more than just individuals.

At Hollandsche Schouwburg, trees have been planted in two places. The serviceberry trees are located in the inner courtyard, while behind the obelisk, a fig tree symbolizes the tree of life¹⁸² alongside nine poplars, which have stood there since the 1960s. The poplars are arranged in a spiral. The fig tree is made of bronze with a few green leaves and gold ceramic leaves scattered on the ground: the work by Gabriel Lester is entitled "Tree of Souls." The Jewish Culture Quarter, of which Hollandsche Schouwburg is a part, consulted surrounding residents regarding the proposed memorial.¹⁸³ Most wanted the site to serve as a place of contemplation, but hoped that visitors wouldn't talk too loudly.¹⁸⁴ Perhaps they can still hear the echoes of the voices that filled the courtyard when people were being lined up for deportation, like my grandparents and my mother, then two months old, with her eight-year-old sister Bertine Margot.

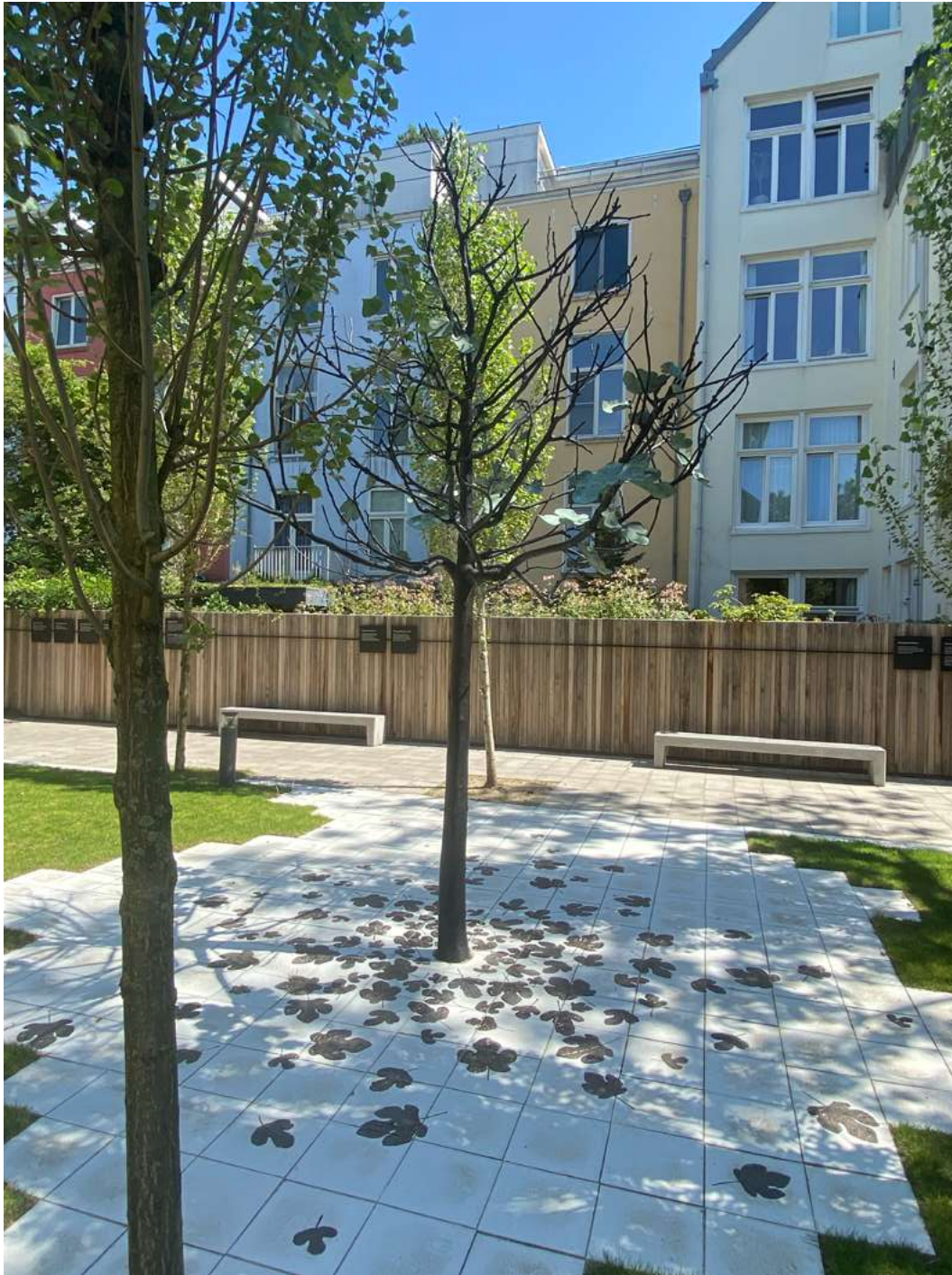


Fig. 21. Gabriel Lester's Reflection Garden at Hollandsche Schouwburg, Amsterdam, July 30, 2024.
Photo by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.

Heritage Arena

On May 10, 2023, I gave a talk at Erfgoedarena (Heritage Arena), one of a series of forums hosted by Reinwardt Academy several times a year on heritage-related topics linked to pressing social themes.¹⁸⁵ This event was about “Commemoration Today” moderated by Daphne Veendorp with myself as co-moderator and speaker in conversation with three invited guests. My talk “Een voorzet” (A starting point) set the scene and introduced the evening’s topic.¹⁸⁶

A Starting Point

“While our country has with painstaking precision observed the strictest neutrality these many months, intending solely to maintain this policy rigorously and consistently, last night, without the least warning, the German Wehrmacht launched a sudden attack against our territory.”¹⁸⁷

These words were spoken by Queen Wilhelmina on May 10, 1940, exactly 83 years ago. When King Willem-Alexander spoke on Dam Square on Remembrance Day on May 4, 2020, he reflected on the part his great-grandmother Wilhelmina played during the war. In her speeches to the Dutch nation from London on Radio Orange she paid little attention to the persecution of Jews.¹⁸⁸ Both the royal house and the Dutch government failed to provide that section of its citizenry with protection. In a sense, they were no longer recognized as full citizens.

My mother was born on Lekstraat in Amsterdam on February 21, 1943. At two months, she and her parents and sister were sent from Hollandsche Schouwburg on a transport to Westerbork. From there she was sent to Bergen Belsen. After the war, having survived the Lost Transport,¹⁸⁹ my mother was

brought back to Amsterdam, aged two. My grandparents returned home to find a fine for unpaid dog tax. That was the welcome they received from the Dutch government.



Fig. 22. My mother aged two. This is the first photograph of her. It was taken shortly after she arrived in Amsterdam in June 1945, having survived Westerbork, Bergen-Belsen and the Lost transport. The photo was taken on Liberation Day, held on August 31, 1945.

In 2024, Hollandsche Schouwburg reopened as a memorial site.¹⁹⁰ Camp Westerbork received a European Heritage Label in 2013.¹⁹¹ The school for the deaf, from which Jewish teachers and Jewish pupils were removed during the Second World War, is now Reinwardt Academy.¹⁹² Last week, on May 4, students laid a wreath at the memorial to commemorate those murdered pupils.¹⁹³ The same day, my sister laid flowers beside the bronze plaque outside my mother's parental home in memory of Abigail de Haan - Buitenkant, my great-grandmother who was murdered in Sobibor, and beside our stones at the National Holocaust Names Monument.

Who cares about what I am sharing here? A few details of history based on sources from archives, orally transmitted stories, data linked to a time and a place, and the accompanying unrelenting emotion and pain. Who is familiar or

should be familiar with this history, and who remembers the people who were part of it? Dieuwertje Blok said in her speech on Dam Square last May 4 that "Every human being, every child has a name, a face, their own history, their own story."¹⁹⁴ When and how, I wonder, will these stories become part of a collective story, of a collective trauma?

My positionality is an inseparable part of my approach to teaching, what I observe, the knowledge I bring to my work. Positionality is part of professionalism. It should also be a part of the way heritage professionals analyze heritage.¹⁹⁵ In my research I examine the tension between commemorators of the Shoah and of slavery, and the role that heritage professionals play in this.¹⁹⁶ What are commemorations for? How collective, inclusive or individual are they? Who is entitled to commemorate? Who is allowed to be commemorated? Emile recently posed a question: "Can you commemorate what you fear to name, and shouldn't we start calling the beast by its many names – antisemitism, racism and all the rest – and grab the bull by its horns?"¹⁹⁷

It has become increasingly clear to me that the tension between commemorators of the Shoah and slavery is not unconnected to the positions commemorators occupy in society and to their relationship with government. Commemoration is also about citizenship. Government policies and attitudes toward citizens and their histories and the importance of their heritage are reflected in speeches at commemorations and in decisions regarding apologies and restitution. These attitudes have tended to polarize. In a recent conversation about this [one of the organizers of the annual Ketji Koti commemoration] remarked, "That tension isn't about envy or anger towards the Jewish community. It's not. It's an indictment of the system we live in. ... Why do we have these double standards? What does it mean? Aren't we worth it?"¹⁹⁸

I can empathize with this from my own personal background. Observing this tension as a historian and a heritage professional, I wonder who may and can and should engage in the struggle for citizenship.¹⁹⁹ While the pain that people who are connected to that struggle feel today has historical roots, it is exacerbated by the resistance people meet when they call attention to their struggle.²⁰⁰ Perhaps, when this pain is recognized collectively, everyone will feel acknowledged as a full citizen. Because collective recognition is about empathizing with people who have never received a response, and about recognizing the root causes of antisemitism and racism, and the role that commemoration can play in addressing this. I hope we can discuss that tonight, and, to quote Schrijver, "give each other space to voice an alternative view."²⁰¹

Discussion

In the discussion that followed my opening talk, the guest speakers engaged with the audience. Three speakers were selected as experts on the history of the Shoah and slavery and related commemorative practices: Wendeline Flores, Lara Nuberg and Lievnath Faber.²⁰² It was clear from the various comments that people tend to view commemoration as part of a linear course. Rather than take it in isolation, they see commemoration as a first step towards the recognition of historical events and situations, their consequences and the desire for citizenship. This linear progress should lead to an official apology and acceptance of responsibility, enabling the next phase: repair. As Wendeline Flores noted in the discussion: “There was a momentum for apologies, but where is the momentum for repair?”²⁰³ Unfortunately, irreparable historical wrongs and the consequent traumas may never be fully resolved, while commemorations continue to remind us of the historical wounds that remain with us today.

Spoken Word

In the interval, Benjamin Fro, an Amsterdam-based spoken-word artist who specializes in philosophical texts, recited two poems: one in honor of Remembrance Day on May 4, and one for Ketí Koti, commissioned by Oy Vey.²⁰⁴

May 4 and 5

*At 8 o'clock on May 4 we stand still for two minutes to remember, for a reason.
We stand still, because for me sitting still just isn't an option.
That's why standing still to remember is an active thing.
It isn't through space but through time that we're travelling.
Forgetting about things and everyday worries, detaching.
And since words so often fail, we fall silent.
...
Some feel excluded and appeal for recognition.
They say "I don't feel a part of that commemoration."
Have we become numbed, if we can't see the pain?
While the survivors are haunted by fear once again,
of the disbelief that met the returned.
Of those who were forgotten, who were spurned.
Have we remembered, if nothing was learned?*

Keti Koti

*Keti Koti, July 1: party. In a world racing on relentlessly,
yet still feeling what happened back in history,
what says most is that collective, silent solidarity.
When I celebrate July 1, what I do it for
is an indescribable past left to me from long before,
which will impact us for evermore,
which our ancestors struggled against, or for.
...
A day that's more than symbolic, that tells the story,
of a desire to break the chains of history.
And because that history will never let us be,
July 1 must be a day when everyone is free.²⁰⁵*

Speeches

Never Again

EMILE: I remember what [Judith] Belinfante told me 20 years ago: “When you know what to say at the Holocaust memorial, then you’re ready for the job.” Because, after all, it’s quite difficult.²⁰⁶

Speeches are part of the ritual of commemorative practice. Politicians, artists and academics are often invited to speak by the National Committee for 4 and 5 May and by NiNsee. In this section, I have created a collage of excerpts from speeches given between 2020 and 2024, primarily on May 4 and July 1. Both dates were added to the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage calendar: Remembrance Day in November 2019,²⁰⁷ and Ketí Koti in July 2023.²⁰⁸ Speech-giving is considered part of the intangible cultural heritage at both events.

May 4, Remembrance Day, is organized by the National Committee for 4 and 5 May, established by royal decree on November 27, 1987, and tasked primarily with giving direction, substance and form to commemorations and celebrations, and with keeping the memory of the Second World War alive.²⁰⁹ July 1 is Ketí Koti, National Remembrance of Slavery, commemorating the victims of slavery and the day in 1863 when slavery was outlawed in Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean. The Slavery Past Commemoration Committee organizes events such as the National Remembrance of Slavery on July 1 in the Netherlands, including Dutch overseas territories. NiNsee organizes commemorations in the European Netherlands.²¹⁰

Extracts from speeches given at these events provide an insight into the tensions discussed here and possible underlying causes. Excerpts from other speeches are included here for the same reason. They are presented below quotes in chronological order. Unlike my conversations with heritage professionals, these excerpts are, I believe, in conversation with each other. Each time, it is the government that is being called on to listen.

Another Date

Holocaust Remembrance Day commemorates the victims of the Holocaust worldwide. The United Nations declared this a memorial day in 2005. The Dutch commemoration is held annually on the last Sunday in January at the “Auschwitz Never Again” memorial in Amsterdam’s Wertheim Park.²¹¹ On January 26, 2020, Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte apologized on behalf of the government for the state’s failure to protect the country’s Jews during the Second World War, explaining “that while some Dutch officials had resisted during the Nazi occupation, too many simply did as they were told.”²¹² It was the first official apology by a Dutch prime minister.

On July 1, 2020, Rutte announced in a live broadcast debate on racism and discrimination that the government would not be apologizing for the state’s involvement in slavery. He questioned ‘whether one can hold people who are alive today responsible for [what happened in] the past. Others might find this a painful experience.’²¹³

Rutte’s announcement that no apology would be issued, rather than simply not offering an apology, meant that this formal remedy remained both present and absent, aggravating the existing tension. At the same time, Rutte’s declaration that no apology would be given showed that he was aware of the impact of multidirectional memory, since some sections of society had clearly asked him to make an apology.²¹⁴ Linda discussed this in our conversation.

LINDA:

I see, when I place Rutte’s speeches side by side, that one day he said “I apologize” and two months later he tells another group “For you I won’t apologize.” When that happened, we got swamped with messages from people asking “Did you see that?” They wanted us to get involved in the fight. But what would that have achieved? I didn’t like what happened either... What bothered me is that one section of society received an apology, and then... it was countered with something negative. But people see the inequality immediately, the inconsistency. The biggest mistake I could have made then was to express our displeasure that an apology had been given to another group, because I would have fallen into a divide and rule trap. After all, they aren’t the enemy, they can’t help it if they finally got their apology. I’m happy for them because we know... I always say: we should be happy because we know what it’s like not to be recognized.²¹⁵



Fig. 23. Front page headline in Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, December 20, 2022.

Excerpts from Speeches

Slavery Past



LINDA NOOITMEER,
JULY 1, 2020, OOSTERPARK

For two-and-a-half centuries, the Netherlands enslaved millions of Africans. This system [of slavery] laid the political, social and cultural foundations for the oppression of people with African roots in the Netherlands and its colonies. That history laid the foundation for the emergence of institutional racism.

Today, July 1, Ketí Koti has been included in the Dutch canon [of key historical events] under the heading Slavery.²²⁹ This is an important milestone: it represents the acceptance and confirmation that transatlantic slavery is a shared past, that it is part of Dutch history.

A future, starting with a new narrative, a narrative that includes a shared past. This is the only way to build an equal society.

It is as Anton de Kom, the resistance hero for Suriname and the Netherlands said:

“There’s no better way to foster a sense of inferiority in a race, than to teach history in which only the sons of another people are mentioned and praised.”²³⁰

•

Excerpts from Speeches

Shoah



ARNON GRUNBERG,
MAY 4, 2020, NIEUWE KERK

Commemoration (should) be more than a ritual, it should carry within it a desire for knowledge, and platitudes are therefore the enemy of meaningful commemorative rituals.

If we deny that the sickness of the previous century, that of industrialized totalitarianism, of antisemitism turned into genocide, of biological racism, runs deep in our culture, then we don’t know who we are.

Commemoration starts with the observation that the past is not finished, with the realization that the belly that bore the Third Reich is still fertile.

“I can’t understand, I can’t bear the fact that we judge human beings not by what they are, but by the group to which they happen to belong,” Primo Levi wrote to his German translator in the 1960s.²¹⁶

Four months after Mark Rutte apologized on behalf the government for the state’s failure to protect Jews in the Second World War, the king spoke about his great-grandmother’s failure during the war. Willem-Alexander gave his speech at the height of the Corona pandemic on an empty Dam Square. It was the first speech by a monarch on Remembrance Day.

Slavery Past



MINISTER INGRID ENGELSHOVEN,
JULY 1, 2020, OOSTERPARK

The government isn't always able to prevent unequal treatment and exclusion.²³¹

•

ARTIST GLENN DE RANDAMIE, A.K.A. TYPHOON,
JULY 1, 2020, OOSTERPARK

Forward is the only option. And you're needed too.

What are you hoping for? I want to be able to tell you that our conversations will be nice and pleasant, but the truth is more valuable.

I want to be able to tell you that your own pain will receive lots of attention, but the truth is still more valuable. Let's talk.

What are you hoping for? If I have to ask you for empathy, what is it worth? Forward is the only option. And you're needed, too. Your hopes and especially your actions.

I stand here, we stand here, you stand here. Be brave in your discomfort. Be welcoming to our generation.²³²

•

MAYOR FEMKE HALSEMA,
JULY 1, 2021, OOSTERPARK

The city councilors and corporate governors who participated in the trade of enslaved people for profit and power also helped establish a system of oppression based on skin color and race. The history that still inspires our

Shoah



KING WILLEM-ALEXANDER,
MAY 4, 2020, DAM SQUARE

There is one witness I will never forget. His name was Jules Schelvis.

After a raid, he and his wife and many hundreds of others were taken to Muiderpoort station. I can still hear his words: "Hundreds of bystanders watched the heavily guarded crowded trams pass by without protest."

Sobibor began in Vondelpark. With a sign: "Jews Prohibited."

Certainly, there were many who resisted.

True heroes who were willing to die for freedom and our values.

But there's that other reality too.

Fellow human beings felt abandoned, insufficiently heard, insufficiently supported, [not] even with words ... By my great-grandmother in London, despite her steadfast resistance. It's something I can never forget.²¹⁷

•

A year after King Willem-Alexander's speech, in which he stated: "Sobibor began in Vondelpark, with a sign: 'Jews Prohibited,'" Amsterdam installed a memorial at the park gate, a mirror the size of that wartime sign, with an explanatory text:

Take a look in the mirror, back to the Second World War, when a sign here stated "Jews Prohibited." The persecution of the Jews began in 1940 with registration and segregation. It ended in extermination camps. Many Dutch

Slavery Past



city's indomitable commercial spirit is therefore inseparable from today's persistent, rampant racism.

Gradually, our historiography, the view of our heritage, is becoming more complete.

Because we want to be a government for those for whom history is full of pain and its legacy a burden. A government for all Amsterdammers.

No Amsterdammer living today is to blame for the past.

As a government, we take responsibility for this.

We strive to deal justly with our history. Reconciliation regarding a shared past creates space for a shared future.

I apologize on behalf of the city council for Amsterdam city council's active involvement in the commercial system of colonial slavery and the global trade in enslaved people.²³³

•

OUTGOING MINISTER KAJSA OLLONGREN,
JULY 1, 2021, OOSTERPARK

Picture a three-letter logo, about four centimeters in size, on a branding iron. The letters WIC stand for the Dutch West Indies Company. The company used a branding iron to mark enslaved men, women and children with its logo.²³⁴ As if they were livestock.

Enslaved people didn't just lose ownership of their bodies. They also lost their names.

Shoah



Jews were killed in Sobibor. We still face segregation, intolerance, discrimination and racism today. It starts in our streets, in our schoolyards, in our parks. Do you look the other way?²¹⁸

•

ROXANE VAN IPEREN,
MAY 4, 2021, NIEUWE KERK

"It was as if each of those people should have asked us questions, read on our faces who we were and humbly listened to our story. But no one looked at us, no one took up the challenge; they were deaf, dumb and blind, entrenched in their ruins as in a fortress of not-willing-to-know, still strong, still capable of hatred and contempt, still trapped in their old confusion of pride and guilt," quoting from Primo Levi's *The Respite*.

To stand in silence for two minutes without being prepared to listen to all the voices is like holding your breath and maintaining the superficial narrative. Not only about what we commemorate, but also who is allowed to speak.

A characteristic of inequality is that the supposedly inferior group is always given a task to do; to be heard, they have to demonstrate their right to exist... But the Dutch Jews were assimilated, they spoke the same language as their neighbors, beside whom they had lived for centuries. Still, three quarters of them were murdered – the highest proportion in Western Europe.

Asking questions and wanting to hear all the answers, untouched by the dominant narrative that has taken root in our collective memory, is a task for all of us.²¹⁹

Slavery Past



We can only look back on the history of slavery with horror, sorrow and shame.

Reckoning with this history is not a sign of weakness. It's actually how a democracy shows its strength. As a government, we need to lead the way.

By remembering the past, we can look forward to the future and commit ourselves to a society in which there is no room for racism or inequality.

I realize that the pain inflicted with that brander has not gone away. That the wounds have not yet healed. This process will take many generations.²³⁵

•

LINDA NOOITMEER,
JULY 1, 2022, OOSTERPARK

Apologies, research and monuments should not become the mirrors and beads of the twenty-first century.²³⁶

•

MINISTER FRANC WEERWIND,
JULY 1, 2022, OOSTERPARK

How many times have I been here on Ketu Koti thinking about my ancestors, enslaved on De Eendragt sugar plantation in Suriname?

Today I stand here in a different capacity. Today I stand here on behalf of the cabinet.

To build that future together, we must know our shared past. That is our common ground.

Shoah



Fig. 24. Memorial by Niels van Deuren at Vondelpark's Van Eeghenstraat entrance, unveiled May 4, 2021. Photo by Alphons Nieuwenhuis.

•

AMARA VAN DER ELST,
MAY 4, 2021, DAM SQUARE

How to heal old wounds with new words.²²⁰

André van Duin, May 4, 2021, Dam Square
There, in a little square behind Westerkerk, lies another war memorial. Not as big as this, but just as impressive, the Gay Monument.

There, too, at 8 o'clock tonight, the many dead are commemorated, like here. Three large pink triangles on the ground symbolize discrimination and humiliation.²²¹

•

Slavery Past



But that knowledge is flawed.

For us, recognition and acknowledgement are the only way to make the burden of history bearable in the present.

Often, living side by side and giving each other space remains difficult.

When we face unequal treatment, discrimination and anti-Black racism, the echoes of the colonial past reverberate. That is where it chafes and we feel the tension.²³⁷

•

KLAAS KNOT,
JULY 1, 2022, OOSTERPARK

Pieta. Twelve hundred guilders.
Zaterdag. Thirteen hundred guilders.
Pierot. Five hundred guilders. Old.
August. Three hundred guilders. Sickly.
Claartje. Zero guilders. Worthless.

Their names, their economic value, and a note regarding their health. This is how enslaved people were recorded in a ledger when they were bought or sold. A ledger from a sugar and coffee plantation in Suriname. A ledger that was kept for one of the plantation owners: Jan Hodshon. The same man who, in 1816, two years after the abolition of the trade in enslaved people in the Netherlands, two years after De Nederlandsche Bank was established, and after having been a board member for two years, became president of De Nederlandsche Bank.

Almost every board member was personally involved in slavery.

Shoah



HANS GOEDKOOP,
MAY 4, 2022, NIEUWE KERK

Allow me to take you to Bergen-Belsen. It's only about four hours from here and during the war it wasn't the worst Nazi camp.

That's where we arrive. Imagine it. How will we hold up? We'll probably do our best to preserve our civilized values. Abel Herzberg notices that most of his fellow prisoners aren't bad people. Just that in the misery of the camp, they do increasingly bad things.

That steady decline prompts Herzberg and a few fellow prisoners, also lawyers, to remind the camp of their civilized values.

"Human civilization's first sentence," as Herzberg says. "The recognition that this is permitted and that is not."

Out of the destruction an obligation emerged. An end to the disqualification of millions deemed unworthy to live due to their passport or race.

In the formerly occupied countries, rule of law was restored and implemented with unprecedented solemnity. Civilization won. Helped at first by the assurance that those who had won the war were indeed civilized. As distinct from the Germans, who were, of course, monsters. Although that distinction faded.

Another question arose: whether all Germans had been equally monstrous in the war.

How many institutions in our own beloved country had aided the German tyranny?

Slavery Past



On behalf of De Nederlandsche Bank, I acknowledge that many of my predecessors treated people as little more than merchandise.

Today, on behalf of De Nederlandsche Bank, the current Executive Board apologizes for these reprehensible facts. We offer our sincere apologies to all descendants of enslaved people in the Netherlands, in Suriname, in Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, in Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. We apologize to all those who, because of the personal choices of my predecessors, were reduced to the color of their skin. To an amount. To a commodity listed in a ledger. We apologize to everyone who still bears the consequences of those choices even today. We therefore choose not only to apologies today. We are opting for more than just words, but also for deeds. Deeds that will hopefully contribute to the fight against racism, inequality and injustice.²³⁸

•

PRIME MINISTER MARK RUTTE,
DECEMBER 19, 2022, NATIONAL ARCHIVE, THE HAGUE

Choosing an apparently random date,²³⁹ Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte spoke at the National Archive in The Hague on December 19, 2022.²⁴⁰

Here in the National Archives, history speaks to us through millions of documents.

We, living here and now, must acknowledge and condemn slavery as a crime against humanity in the clearest terms.

In recent years, that history has been receiving more attention – in exhibitions, in publications and in public debate.

Shoah



The banality of evil, it was called. Evil that doesn't look evil, hidden behind rules and routine – and that put paid to that bright idea of civilization. If people can't see their own wickedness, how can we judge what is permitted and what isn't permitted?²²²

•

MAYOR FEMKE HALSEMA,
MAY 4, 2022, DAM SQUARE

Second World War survivors, people who fled the bombing elsewhere, soldiers who risked their lives for peace and security: now that war is back on our continent, for many, old memories return. Of torture, oppression, of loved ones dying. The pain that never really went away is felt all the more.

Remembering together brings comfort. Here, at this symbol of national unity and at the countless memorials and monuments elsewhere in our country.²²³

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MARCEL MÖRING,
MAY 4, 2023, NIEUWE KERK

Primo Levi writes in *Is This a Man?* that the camps dehumanized both the prisoners and the executioners. French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas says that we become who we are in the face of the Other. How can we reconcile [these statements]?

True, this was preceded by a long process of ever-increasing dehumanization, proclaiming that “they” are different, that “they” don't belong here, that “they” threaten our way of life. But when and where does the

Slavery Past



Actually, for a long time I thought that slavery was history, that we had left it behind us.

But I was wrong. Because centuries of oppression and exploitation continue to impact here and now.

It's true that no one alive today is personally responsible for slavery. Yet it's also true that in the various forms it has taken in history, the Dutch state bears responsibility for the immense suffering inflicted on enslaved people and their descendants.

The *Ketenen van het verleden* report issued by the Slavery dialogue group has been hugely influential on the growing awareness many of us are experiencing. ... Its three watchwords are: recognition, apology, reparation.

Today I apologize.

Awe mi ta pidi diskulpa.
Tide mi wani taki pardon.

Today, on behalf of the Dutch government, I apologize for the actions of the Dutch state over the years: posthumously, to all the enslaved around the world who suffered as a result of what was done, to their daughters and sons, and to their descendants here and now.

We are doing this now, on the eve of a crucial commemorative year, to find a way forward together. It's not only the past that we share, we also share the future. So today we add a comma, not a full stop.

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Shoah



moment come when "they" are no longer our neighbors? I must admit: I don't know.

If it's true that it's in the face of the Other that we become human, and if it's possible to dehumanize that Other and be simultaneously dehumanized ourselves, does that mean that human beings are evil?

If you wait long enough – and it's often far too long – it all rises to the top. But the key question remains: why did we suddenly stop being each other's neighbor? When did we become reptiles, rats, roaches? How did it come about that we were taken from our home while our neighbors watched and said nothing?

It's impossible to take more than a hundred thousand people out of their homes and get rid of them without having a system in which people no longer see their neighbor's face as the face of a fellow human being.

Inquiries are investigating the role that municipalities and railways played. After many years, there is legal redress. But more important – than the ideas, nuances, investigations – is when and why the person next door stopped being a fellow human being, a neighbor just like you are their neighbor. If we don't think about that, if we stop asking and trying to answer that question over and over, whenever it's needed, we'll say nothing when the time comes to shout.²²⁴

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DIEUWERTJE BLOK,
MAY 4, 2023, NIEUWE KERK

I try to imagine it. Looking at photos taken back then. A packed beach at Zandvoort on a sunny summer's day in

Slavery Past



LINDA NOOITMEER,
KETI KOTI, JULY 1, 2023, OOSTERPARK

I would like to extend a special welcome to His Royal Highness, King Willem-Alexander and Her Royal Highness, Queen Máxima.

Thank you for accepting our invitation ... to respect our ancestors today ...

Much has been achieved. ... However, we should not lose sight of the fact that a large section of the European Netherlands still fails to recognize this aspect of Dutch history. And we note that many slavery monuments remain unbuilt in the Netherlands.

While we are agreed that transatlantic slavery and the slave trade are crimes against humanity and that the effect of transatlantic slavery continues to impact the lives of descendants of the enslaved in Suriname, the Caribbean territories of the Netherlands.

So why the hesitation?

To be honest, I don't have an answer. But I do want to share a thought with you. What if, at heart – 560 years after the first people with African roots were enslaved – we haven't come any further. In those days ... the dehumanization of Black people became a fact. ...

What if, during those 400 years of slavery, the residue of that idea became etched in the deepest recesses of our mind, passed down the generations, ready to reassert itself just when the moment arrives for us to do the right thing. A moment that moral duty bids an apology be made, that the process which starts after the comma ensures not just that we make nonmaterial recompense, but also material recompense.

What if our desire to tackle the socio-economic and cultural disadvantage of people of African roots is ham-

Shoah



1941. Taken from the dune, and beside the stairs to the beach a big sign: "Jews Prohibited."

Everyone on that packed beach had walked past it.

What did they think? Did they see it? Did they look away? And often I wonder: what would I have done? A sign banning a group of fellow citizens. Reducing people to one aspect of who they are, their color, religion, origin. Could I ever get used to that? Would I look the other way?

Remembrance isn't passive, it isn't just about what happened. For me, it's about the connection with the present, with the future. ... What are we going to do about intolerance today, in our country, in our neighborhood.²²⁵

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KING WILLEM-ALEXANDER,
MARCH 10, 2024, OPENING OF THE NATIONAL HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

The National Holocaust Museum gives a face and a voice to the Jewish victims of persecution in the Netherlands. It brings to life the stories of people who were isolated from the rest of Dutch society, robbed of their rights, denied legal protection, rounded up, imprisoned, separated from their loved ones and murdered.

But the National Holocaust Museum does more than just tell us stories. It shows us the devastating consequences that antisemitism can have.

The walls of the museum are covered – wall after wall after wall – with the many hundreds of ordinances, rules, instructions and bans: the small steps by which the Jewish population was set apart. Mandatory termination of employment. Forced registration. Banishment

Slavery Past



pered by that still small voice deep in our heart and head that says “We don’t think they’re worth it.”²⁴¹

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KING WILLEM-ALEXANDER,
KETI KOTI, JULY 1, 2023, OOSTERPARK

The archives contain the raw figures. They present the facts with a bookkeeper’s precision. But the voices of the enslaved are lost in the mists of time.

The horrific legacy of slavery remains with us today. Its effects can still be felt in racism in our society.

On December 19 last year, the Dutch prime minister apologized on behalf of the Dutch government for the fact that, for centuries, in the name of the Dutch state, human beings were made into commodities, exploited and abused.

Today I stand before you. Today, as your King and as a member of the government, I make this apology myself. And I feel the weight of the words in my heart and my soul.

But for me, there is another personal dimension.

Slavery and the slave trade are recognized as a crime against humanity. And the stadholders and kings of the House of Orange-Nassau did nothing to stop it.

As the Second World War highlighted more recently, you cannot hide behind laws when your fellow human beings are reduced to animals and subjected to the whims of those in power.

Shoah



from public life. No bicycle. No telephone. No savings. No home. No freedom of movement. No life.

There is no excuse for ignorance – no place for relativism, no room for ifs and buts. Knowledge of the Holocaust is not optional.

Learn about what happened. And keep that knowledge in your heads and in your hearts.

•

MAYOR FEMKE HALSEMA,
MAY 4, 2024, DAM SQUARE

All wars come to an end someday.
Yet even when we lay our weapons down,
the violence rages on in our memory.
Among those who survive, among the bereaved.

War leaves wounds that never heal.

We who are gathered here, are the heirs of a hard-fought peace.

Let us protect that legacy – our open society.
By always standing up to antisemitism, to all forms of hatred and discrimination.

By cherishing our fundamental rights, like a free press and democracy.

Sometimes disagreement is so overwhelming that it drowns out our compassion.

Let us open up our gentle hearts to all those who feel the wounds of war each day.

Let us, at times, stay silent.
Let us comfort each other.²²⁶

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Slavery Past



At a certain point you have a moral duty to act.

But today, on this day of remembrance, I ask forgiveness for the clear failure to act in the face of this crime against humanity.

There is no blueprint for the process of healing, reconciliation and recovery. Together, we are in uncharted territory. So, let us support and guide each other.

We all have our own family history. Our own emotions. Our own cultural traditions that ground us in our communities. Our rituals that comfort us, symbols that encourage us, and words of wisdom that resonate in our hearts.

After acknowledgment and apologies, let us work together to foster healing, reconciliation and recovery. So that we can all be proud of what we share. So that we can say: Ten kon drai
Times have changed.²⁴²

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MINISTER ROBERT DIJKGRAAF,
JULY 1, 2024, OOSTERPARK

“How do we write ourselves into this next chapter, with how many arms and with which words will we pull the past out of the shadows, look it in the eye and embrace it?”

The words of Poet Laureate Babs Gons which she wrote to mark the national Slavery Memorial Day ceremony last year.²⁴³

Shoah



Fig. 25. Forget-me-not display honoring Esther Mendes da Costa and anti-Jewish regulations on the wall of the National Holocaust Museum. Photo by Mike Bink.

Slavery Past



Entire human lives, entire communities were deliberately erased from our history.

And yet something continued as a legible reminder. Between the lines.

The most fragile and personal did survive history.

The song a mother sang to rock her child to sleep.

The recipe handed down from generation to generation.

The hairstyle that speaks its own language.

Without the resistance of you and your ancestors, without the perseverance of teachers, researchers, activists and many others, the Memorial Year and the apologies by Prime Minister Rutte and the King would never have happened.

It has taken over a century and a half for that apology to be made and it is perfectly understandable that not every descendent is yet ready to accept it.

Today, we are also moving forward in this recovery process.

From now on, descendants in the European and Caribbean Netherlands who carry the pain of the plantation in their surname will be able to change their name.

And from today, Papiamentu will also have protected status here, in the European part of the Netherlands.

As true as we are together today, we carry the past in our genes.

The pain of that past has been unequally distributed.²⁴⁴

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Shoah



DIDO MICHIELSEN,
MAY 4, 2024, NIEUWE KERK

The lost war

Wouldn't it be better to stop carrying the burden of our parents' suffering and passing it on to posterity?

Now that new conflicts are raising new generations filled with hatred and enmity, it's time, eighty-four years after May 1940, to end old wars and stop passing on the trauma.

Compassion can help us lower our defenses without having to know each detail. Sometimes knowledge, knowing, even words, are unneeded.

Commemoration is when a war can end. Two minutes of compassion: a start, a gentle exercise for every day.²²⁷

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MAYOR FEMKE HALSEMA,
YOM HASHOAH, MAY 6, 2024, HOLLANDSCHE SCHOUWBURG

Today we remember the Shoah. When the Nazis attempted to murder all of Europe's Jews and eradicate the rich Jewish culture, identity, religion, traditions and history.

They did it in stages. First, they stripped Jews of their rights. Then came isolation, dehumanization and finally murder.

But we also commemorate in order to express what we strive to be. A society that is determined to face up to its most painful histories.

Slavery Past



Figs. 26 and 27. Branding iron with the initials "GWC", probably signifying the Geootroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie (Chartered West Indies Company). National Numismatic Collection, De Nederlandsche Bank.



MAYOR FEMKE HALSEMA,
JULY 1, 2024, OOSTERPARK

Today we remember the ancestors of hundreds of thousands of Dutch people.

We're not here out of some political obligation, but out of deep respect and compassion.

Compassion for those who were abducted from their country, separated from family and loved ones. Whose names were erased. Who were chained and abused and forced into slavery. Who were murdered.

And out of respect for those who passed on their stories, songs and rituals to future generations under appalling conditions. Respect for the freedom fighters – like Boni and Tula – who resisted.

The Rijksmuseum displayed a Dutch West Indies Company brander in the *Slavery* exhibition.

I found it one of the most confrontational exhibits.

The brand scar still remains. And the pain has passed from generation to generation.

Shoah



Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel wrote: "Without memory there is no culture. Without memory there would be no civilization, no society and no future."

These are troubled and sad times. Antisemitism is back, even in Amsterdam.

Only by remembering can we understand what people, fueled by hatred, antisemitism and racial prejudice are capable of. And what indifference can lead to.

Only by remembering do we protect our civilization and so our future.

We don't want to and will not forget.²²⁸

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Slavery Past



Because burnt skin can't heal if it keeps getting slashed open with the brand of contemporary racism. To those people who want to roll back progress, who pride themselves on looking away, on denying other people's pain... I ask: Why? No one is taking anything away from you?

Let's all heed the appeal Typhoon made here earlier. He said: "Be brave in your discomfort. Be welcoming to our generation."²⁴⁵

Femke Halsema referred to the branding iron in her speech in 2024, as had Kajsa Ollongren in 2021. They had both seen it in the Rijksmuseum's *Slavery* exhibition and both spoke about its purpose and the enduring wound the implement had left.²⁴⁶ How it had dehumanized people who were not considered fully human by those who had branded them.

Eveline Sint Nicolaas noted in the *Slavery* exhibition catalogue that "in Africa the trading company brand had been burned into their body."²⁴⁷ This is what led to the story being told in the museum and cited in the speeches. For the preparation of the exhibition more sources were used than are referred to in the catalogue. In an email correspondence, Eveline Sint Nicolaas explains that:

When preparing for the *Slavery* exhibition, we referred to Felhoen Kraal's 1950 publication, *Arms and Seals of Suriname*, which describes the branding iron now in the Nederlandsche Bank collection. It discusses the possibility that the branding iron was used to brand WIC property, as well as the similarity of this particular branding iron to those described in Wilhelm Joest's *Ethnographisches und verwandtes aus Guyana* (1893) and pictured when describing the branding of people in slavery.

Neither of these publications is mentioned in the catalogue. Sint Nicolaas further stated that:

Slavery Past



It is important to keep in mind that for many objects with a colonial background, the use will not always have been limited to a single specific function. For example, a whip may have been used for livestock, but also for people. Merchant ships were used to transport goods, free people as well as enslaved people. Objects such as shackles and branding irons could be used in multiple ways. It is precisely this multi-functionality that makes the relationship to slavery easy to overlook, and at the same time, I believe, so aptly demonstrates the gruesome nature of the colonial system.²⁴⁸

The branding iron is part of the Nederlandsche Bank collection. When I asked permission to use the photo, the bank agreed on condition I added the following information:

In the *Slavery* exhibition at the Rijksmuseum, the branding iron from our collection was described as having been used for branding enslaved people. However, we do not know what these interpretations are based on. This would require more research on branding irons from the VOC and GWC, among others.

What we do know is that a similar object in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam is interpreted as a branding iron for marking goods (including wooden transport crates) (inv.no. NG-1987-14-1 / Brandmerk VOC - Rijksmuseum). We notice that there is more than average interest in this stamp. Perhaps because of the description in the aforementioned exhibition. We would therefore like to ask you to provide the above information.²⁴⁹

I have repeated the bank's proviso in full to show the responsibility that comes with owning collections and archives. Whether this is about performing diligent research or protecting the integrity of an object is debatable, and it raises the question whether we can hold a collection to a moral standard.

Slavery Past



MAYOR FEMKE HALSEMA,
KETI KOTI, JULY 1, 2024

We want to go down that same road together. To give Amsterdam's young people new role models and icons. From history and from today. Not just in museums and history books, but at school, at commemorations, at celebrations and in our public spaces.²⁵⁰

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BABS GONS

Who are we tomorrow
we often ask ourselves
who we would have been
...
but who are we now
who are we tomorrow
with this history stretching ahead us
who are we after the comma
the great-great-grandchildren of.²⁵¹

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A Place to Perform Libations and Lay Stones

At a national commemoration, the context in which it is held transforms the monument into a national podium, especially when politicians take part and national and local media are present. This may explain why many are drawn to the May 4 ceremony on Dam Square rather than on Apollolaan. The latter is a small gathering with no media. Perhaps it's no longer about the Holocaust, but about the podium set up for the specific commemoration. Not every commemoration has a podium. This exposes and creates tension. I explored this aspect in my conversations with Linda and Patrick.

LINDA:

Sure, commemoration is a good thing, and we're using it increasingly as a platform to raise issues, but that's not what it was in the past. Commemoration was a moment to show respect to the ancestors. Now it's being used as a podium, by me too. In the hope that it will trickle down further. Though I'm not convinced about that. The people involved seem happy, they feel heard at present and they want someone to say those things, but there's far more that should be said. And far more than even I could say. For me, commemoration is about showing respect. I really want to see that respect. It shouldn't be a show. It shouldn't be an Instagram post. With people insisting on laying a wreath during the ceremony and not after. I say, if you're all about commemoration, about showing respect, does it matter if it isn't during the broadcast? Surely it has value after, too?²⁵²

- JUDY: The broadcast on July 1 and May 4 follows a certain formula: that's how it's done, although it lacks specificity, and the value of each ceremony.
- LINDA: Funny you should say that. A couple of weeks ago, we carried out an evaluation with the Dutch public broadcaster NOS. They wanted bigger names at the ceremony. I said, "Sorry, we're not asking Ruud Gullit." "But he generates more publicity," they said. But, that's not what it's about. I don't want it to be a show.²⁵³
- PATRICK: There are two wings beside the monument, one is for invited guests, sometimes there are a few people who come from grassroots organizations, but the real grassroots, the ordinary people, sit on the other side. They both hold their own ceremony as it were. I tend to look for the grassroots organizations. It's true that they feel they have controlling rights on the ancestors. Not least because they still perform Winti rituals to honor the ancestors. The more we integrate, the further away that gets.²⁵⁴

National Slavery Monument

The story of the National Slavery Monument in Oosterpark begins in 1998, when the Afro-European women's movement Sophiedela (today's National Slavery Platform) petitioned the Dutch government to recognize African and indigenous Surinamese history and the legacy of slavery.²⁵⁵ Four years later, on July 1, 2002, Queen Beatrix attended the unveiling of a monument. The bronze sculpture was designed by Surinamese artist Erwin de Vries, who explained that "the commission was to portray slavery in the past, present and future. To show the past, I depicted a group of enslaved people in chains; to show the present I showed a person being freed; the key is the future: freedom, and the belief that one day we will be completely free from discrimination." When he designed the monument, he felt "the pain of the enslaved, including my ancestors, but also their tremendous strength." The monument has been widely discussed. Critics objected to its obscure location in Oosterpark. While security concerns

prevented the organizers inviting a large group of guests to the unveiling, to the frustration of many descendants who were kept behind fences.²⁵⁶

Winti priestess Marian Markelo (Okomfo Nana Efua) has performed the annual libation here for the last twenty years. This involves sprinkling water from a calabash on the ground, singing and addressing the ancestors, gods and nature spirits of the Winti faith. Winti (literally "wind"), is an African-Surinamese religion that emerged among the enslaved communities on the plantations. It honors Mama Aisa (Mother Earth) and the ancestors. Markelo performs the ceremony with a dancer wearing a Kabra, an ancestor mask. This was first worn on July 1, 2013, to mark the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the Dutch Caribbean colonies. That impressive ceremony prompted Amsterdam Museum to purchase the Kabra mask, to preserve it in its collection. The museum consulted with Markelo to set up a new collection category for objects that would remain available for use in ritual events. The Kabra mask was created by Boris van Berkum in collaboration with Marian Markelo.²⁵⁷

In Winti culture, the colors blue and white symbolize the ancestors. Blue represents the West African royal lineage, while white symbolizes death and purity. Delftware pottery has also used these two colors since the seventeenth century.



Fig. 28. Marian Markelo dedicating Kabra Blauw at the Boijmans van Beuningen depot, 2022. Photo by Aad Hoogendoorn.

What would happen if these two traditions met in the same object? Van Berkum explored the idea in his design.²⁵⁸ In 2022, Marian Markelo gave her blessing when Museum Boijmans van Beuningen acquired the Kabra Blue vase.²⁵⁹ Commenting on the many invitations Markelo has received to perform, she later noted, “Because of the way I speak, white Holland understands what I’m talking about. That I work with so many white organizations, in the museum world and the art world, is because I’m able to articulate my heritage.”²⁶⁰ For Slavery Remembrance Year 2023–2024, NiNsee issued a Kabra Blue souvenir salt shaker.²⁶¹ This launched a new genre of museum shop items linking museums and commemorative practices through merchandise.²⁶²

EMILE: So what remains of the heritage? When memory is linked to an actual location, a building or a station, or a place like the [Holocaust Museum] kindergarten yard where the fence used to be, which is now just a geolocation, it adds a certain intensity to the commemorative experience. Heritage is part of that.²⁶³

JUDY: It seems that location is also about owning. A place is tied to the ceremonies performed there. The tension is especially evident at those ceremonies. What does the performance involve and what does it convey, and does it include elements from other ceremonies?

EMILE: That’s an important aspect of these ceremonies. Commemorative culture in the Netherlands is incredibly traditional. There’s little room for variation, which is problematic. The Jewish community can learn from the Black community, where there’s far more room for alternative ways of celebrating. It’s all so solemn. There’s only one way out in my opinion: that’s for people who think it’s important to break the mold to take risks. Those who stick their neck out may find themselves in an uncomfortable position. So be it. People in my position should be taking that risk on. When I discussed this with Emily Gordenker she said that the museum sector has acquired more beauty by encouraging openness, while we also made the public space more vulnerable.²⁶⁴

The Wall of Names Monument

The names on the Wall of Names Monument tell their own story and leave no room for ritual performance other than remembrance. The monument has become a symbol in the ongoing battle against antisemitism. For some, it serves the same purpose as a Jewish cemetery. It is made of 102,000 bricks, each laser-inscribed with the name, date of birth, and age at death of the 102,000 Jewish victims and 220 Sinti and Roma victims of the Shoah. The bricks form a series of labyrinthine walls supporting massive mirrored steel letters spelling the Hebrew phrase for “in memoriam.” People come here to remember those who were murdered in the Shoah, individually and collectively. The bricks form 102,000 miniature headstones. “Each name was a person. Today they get their names back.”²⁶⁵

From its inception, the monument was the subject of fierce debate. It was Jacques Grishaver, chair of the Dutch Auschwitz committee, who launched the idea and led a fifteen-year campaign to realize the plan. The design is by architect Daniel Libeskind, who explained: “To me the Holocaust, as to many others, is not just one more event of tragedy in history. It’s an event that, in a seismic way, has shifted our sense of what humanity is capable of.”²⁶⁶

A documentary about the realization of the monument describes the attempts by residents in the neighborhood, implicated subjects perhaps, to block the proposed construction, which was first meant for Wertheim Park. Libeskind commented on their objections: “I felt bad that people thought that walking their dogs was more important than a memory of those who were part of the city that made it successful, the Jews. I felt bad that people thought they didn’t want a memorial near them, because it would infect their daily life with a memory they didn’t want to have.”²⁶⁷

In 2016, Amsterdam mayor Eberhard van der Laan and Grishaver’s committee chose a new site not far from the park and still within the old Jewish neighborhood. However, once again, local residents launched a protest: their main objection was that the construction would involve the removal of 24 trees. “The trees were more important than those 100,000 people,” said an exasperated Jacques Grishaver. “The people who would have wanted to see it [built] are no longer there, they are dead. But they’re Jews, so it doesn’t matter.” The protests were, however, about more than trees. “According to the Auschwitz Committee, the monument should be a scream,” says Petra Catz, chair of Neighborhood 1018 association. “It should be oppressive and disorienting. But memorializing and shocking are two different things. You can also make

a monument that doesn't shock. That doesn't look so enormous. Without this fierce, confrontational, almost aggressive look.” Her biggest annoyances: the total unwillingness to enter into discussion about the monument and the forwardness with which objectors are brushed aside as “people who turn a blind eye.” “There is no truth, it's a thought process. It's not just about the result, it's about creating commonality. It is a national monument. Without support, it has no meaning.”²⁶⁸

The protesters took their campaign to the Supreme Court, which rejected their argument, enabling construction of the monument to start. It was completed in September 2021.²⁶⁹

King Willem-Alexander unveiled the monument on September 19, 2021.²⁷⁰ Wearing a *kippah*, the king paid respect by laying a small stone, a Jewish custom when visiting a grave. The live broadcast turned the monument into a stage. Perhaps more than the actual monument, a model of Libeskind's design at Amsterdam's National Holocaust Museum conveys a sense of the struggle to bring home the names of the people who once lived in the neighborhood and were deported from there, against the opposition of a committee of protestors more concerned to preserve a group of trees.²⁷¹



Fig. 29. King Willem-Alexander with Dutch Auschwitz Committee chair Jacques Grishaver laying a stone at the National Holocaust Names Memorial, September 19, 2021. Photo by Mischa Schoemaker.

PEGGY:

Regarding processing the trauma of the Shoah, when people commemorate, they mark something that happened in the past, that happened to their ancestors. But when I think about the names, the pain and emotion I feel at the memorial is enormous. My name is Brandon, which is a Jewish-Portuguese name. I often visit the memorial. The fact that my name is there, whatever the history, from the first people who came to Suriname in 1600. I can trace a line. That sense of something tangible is still greatly needed in the Black community. That sense of giving back the names, that's such an essential thing and we can't do that. And look how important it is.

Also, those brass Stolpersteine plaques in the city's pavements – when I see them, it always reminds me. Those places in the city that recall, that give something back, they're essential. We could do the same for other groups. Put signs: this house [was built here and] that's where the money came from, or that's where people lived who fought for the freedom of enslaved people. The elements of commemoration and doing right by people, it's a deep human need. I recognize that. The most significant thing you can do for people who have been reduced to a number, or branded in slavery, is to restore what others tried to take away. Their history matters. Ultimately, that's also true for the Jewish diaspora. The only image left being: that's so and so, murdered then and then in Sobibor.²⁷²



Fig. 30. Flowers and stones placed in memory of my great-grandparents Mozes Turfrijer, Bertha Turfrijer-Lampie and my great-great-uncle Salomon Turfrijer. National Holocaust Names Memorial. May 4, 2024. Photo by my sister Sanne Schagen and my nephew Yasha Schagen.

From MUPI to Monument

An advertisement in a public space is a visible display designed to inform and persuade an audience. While many often walk past without noticing, it can suddenly intrude when the daily rhythm of urban existence is interrupted for two minutes for a solemn ceremony. Then instead of being an innocent bystander, it can become something that deliberately refuses to participate in that event. The public space, designated on May 4 as a place for a commemorative ceremony, is interrupted there by something that jars with the solemnity of that moment.

On Remembrance Day, all Dutch victims, civilian or military, who died in armed conflicts or on peace missions in the Netherlands or abroad since the start of the Second World War are remembered. The National Committee for 4 and 5 organizes a memorial service for survivors, next of kin and other guests, and a ceremony on Amsterdam's Dam Square, open to the public. Everyone in the Netherlands is invited to observe a two-minute silence at 8 o'clock, and flags may be displayed subject to certain rules.²⁷³

This section examines how the regulations for the commemorative ceremonies on May 4 affect advertisements, what advertisers regard as most important about Remembrance Day and how their expertise in persuasive messaging can be applied to design a monument. The focus is on MUPIs (from the French: *Mobilier Urbain pour l'information*, meaning urban informative fixtures), especially those that transform for a day into a monument.²⁷⁴ MUPI adverts at public transport stops were first developed by JCDecaux, a company that installs free street furniture in exchange for the right to use those objects to advertise.²⁷⁵

On May 4, 2018, three people from N=5 advertising agency noticed a poster of a scantily clad woman advertising lingerie.²⁷⁶ It seemed inappropriate on that day: while everything had come to a standstill, advertising carried on regardless.



Fig. 31. MUPI digital memorials. JCDecaux, 2019.

So in 2019, when Ocean, which supplies outdoor advertising, issued its annual challenge to agencies to develop a creative idea for a public space, instead of designing an advert, N=5 decided to use MUPIs as a space for liberation story memorials at locations where resistance actions had taken place during the Second World War.²⁷⁷ When Ocean was unable to supply the envisaged advertising spaces, N=5 decided to produce the idea anyway and pay for it themselves, incorporating 3D sound, geolocation and QR links. JCDecaux offered the use of a selection of free-standing bus shelters free of charge, for which no special permission would be required. The National Committee for 4 and 5 May gave their approval. Historian Bianca Stigter checked the various stories.

Choosing the right locations was important: eventually, ten MUPIs at key locations in the city center were selected as memorial sites, including Central Station, Dam Square and Leidseplein. An accompanying website recommended a route for people to visit the memorials.

The designers decided to employ conventional memorial tropes. Each of the displays showed the name of a resistance fighter who had been involved in an action at that site in white letters on a black background. Below, a quote introduced their story. To see the whole story, a QR code linked to a podcast developed specially for the project: an immersive podcast recorded to give

listeners a sense of being part of the wartime narrative, pointing out locations visible from the site. Each recording was told from a third-person perspective, using 3D/8D sound design to carry listeners back in time at each location. “By turning outdoor advertisements into interactive memorials, each billboard tells a different story about what happened in the war at that location. A story told at the right time, in the right place has more impact. That was the core of our strategy. We told the stories on Remembrance Day, where they happened.”²⁷⁸ “Music ensured recognizability at the start and finish of each story, adding an extra emotional dimension without overdramatizing.”²⁷⁹

“This project shows that history is never far away in Amsterdam,” commented the Amsterdam 4 and 5 May Committee program director Joost Janmaat.²⁸⁰ True to the original concept, the actual advertisements were silent, stationary images. Wreaths were placed at each of the MUPIs and pennants with Amsterdam’s emblem waved from each MUPI. For people using the MUPIs, the wreaths turned their shelter into a monument and part of a commemoration that enabled them to perform the ritual of listening to a two-minute silence in the present and stories from the past.

On May 4, 2019, the MUPIs transformed the public space. Between 4 and 9 o’clock in the evening, regular posters were replaced by commemorative panels. A key feature of a MUPI is its ability to switch, allowing the memorial to exist – in this case – for one day. Unlike the flowers laid at a permanent monument, the wreaths and pennants at each commemorative panel were gone by the end of the day. Besides the names, the stories, the silence and the wreaths, the MUPIs received an additional boost with an impromptu visit by Amsterdam’s mayor Femke Halsema – which was mentioned in numerous articles and broadcasts about the day’s events.²⁸¹ Stories collected for the event were available for the following year, to make this feature part of the May 4 commemorative program. Unfortunately, that didn’t happen.²⁸² The next year, the regular advertisements remained in place. Yet for those who experienced the MUPI memorials in 2019, the events that took place at that location during the war are now a familiar story.

It was no coincidence that Bianca Stigter was asked to check the MUPI stories. In 2005, she published *An Occupied City*, which laid the groundwork for her 2019 publication *Atlas van een bezette stad: Amsterdam 1940–1945* (Atlas of an Occupied City: Amsterdam 1940–1945). The work has been described as a monument in its own right.²⁸³ Steve McQueen used the book to create a film, also called *Occupied City*, hailed as a contemporary cinematographic monument to the city’s 60,000 victims and the resistance against the Nazis, which

premiered in Amsterdam in November 2023. Each two- to four-minute segment is the same length as the MUPI stories. As the narrator reads the historical record of what happened on a particular day in the war, the viewer is presented with images of the location 80 years later.²⁸⁴

The MUPI event, the book and the movie are all part of a trend, connecting the geography of public spaces with events in history, especially connected with the Shoah and slavery. Another example is the brass plaques in the pavement commemorating victims of the Shoah outside their former home. These are known as Stolpersteine (stumbling blocks), concrete cubes measuring 10 cm by 10 cm, topped with polished brass engraved with a single name, date of birth, and date and place of death. These plaques have been made by Gunter Demnig since 1995.²⁸⁵

At some point, two stones were lost and later replaced. When the originals were recovered, they were given to the National Holocaust Museum and are now displayed alongside the scale model of the Wall of Names Memorial. In themselves obsolete, they are now museum exhibits, showing how objects can connect commemorative rituals and museum audiences.

Another example of the way public spaces can connect with historical events is the metal slave-ship plaque, which first appeared in Utrecht in 2019.²⁸⁶ These refer not just to the victims, but to the perpetrators too, to historical events and objects relating to slavery.²⁸⁷ Amsterdam's Vrije Universiteit launched the Mapping Slavery project to connect slavery and the slave trade to local, national and regional history of Europe by mapping that history.²⁸⁸ Time will tell which markers will become permanent monuments. And it remains to be seen whether the National Slavery Museum will acquire a slave-ship plaque, giving the symbol museum status. And I wonder what will happen when commemorators find themselves mapping the same site and connecting the same location to different histories.



Fig. 32. Design for National Holocaust Names Memorial, National Holocaust Museum. Photo by Mike Bink.

Time and Trauma

In the tensions discussed here, the past is part of the present. When we talk about the Shoah, the first generation, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen are part of the here and now. This is true also of slavery, ancestors and plantations, indeed for many descendants of the enslaved, ancestors are involved in their lives. Descendants connect with their ancestors through rituals and speak with them, although not everyone agrees. As Peggy Brandon notes with regard to the King's apology.

PEGGY:

He uses meaningful words. He asks for forgiveness. It's unique in Europe. It changes the atmosphere for everyone. Yet what's happening on the islands? A lot of islanders have said: "We don't accept his apology, because it's not retroactive. It raises all kinds of cultural issues that have come down over the centuries. About how to apologize... Don't apologize to us, apologize to our ancestors! How come the King apologized without discussing it with us and the ancestors? People in Europe don't understand these things at all, because for them it's all about now."²⁸⁹

Video portraits of commemorations reveal the difference between first generations and their forebears. A video of a recent Remembrance Day shows the second and third generations in the foreground with the first generation in the background.²⁹⁰ Video testimony of the slavery ceremony shows something different: ancestors and descendants appear side by side.

Rudie (Samuel) Cortissos, survivor of the Shoah appears together with his grandson Yinon Cortissos. In this video portrait Yinon Cortissos relates:

My grandfather lost 63 members of his family in the Holocaust. They were gassed in Sobibor and Auschwitz. This still affects his life 75 years later. He gives talks in schools to help today's generation understand the importance of commemorating. Mass murder must never happen again.²⁹¹

Peggy Wijntuin launched Slavernij Monument Rotterdam and has researched Rotterdam's slaving and colonial past. Her great-grandmother, known as Krotu Ma²⁹² by her grandchildren, was enslaved in Suriname when slavery was abolished on July 1, 1863.

In this video portrait she recalls:

When I think about that [slavery], I often think of Krotu Ma. Krotu Ma was the person who raised my mother. My mother's stories gave me an impression that she was a woman who never bowed her head. She went into the battle with her head held high. It's quite something to be released from chains. That broken symbol is the legacy she left to my mother. Ketu Koti. She passed that on to my mother. She taught my mother to have big and grand dreams. The Dutch word for history – *geschiedenis* – splits into three words: *geschied en is*: it was once and it is now. The past is in the present.



Fig. 33. Rudie Cortissos with grandson Yinon Cortissos at National Remembrance Day, May 4, 2020, on Dam Square from: NOS Nationale Herdenking 2020 (04 May 2020) Dam. <https://youtu.be/wT9aBclrB2w?t=4109>. Copyright: NOS.



Fig. 34. Peggy Wijntuin beside a photo of her mother, Juliana Jozephina Wijntuin. July 1, 2020. "Slavernijverleden zie je nu terug in Black Lives Matter-demonstraties". Still from NOS.nl (30 June 2020) <https://nos.nl/l/2339093>. Copyright: NOS.³⁰⁹

A key ritual at commemorations is the two-minute silence. This can affect our perception of time. It enables the past to enter the present, even the future. Indeed, time itself comes to a halt. Yet those who still bear the scars may experience time differently than those who take part out of solidarity. In 2017, a new app for Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel, where air raid sirens sound during the two-minute silence, offered users a choice to stand in silence in real time or to sound the siren at a more convenient time, allowing users to perform the ritual partially: in action but not in time.²⁹³

For a historian, heritage professional and commemorator, time can be puzzling. Interdisciplinary fields, especially the increasingly influential field of memory studies, have emerged to examine how we understand time, history and memory. Historical theorist Berber Bevernage addresses the way victims perceive time. He argues against "the self-evidence of modernity's claim to be able to accomplish and constantly renew a radical and clear break with the past in order to start from the ground up to create a new present or new time. Every attempt to produce such a clear break with the past and a new beginning will be frustrated by the reality of the historical process that resists being frozen and always contains delays, survivals, and unfinished projects."²⁹⁴ Bevernage explains that victims of historical injustice often describe the past as being stuck in the present, that it has become a haunting presence, a claim that needs to be taken seriously, literally even, rather than metaphorically.²⁹⁵

Aleida Assmann describes this as “a present that is being challenged by a past that doesn’t go away.” She argues that “we have come to believe that remembering is something culturally valid and that there is even an ethical imperative of remembering.”²⁹⁶ Some events are impossible to forget, no matter how hard an individual, a nation, or the world may try.

Chris Lorenz argues that “the neat distinction between history and memory cannot be upheld because the phenomenon of ‘hot,’ ‘post-traumatic,’ ‘catastrophic’ and ‘haunted’ history poses a fundamental problem to the very idea of the past as an object of a discipline. This is the case because history as a discipline presupposes that the ‘hot’ present transforms into a ‘cold’ past by a growing distance in time. ... The past as the object of history as a discipline can only exist as long as it is ‘disciplined’ – and thus as long as the dead refrain from haunting the living. As Michael Ignatieff rightly observed, ‘historical’ time is conceived of as the very opposite of the ‘time of revenge’ – and thus also of ‘legal’ time – which is essentially a time conception that conceives of the past and the present as one whole and thus as more or less simultaneous.”²⁹⁷

Lorenz proposes that “the time of disciplinary history must really ‘progress’ in order to be able to ‘produce’ the ‘surplus value’ of historical knowledge. But what if there is no longer a growing, productive and erasing ‘distance in time’ and no experience of ‘progress’ in time? What if there is no clear *ex post* as a vantage point from which the past can be conceived of as distinct and as distant from the present? What if the past refuses to be ‘erased’ and to ‘go away’? What if the past and the future remain stuck *in* the present – and thus remain more or less present and simultaneous – as increasingly appears to be the case since the end of the Cold War?”

Lorenz argues “that fundamental controversial parts of the past – that since 1990 have been labelled as ‘catastrophic,’ ‘post-traumatic,’ ‘terroristic’ and ‘haunting’ – are overstressing the normal ‘historical’ concept of ‘the past.’” Lorenz argues that “the recent ‘hot’ condition of important parts of the past can best be explained by a fundamental change in the experience of time. The dominant time conception has changed from a linear, irreversible and progressivist time conception to a non-linear, reversible and non-progressivist one.”²⁹⁸ “The non-linear time conception allows us to think of a temporal simultaneity and coexistence of past, present and future – as linear time does – but instead regards them as mutually interpenetrating, meaning that the past can live on in the present just as the future can be present in the present.”²⁹⁹

Perhaps “traumatized” time is a better way of describing the impact of irreparable historical wrongs on temporal awareness, as distinct from “legal”

time, which implies that the past can become “cold” after revenge is taken and the case is closed. Wounds don’t heal in legal time, they continue to fester, leaving the living “stuck in time.” Trauma is indeed closer to the non-linear concept of time, yet traumatized time is not widely used and the term legal time is preferred. Wounds left by evil crimes demand a different perspective on history, one that connects evil and humanity.

David Scott referred in a recent lecture on “New World Slavery as Irreparable Evil” to the reorientation of ideas about New World slavery towards a moral and reparatory history.³⁰⁰ Moral history, Scott argued, is today’s history of past evils, of wrongdoings that involved a deliberate and systematic violation of our common humanity.³⁰¹ The form of moral history that interests Scott is reparatory history: the instantiation of the moral history of those irreparable historical evils that have disfigured successive generations and which demand a just response. Scott uses the concept of evil as a moral idiom to convey the depth of morally significant injury. He defines evil as an inexcusable action that destroys moral life and the fabric of moral relations. In the case of New World slavery, it is a systemic wrong, deliberately institutionalized, and inflicting harm on successive political generations.³⁰² Scott argues that a moral and reparatory history does not presuppose moral improvement. On the contrary, it tries to attune itself to the uncomfortable thought that a loss, damage, injury or failure may be permanent and irreparable. A past that is reconciled in the present but leaves a scar that never properly heals.³⁰³ It haunts the present.

Scott shows that irreparable wrongs require a reorientation of past, present and future. His concepts of an irreparable past and present-day wounds are key to understanding the inherent tension in commemorative practices. So too is, as Bevernage and Lorenz explain, the impact of trauma on the experience of time. This awareness does not necessarily imply a willingness to agree that it may engender a common belief in humanity going forward. In my conversations with heritage professionals, many imagine a linear progression from a traumatic event to the acceptance of responsibility, caring and healing. But that’s not how life works. Not for historians, for heritage professionals and especially not for people bearing the scars of an irreparable historical wrong.

Trauma

Machiel Keestra recently launched a study on time and trauma.³⁰⁴ It aims “to discuss whether the rich body of research in trauma and traumatization in

Holocaust survivors and their descendants yields relevant insights for post-slavery contexts. It has been shown that children of Holocaust survivors suffer from stress and other symptoms related to their parents' traumatization which influence their interactions with their environments. Such results made [Keestra] wonder whether the traumatic impact of chattel slavery – which has been abolished some 160 years ago – might have a similar impact, even now across several generations. Issues of the transmission and current persistence of trauma are inherently linked to questions of social justice, recognition and reparations.”³⁰⁵ Gert Oostindie points out that slavery is ubiquitous in human history and that it is difficult to demonstrate empirically that the impact of transatlantic slavery has been passed on as intergenerational trauma.³⁰⁶ The problem of racism and discrimination today should not be minimized, says Oostindie, but may have multiple causes and cannot be traced solely and exclusively to transatlantic slavery.³⁰⁷

Museums can play a role in addressing the causes of racism while presenting the history and enduring effect of slavery. Bogues notes that when planning it's *Our Colonial Inheritance* presentation, Amsterdam Wereldmuseum made “a curatorial decision ... to understand racism as a consequence of colonialism, and not so much as a foundational feature that did not end with political decolonization.”³⁰⁸

Considering racism and antisemitism in a wider temporal context beyond colonialism and the Shoah, it is clear that intergenerational trauma is caused primarily by the effects of irreparable evils. These continue to harm successive generations, with past, present and future compressed into a non-linear concept of time, and racism and antisemitism forming two constant factors.

Epilogue

I don't believe that I'm ready for the future – a future I have sometimes dared to imagine, in which commemorations are only about naming and remembering murdered family members, where inherited wounds are healed and not continually reopened. A future without tension because there is no reason for tension to exist. We often say that a sense of a shared past is necessary for a shared future. Yet no one describes that vision, possibly assuming that everyone nurses the same idea. But what if that shared future is no different from our shared past? Or if that future is the opposite of that past? What role will the past play in that future? What if that future goes a step further than the past, with time guiding us from trauma to caring and healing? As the previous section on time and trauma explains, the future is part of the past and the present.

As a heritage professional, when I notice an issue that jars with my view of the present, I ask questions. It's part of the process of re-imagining the present. My aim is not to prepare for a better future, but to make today's pain bearable. I like to think that heritage professionals can help achieve this. And with that in mind I have put together some suggestions based on what I have heard, seen and felt while working in this field. The results of this study do not make pleasant reading; there is little cause for hope, and that is sad. The study has confirmed my impression that tension exists between commemorative practices of the Shoah and slavery. This is evidently linked to a lack of recognition by Dutch society at large, of irreparable historical wrongs and their continuing impact, to a lack of understanding by the Dutch governments that acknowledgement requires more than just apology.

The tensions are palpable in the ritualistic commemorative speeches, particularly those that appeal to the government or those made by politicians and plenipotentiaries. Tension is also evident in art connected with commemorative practices, especially when museums have to choose to acquire or ignore a work. Tensions are not inherent to religious ritual, to the laying of a stone or a Winti libation, for example; they emerge when a decision is made about who is included in the ritual. Tensions emerge when civic rituals are broadcast: which commemorations deserve to be broadcast, and which commemorators should

appear before, after or in the broadcast? Peripheral to commemorative practice, tension is also evident when a participant can only comment on condition of anonymity, as it was here initially. In addition, tension is also evident when commemoration is seen as part of a healing process, of an attempt to move on.

Someone once said, “You asked so many questions, what do *you* think?”³¹⁰ Well, I think the time to talk about caring and healing has yet to arrive. To imagine that given time everything will be fine, is wishful thinking. I don’t think it’s true – not while the main participants in an age burdened by irreparable historical wrongs are bystanders and implicated subjects. Like Hollandsche Schouwburg’s neighbors who are happy to live next door to a site commemorating the past, as long as it’s done quietly. Not while antisemitism and racism have become part of our everyday lives. Not when politics prevents scars from healing. For now, there is little left to say, and no questions to ask. Except one. Could you try not to be indifferent?

Recommendations for Heritage Professionals

'You have to believe that reality can be better, that you can educate, that you can do something better than [others have done in] the past.'

LIBESKIND

These recommendations for heritage professionals currently or aspiring to work in the field of commemorative practice relating to the Shoah and slavery are based on the results of Disturbing Tensions.

Consider permission to commemorate as an acknowledgement of citizenship, reflecting the value attached to particular commemorative practices and the emotion that accompanies them.

Commemoration is as much about now as it is about then: indeed, then and now are not experienced linearly when a commemorative practice involves trauma.

Realise that when making history part of a commemorative practice, past, present and future operate differently if that history involves unhealed wounds.

Realise that implicated subjects are here in the present as much as they were in the past.

Solidarity involves a hierarchical relationship.

Multidirectional memory is a laborious and sometimes painful, often unconscious process.

Recognise that a positive outcome is not necessarily unequivocal.

When discussing the past, remember it is shared, although not everyone experiences it as such.

When discussing the future, remember there is no shared image of a common future.

When discussing the present, remember a sense of togetherness is often incorrectly assumed.

Note that interventions at commemorative practices can cause harm, and that trauma is present throughout the year.

Note that commemorative practice is not the natural task of a museum and that a museum's role should be subject to scrutiny.

indifferent

Notes

- 1 Original Dutch: “De Holocaust is slechts een cover-up voor domme schapen. ... De behandeling van de concentratiekampen is slechts een lachertje vergeleken bij onze slavenhandel, mensen vergassen snap ik dat is ook zielig, maar je moet je voor de grap eens verdiepen in marteltechnieken.” From *Zwarte Bladzijde* by Darryl Danchelo Osenga (Insayno), 2012. On Osenga’s appointment as poet laureate see: Ismaël de Bruijn, “Nieuwe stadsdichter Haarlem bagatelliseert Holocaust,” September 25, 2020, <https://haarlem105.nl/nieuwe-stadsdichter-haarlem-bagatelliseert-holocaust/#:~:text=Het%20Centrum%20Informatie%20en%20Documentatie,rapper%20onder%20de%20artiestennaam%20Insayno>. Osenga’s recording of *Zwarte Bladzijde* is available at: <https://soundcloud.com/niels-anzalone/insayno-zwarte-bladzijde-1>.
- 2 “Verklaring van het college van Haarlem,” *Haarlem updates*, September 25, 2020, <https://www.haarlemupdates.nl/2020/09/25/verklaring-van-het-college-van-haarlem-over-stadsdichter-darryl-danchelo-osenga/>.
- 3 This research project is co-funded by the Amsterdam University of the Arts and SIA-NWO. Project number: HBOPD.2018.05.02.
- 4 Jaffe-Schagen, “A justice memory.”
- 5 Dibbits, “Bringing in History.”
- 6 Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, *Erfgoed van betekenissen*.
- 7 Dibbits, “Bringing in History.”
- 8 KNAW, *Unstable Pedestals*.
- 9 KNAW, *Unstable Pedestals*.
- 10 KNAW, *Unstable Pedestals*.
- 11 KNAW, *Unstable Pedestals*.
- 12 Het Koninklijk Huis, *Golden Coach* exhibition DutchCulture: “Toelichting van Koning Willem-Alexander.”
- 13 Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, *Erfgoed om bij stil te staan*.
- 14 Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, *Erfgoed om bij stil te staan*.
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- 16 Research Group Cultural Heritage, Reinwardt Academy.
- 17 Reinwardt Academy, Internal Annual report 2022.
- 18 Jaffe-Schagen, “The Commemoration Professional.”
- 19 Even if exceptions exist, such as Smith (2004), Waterton and Smith (2010) and (Barthel-Bouchier 2014) quoted in Hølleland, Skrede, “What’s Wrong with Heritage Experts?”
- 20 Jaffe-Schagen, “The Commemoration Professional.”
- 21 “Master Applied Museum and Heritage Studies,” Reinwardt Academy.
- 22 Harris, ed., *Ways of Knowing*.
- 23 Harris, ed., *Ways of Knowing*, 4.
- 24 Jaffe-Schagen, “Long Shot?”
- 25 Van Mensch, “Looking for a rationale behind museum practice,” 121.
- 26 Fraser, “Rethinking recognition”; Fraser, “Recognition without Ethics?”
- 27 Smith, “Discourses of Heritage”; Smith and Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology*; Waterton and Smith, “The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage.”
- 28 De Vries, “The Emotional Impact of 4th May Commemoration.”
- 29 Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen
- 30 Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen
- 31 Wayne Modest, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen. Email from Wayne Modest to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, February 15, March 10, March 31, 2025.
- 32 Wayne Modest, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen. Email from Wayne Modest to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, February 15, March 10, March 31, 2025.
- 33 Wayne Modest, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen. Email from Wayne Modest to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, February 15, March 10, March 31, 2025.
- 34 Wayne Modest, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen. Email from Wayne Modest to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, February 15, March 10, March 31, 2025.
- 35 For a discussion on whether Elieser was ever enslaved or not see: Stoutjesdijk, “Judaism, Slavery and Commemorative Ritual in the Netherlands.”
- 36 Perez Jong Loy, one of the most passionate fighters against racism in the Netherlands in the twenty-first century, was also the driving force behind the annual Elieser commemoration.

- See: “Fotoverslag Dag van Elieser,” Nationaal Instituut Nederlands Slavernijverleden en Erfenis.
- 37 Annemarie, email correspondence with Judy Jaffe-Schagen; Annemarie de Wildt, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen; Annemarie, email correspondence with Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
- 38 Annemarie de Wildt, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
- 39 Soedirgo and Glas, “Toward Active Reflexivity.”
- 40 “On positionality.”
- 41 Low, “Why Public Space Matters.”
- 42 Jaffe-Schagen, “Hierarchization of Tabooed Topics.”
- 43 Jaffe-Schagen, “Long Shot?”
- 44 Soedirgo and Glas, “Toward Active Reflexivity.”
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- 60 Eline Jongsma and Kel O’Neill, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
- 61 Eline Jongsma and Kel O’Neill, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
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- 67 Stigter, *Atlas van Een Bezzette Stad*; “Home,” Mapping Slavery.
- 68 Research Group Cultural Heritage, Reinwardt Academy.
- 69 See for more on the Knowledge Mile: Van Winden, Hagemans, and Van Hemert, “The Street-Wise University,” 229.
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- 72 Original Dutch: “Maar nu ik weet dat het nog niet bestaat / ga ik het zelf maar maken; als het klaar is / plaats ik het aan het eind van elke straat / en tegen enen aan het einde van mijn bed.”
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- 79 Esajas, “Dodenherdenking: Wat Is Een Herdenking Waard?”
- 80 “TBA x Lush.”
- 81 Esajas, “Jessica de Abreu, and the Public Recognition of the Dutch Role in Slavery.”
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- 91 Jaffe-Schagen, “On positionality.”
- 92 Palmer, “The Battle over the Memory of the Spanish Civil War.”
- 93 The Wheel of Restoration.
- 94 Anstett, 2019.
- 95 Bogues, 2010: 1, 18.
- 96 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 206, 223.
- 97 Bogues (2010).
- 98 Asmann (2014a).
- 99 Asmann (2014a).
- 100 See Bogues.
- 101 Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
- 102 Schrijver, “Overheid, Wacht Niet Langer Met Excuus Voor Slavernij.”
- 103 Emile Schrijver, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
- 104 Horsti, “Curating Objects from the European Border Zone.”
- 105 Jaffe-Schagen, “A stirring match: Commemoration practices and football supporters.”
- 106 Hudson, *Museums for the 1980s: A Survey of World Trends*, 7.
- 107 “Our Colonial Inheritance.”
- 108 “Prologue to a Nation,” by Bibi Fadlalla.
- 109 Koops, “Historische Ketikoti: Amsterdam Maakt Excuses Voor Slavernijverleden.”
- 110 Protschky, “Our Colonial Inheritance at the Wereldmuseum.”
- 111 Jaffe-Schagen, “On positionality.”
- 112 Wayne Modest, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen. Email from Wayne Modest to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, February 15, March 10, March 31, 2025.
- 113 Modest, “An Unfinished Conversation with Rolando Vazquez,” 150.
- 114 Modest and Flores, “Epilogue: An Unfinished Conversation with Gloria Wekker,” 362.
- 115 Wayne Modest, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen. Email from Wayne Modest to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, February 15, March 10, March 31, 2025.
- 116 Regarding these ribbons, see: “Kransen en Bloemen.”
- 117 The King apologised at the memorial for Dutch victims of the Second World War and subsequent armed conflicts in Amsterdam on May 4, 2020. It was the first time a reigning monarch had spoken at the annual event on Dam Square. It was also the first time a monarch had apologised to Jewish victims of the Shoah. “Fellow human beings felt abandoned, insufficiently heard, insufficiently supported, [not] even with words ... by my great-grandmother in London, despite her steadfast resistance. It’s something I can never forget.” (Koninklijkhuus, 2020; Liphshiz, 2020); “Koning biedt excuses aan voor slavernijverleden.”
- 118 Speech by King Willem-Alexander at the commemoration of the role of the Netherlands in the history of slavery.
- 119 Nationaal Instituut Nederlands Slavernijverleden en Erfenis via LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ninsee_koninklijkpaar-symbool-geschiedenis-activiteit-7178777559000616960-27VP/?originalSubdomain=nl.
- 120 See: Archangel, “Ribbons used during the King’s Apology for Slavery in 2023,” in *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 72 (2024) no. 4, 380-381.
- 121 Ketikoti means “breaking the chains.” I would like to thank Floris Kruidenberg for sharing his research and insights on the Ketikoti Dialogue Table.
- 122 Zandwijken and Keestra (n.d.) in: Floris Kruidenberg, “The Ketikoti Dialogue Table,” unpublished MA thesis, RWA.
- 123 About, Ketikoti Tafel.
- 124 Jaffe-Schagen, “On positionality.”
- 125 Post June 30, 2019.
- 126 Breure, “Zwarte Pijn en Wit Onbegrip.”
- 127 Annemarie de Wildt, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen; Jaffe-Schagen, “Hierarchization of Tabooed Topics.”
- 128 In 2019, Amsterdam Museum stopped using the term Golden Age with reference to the seventeenth century, stating in a press release that “every generation must be able to form its own story about history: the dialogue about that needs space, the term Golden Age limits that space.” See Dafoe, “The Amsterdam Museum Drops the Term Golden Age.”
- 129 Annemarie de Wildt, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
- 130 Annemarie de Wildt, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
- 131 Mak, “2.1. Amsterdam as The Compleat Citie,” 36.
- 132 My Town, 2012-2016.
- 133 Annemarie de Wildt, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.

134 “Het Slavernijverleden van Amsterdam.”
 135 “Glazen Koets,” “Videoboodschap Koning over
 besluit gebruik Gouden Koets.”
 136 Amsterdam Museum, Facebook page. “Nationale
 Ketí Koti Tafel, 2021.”
 137 Terpstra and Bentvelsen, “In gesprek aan de
 Ketí Koti Tafel.”
 138 Jaffe-Schagen, “On positionality.”
 139 See <http://hdl.handle.net/11259/assets.190168>.
 140 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 23.
 141 Du Bois, *The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto*, 14–15.
 142 The Ghetto Heroes Monument was designed
 by Natan Rappaport and architect Leon Marek
 Suzin and unveiled in 1948. Marcuse (2010)
 notes that the Communist Party Arts Commit-
 tee rejected the first design as “too narrow in
 conception, too nationalistic,” i.e., too Jewish.
 143 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 116; cites Du
 Bois, *The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto*.
 144 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 116; cites
 Du Bois, *The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto*:
 “The race problem in which I was interested cut
 across lines of colour and physique and belief
 and status and was a matter of cultural pat-
 terns, perverted teaching and human hate and
 prejudice, which reached all sorts of people and
 caused endless evil to all men.”
 145 Rothberg, “From Gaza to Warsaw,” 528.
 146 Young, “Beyond the Color Line.”
 147 Gideon Querido van Frank, *Hoe links ook de
 Joden treft in de strijd tegen wit privilege*, June 8,
 2021. “Opnieuw relevant” was added above the
 article on the website in red on August 23, 2024.
 Van Frank, “Hoe links ook de Joden treft.”
 148 Joods Historisch Museum, “Bevoorrecht of
 benadeeld.”
 149 “Koning opent in het Rijksmuseum de eerste
 grote tentoonstelling over slavernijverleden van
 Nederland.”
 150 Opening Tentoonstelling *De Gouden Koets*.
 151 Takken, “Joden zijn wit als het de ander uit-
 komt.”
 152 “Wat Is Joods?”
 153 See for a fragment of the video installation:
 ‘Zijn Joden Wit?’
 154 Emile Schrijver, email correspondence, January
 15, 2025.
 155 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *New York Times*, 2020.
 156 “Wat Is Joods?”; see also Wekker, *White inno-
 cence: paradoxes of colonialism and race* (2016).
 157 Gloria Wekker, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen.
 158 Gloria Wekker, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen.
 159 Emile Schrijver, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen.
 160 Assmann, “The Holocaust - a Global Memory?”
 161 Modest and Lelijveld, *Words Matter*.
 162 Microbiologist and author Rosanne Hertzberger
 was elected to the Dutch parliament for Pieter
 Omtzigt’s New Social Contract party in 2023.
 163 Rosanne Hertzberger: 5 Mei-Lezing 2019.
 164 Wertheim, “OVT: Slachtofferschap.”

165 Wertheim, “OVT: Slachtofferschap.”
 166 Younes Saramifar, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 167 Peggy Brandon, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen.
 168 Peggy Brandon, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen.
 169 Peggy Brandon, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen.
 170 Peggy Brandon, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen.
 171 Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 172 Bogues, “The human: An alternative ground for
 development.”
 173 Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 174 Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 175 Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*; Knittel and
 Forchieri, ‘Navigating Implication: An Interview
 with Michael Rothberg’
 176 Paul van Tongeren (2020).
 177 Sophie van den Bergh, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 178 Sophie van den Bergh, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 179 Joandi Hartendorp, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 180 Wayne Modest, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen. Email from Wayne Modest to Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen, February 15, March 10, March 31,
 2025, June 6, 2025.
 181 Wayne Modest, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen. Email from Wayne Modest to Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen, February 15, March 10, March 31,
 2025, June 6, 2025.
 182 The Tree of Souls is a variation on the Tree of
 Life in the Bible. The Tree of Life, a fig tree,
 is one of three trees mentioned in the biblical
 description of Paradise.
 183 Jaffe-Schagen, “Hierarchization of Tabooed
 Topics.”
 184 Stadscuratorium Amsterdam, Aanvraag /
 Advies, 2022.
 185 Actueel: Erfgoedarena.
 186 “Voorzet, praatje erfgoedarena 10 mei 2023,”
 translated from Dutch by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
 187 Collectie Nederland: Musea, Monumenten En
 Archeologie.
 188 Rijken, “Documentaire over de joden.”
 189 On the lost transport see: Lattek, “Bergen-
 Belsen: From Privileged Camp to Death Camp.”
 190 National Holocaust Museum Passes History on
 to Future Generations.
 191 Europees Erfgoedlabel.
 192 J. C. Ammanschool.
 193 Internal teams memo from Nel van Dijk,
 Reinwardt Academie director, May 4, 2023.
 194 Dieuwertje Blok: Toespraak Op de Dam.
 195 Gigengack, “Positionaliteit in Kwalitatief
 Onderzoek.”

196 See also [https://www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/lector-
 aat-cultureel-erfgoed/projecten/project/2021/
 precaire-spanning/](https://www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/lector-aat-cultureel-erfgoed/projecten/project/2021/precaire-spanning/)
 197 Schrijver, “Opinie.”
 198 Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 199 With thanks to Paul Arieese.
 200 With thanks to Susan Legêne.
 201 Schrijver, “Opinie.”
 202 Erfgoedarena: Herdenken in de Huidige Tijd.
 203 The evening was recorded and can be watched
 on Erfgoedarena: Herdenken in de Huidige Tijd
 (May 10, 2023).
 204 See also: Oy Vey, Radically Inclusive Jewish
 Culture. www.oyvey.nl/en/.
 205 Text by Benjamin Fro, translated for his book by
 Sam Herman.
 206 Emile Schrijver, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen.
 207 May 4 and 5.
 208 Emancipation Day.
 209 The National Committee for 4 and 5 May.
 210 [https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/contact/contact-
 gids/herdenkingscomite-slavernijverleden](https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/contact/contact-gids/herdenkingscomite-slavernijverleden)
 211 Holocaust Remembrance Day.
 212 Rutte, “Toespraak van Minister-President Mark
 Rutte Bij de Nationale Holocaust Herdenking.”
 213 Excuses Rutte: Overheid Schoot Tekort Tijdens
 de Holocaust.
 214 Excuses Voor Het Slavernijverleden: (Waarom)
 Moeten We Dat Willen?
 215 Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 216 Grunberg, “Nee.”
 217 Toespraak van Koning Willem-Alexander.
 218 [https://4en5meiamsterdam.nl/sobibor-
 begon-in-het-vondelpark/](https://4en5meiamsterdam.nl/sobibor-begon-in-het-vondelpark/).
 219 Van Iperen, “4 mei-lezing 2021.”
 220 Amara van der Elst: Spoken Word. 4en5mei;
 “Amara van der Elst: Spoken Word-Voordracht.”
 221 André van Duin: Toespraak Op de Dam.
 222 Wat Niet Mag.
 223 “Toespraak Op de Dam,” Femke Halsema.
 224 “Mens en medemens: 4 mei-voordracht van
 Marcel Möring. Uitgesproken tijdens de Natio-
 nale Herdenking 2023.” [https://www.4en5mei.nl/
 archieven/inspiratie/mens-en-medemens](https://www.4en5mei.nl/archieven/inspiratie/mens-en-medemens).
 225 Dieuwertje Blok, “Toespraak Op de Dam.”
 226 Femke Halsema: Toespraak op de Dam: Uitge-
 sproken tijdens de Nationale Herdenking 2024.
 227 De Verloren Oorlog.
 228 “Jom Hasjoa,” speech, 2024.
 229 Ketí Kotí Treedt Toe Tot Canonnetwerk.
 230 Ketí Kotí 2020: Speech Linda Nooitmeer.
 231 This was the slavery commemoration without an
 audience and without an apology.
 232 Typhoon, “Wees Moedig in je Ongemak.” See
 also, in Dutch: [https://www.youtube.com/
 watch?v=IYSCIIh9fok](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYSCIIh9fok)
 233 “Speech Apologies Slavery,” by Amsterdam
 mayor Femke Halsema.
 234 The letters on the branding iron, contrary to

what Ollongren states, read GWC, not WIC.
 235 Kajsa, “Speech by Kajsa Ollongren.”
 236 <https://4en5meiamsterdam.nl/bord-vondelpark/>.
 237 Speech by Minister Franc Weerwind at the Ketí
 Kotí slavery memorial, July 1, 2022.
 238 Knot, “Ketí Kotí 2022.”
 239 “19 December Als Datum Voor Slavernij-Excus
 Vooral Praktisch.”
 240 “Toespraak van minister president Mark Rutte
 over Het Slavernijverleden.”
 241 Speech by Linda Nooitmeer.
 242 “Toespraak van Koning Willem-Alexander
 tijdens de Nationale Herdenking Slavernijverle-
 den” (Speech by King Willem-Alexander during
 the National Historical Slavery Memorial Day).
 243 Gons, *Wie zijn we morgen*.
 244 Speech by Minister Robbert Dijkgraaf at the
 2024 National Slavery Memorial Day Ceremony.
 245 Speech by Femke Halsema, Oosterpark, Amster-
 dam July 1, 2024.
 246 Eveline Sint Nicolaas writes in the chapter
 Dutch Colonial Slavery: p. 44. “In Africa the
 brand of the trading company had been burned
 into their body.” No reference to a source for
 this information is made, only to the photo of
 the branding iron.
 247 Eveline Sint Nicolaas writes in the chapter
 Dutch Colonial Slavery p. 44.
 248 Sint Nicolaas, email correspondence, January 8,
 2025
 249 Cheyenne Zwagerman De Nationale
 Numismatische Collectie (NNC) e-mail
 correspondence December 19, 2024.
 250 “Toespraak Nationale Herdenking Slavernij-
 verleden,” July 1, 2024.
 251 Gons, *Wie zijn we morgen*. Babs Gons Draagt
 Gedicht Voor Tijdens Ketí Kotí. Babs Gons was
 appointed Dichter des Vaderlands on September
 24, 2024 in Utrecht. This poem dates from start
 of Slavery Memorial Year, in 2023.
 252 Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 253 Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 254 Patrick Meershhoek, interviewed by Judy
 Jaffe-Schagen.
 255 Petitie.
 256 Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden.
 257 Takken, “Aftredende Bewindslieden.”
 258 Kabra Blauw.
 259 For a video of the event see “Marian Markelo
 zegent Kabra Blauw pronkobject in”: “Kabra
 Blauw – Boris van Berkum.”
 260 Ianthé Sahadat and Sterre Lindhout, “Omdat
 winti onlosmakelijk verbonden is met verzet
 tegen slavernij en onderdrukking.”
 261 “Kabra Blauw zoutvaatje is hét aandenken van
 het herdenkingsjaar slavernijverleden.”
 262 Yares, “The Material Inventories of Millennial
 Jewish Lives.”
 263 Emile Schrijver, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-
 Schagen.

264 Emile Schrijver, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.

265 “Ieder van hen was iemand. En vandaag krijgen zij hun naam terug”: Toespraak Minister-President Rutte Bij Opening Holocaust Namenmonument.

266 Van der Starre, “LEZECHER,” NPO2, September 19, 2021.

267 Van der Starre, “LEZECHER,” September 19, 2021.

268 Wiegman, “Namenmonument.” Unveiling of the Wall of Names. See for more data on the arguments of the opposition: Contested Histories, “Libeskind Lebovic, ‘Dutch Holocaust Survivor, Memorial Founder Jacques Grishaver to Address UN’.

270 Unveiling of the National Holocaust Names Memorial.

271 See for more data on the arguments of the opposition: Contested Histories, “Libeskind Memorial in Amsterdam, Netherlands.”

272 Peggy Brandon, Interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.

273 Remembrance Day.

274 Partly based on preliminary, unpublished research by Marit van Dijk, August 31, 2022.

275 Abris & Mupis and ADCN, “Memorials of Amsterdam.”

276 Jesse Moes, Tom Rentmeester and Marlou Wirken.

277 Unpublished notes on conversation with Marit van Dijk and with N=5’s Jesse Moes. 2022.

278 Memorials of Amsterdam.

279 National Committee for 4 and 5 May, “Vrijheidsverhalen”; “Monumentale Digitale Mupi’s in Amsterdam.”

280 Liberation Stories is an N=5 advertising agency initiative involving JCDecaux, Egotribe, Big Orange, Kinetic, Bewegend Beeld, Anko Stoffels Fotografie and Koolhoven & Partners. It was developed jointly with Amsterdam’s Committee for 4 and 5 May, and Stichting Memorial voor Damslachtoffers 7 mei 1945; see also: “Digitale abri’s veranderen in herdenkingsmonument,” “Tijdens 4 mei oorlogsverhalen op digitale abri’s in Amsterdam.”

281 ADCN, “Memorials of Amsterdam.”

282 But in England in 2022 Jcdeaux marks Mupi’s Holocaust Memorial Day: “UK Marks Holocaust Memorial Day 2022 With A National Moment.”

283 Stigter, *Atlas van Een Bezette Stad*.

284 Steve McQueen and Bianca Stigter on Occupied City; Jones, “This Was the Most Feared Address in Amsterdam”; Lovink, “Review of Steve McQueen’s Occupied City.”

285 Home: Struikelstenen.

286 Van Hengel, “Kleine Slavernijmonumenten.”

287 These plaques are designed and placed by the Mapping Slavery workgroup involving Vrije Universiteit, NiNsee and Kosmopolis e.a.; Van Hengel, “Kleine Slavernijmonumenten.”

288 Mapping Slavery.

289 Peggy Brandon, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.

290 Hogervorst, “Herdenken Voor de Toekomst.”

291 NOS Nationale Herdenking 2020 Dam (04 May 2020) Dam. <https://youtu.be/wT9aBclrB-2w?t=4109>.

292 Peggy Wijntuin uses the spelling *Krotu Ma*, while the NOS uses *Krotmoe Ma*.

293 Leichman, “Standing Still.”

294 Bevernage, “Time, Presence, and Historical Injustice.”

295 Bevernage, “Writing the Past Out of the Present.”

296 Aleida Assmann.

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298 Lorenz, “Blurred Lines. History, Memory and the Experience of Time,” 46.

299 Lorenz, “Blurred Lines. History, Memory and the Experience of Time,” 46.

300 *David Scott*, Amsterdam Tropenmuseum, November 1, 2018.

301 *David Scott*, Amsterdam Tropenmuseum, November 1, 2018.

302 See Grimaldi, “The Idea of a Moral and Reparatory History of New World Slavery.”

303 See: Bogues, *Empire of Liberty: Power, Desire, and Freedom*, 39–41, who argues that certain historical events produce wounds that are repeated over time in communal flashbacks and collective memory.

304 Kestra is a philosopher, co-founder of the Ket i Kot i Dialogue Table, and Central Diversity Officer at the University of Amsterdam.

305 Kestra, “Transgenerational Trauma and Worlded Brains.”

306 Oostindie, “Het Trans-Atlantische Slavernij-verleden en Hedendaags Racisme.”

307 Oostindie, “Het Trans-Atlantische Slavernij-verleden en Hedendaags Racisme.”

308 Bogues, ‘The Matter of Race’, Our Colonial Inheritance, Wereldmuseum, Amsterdam.

309 “Slavernijverleden zie je nu terug in Black Lives Matter-demonstraties,” NOS.nl, June 30, 2020, <https://nos.nl/1/2339093>.

310 Paul Aries, conversation with Judy Jaffe-Schagen, August 29, 2024.

311 See <http://hdl.handle.net/11259/assets.190168>.

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INTERVIEWS

- Sophie van den Bergh, National May 4 and 5 Committee, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen, Amsterdam, August 2, 2022.
- Peggy Brandon, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen via Teams, November 13, 2023.
- Joandi Hartendorp, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen via Teams, November 16, 2023.
- Eline Jongsma and Kel O’Neill (Jongsma and O’Neill), interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen via Teams, November 30, 2022.
- Patrick Meershoek, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen via Teams, July 20, 2022.
- Wayne Modest, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen in Amsterdam, August 2, 2022.
- Linda Nooitmeer, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen online via Teams, August 3, 2022.
- Younes Saramifar, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen at Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, July 21, 2022.
- Emile Schrijver, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen at Jewish Museum, Amsterdam, March 21, 2022.
- Gloria Wekker, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen via Teams, March 2, 2022.
- Annemarie de Wildt, interviewed by Judy Jaffe-Schagen at Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam, July 21, 2021.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

- Internal Teams message from Nel van Dijk, Reinwardt Academy, May 4, 2023.
- Email from Peggy Brandon to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, January 10, 2025.
- Email from Marit van Dijk to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, April 6, 2021.
- Email from Joandi Hartendorp, January 15, 2025.
- Email from Taraq Hok-Ahin with Judy Jaffe-Schagen, June 1, 2021.
- Email from Eline Jongsma, January 8, 2025.
- Email from Wayne Modest to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, February 15, March 10, March 31, 2025, June 6, 2025
- Email from Emile Schrijver to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, January 15, 2025.
- Email from Eveline Sint Nicolaas to Judy Jaffe-Schagen, January 8, 2025.
- Email from Annemarie de Wildt, January 16, 2025.

Illustrations

While choosing and arranging the illustrations for this book, I noticed that I had taken more photos during commemorations of slavery than of the Shoah. Perhaps this is because I feel more like a spectator at the former than a participant?

- | | | | |
|---------|--|-----------------|--|
| Fig. 1. | King Willem-Alexander with Amsterdam Museum director Judikje Kiers at the opening of the Golden Coach exhibition, Amsterdam, June 17, 2021. Photo by Mischa Schoemaker. | Fig. 7. | Design by Rade Eijkelhof and Sofie Gombert for a memorial to Surinamese resisters in Wibautpark, Amsterdam, 2022. |
| Fig. 2. | Photo taken after the signing of the certificate by Urwin Vyent, Linda Nooitmeer and Hendrik Henrichs, adding Ketí Koti to the Intangible Heritage Inventory of the Netherlands at the Amsterdam City Archives, December 2, 2023. Courtesy of the National Institute for Dutch Slavery Past and Heritage. Photo by Jörg Bernsmann. | Fig. 8. | Design by Steve Hulsbergen for a memorial to Surinamese resisters, 2022. |
| Fig. 3. | Slavery commemoration at Oosterpark, Amsterdam, July 1, 2022. Photo by Judy Jaffe-Schagen. | Fig. 9. | Design by Merav Krone for a memorial to Surinamese resisters, 2022. |
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| Fig. 5. | Sign outside the National Holocaust Names Memorial building site, Amsterdam: "We are building a Holocaust Names Memorial here with reverence and respect. We apologize for any inconvenience. You will soon be able to visit this unique memorial. Keep history alive!" Photo by Judy Jaffe-Schagen, August 30, 2021. | Fig. 12. | King Willem-Alexander at the wreath-laying ceremony on Slavery Remembrance Day in Amsterdam, 2023, where he apologized for the country's involvement in slavery. Photo by Mischa Schoemaker. |
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| | | Fig. 14. | Ketí Koti meal in Amsterdam Museum's Schuttersgallerij on Liberation Day, May 5, 2013, with Hellen Palmtak, Nikki Pootjes, Joyce Edwards, Judikje Kiers, Annemarie de Wildt, Eva Firet. Photo by Monique Vermeulen (Amsterdam Museum). ³¹¹ |
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- Figs. 17, 18, 19. Stills from “Are Jews White?” video installation, Aldus Productions, 2021. Photos by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
- Fig. 20. National Holocaust Museum display, Amsterdam, July 30, 2024. Photo by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
- Fig. 21. Gabriel Lester’s Reflection Garden at Hollandsche Schouwburg, Amsterdam, July 30, 2024. Photo by Judy Jaffe-Schagen.
- Fig. 22. My mother aged two. This is the first photograph of her. It was taken shortly after she arrived in Amsterdam in July 1945, having survived Westerbork, Bergen-Belsen and the Lost transport. The photo was taken on Liberation Day, held on August 31, 1945.
- Fig. 23. Front page headline in Dutch newspaper de Volkskrant, December 20, 2022.
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- Fig. 29. King Willem-Alexander with Dutch Auschwitz Committee chair Jacques Grishaver laying a stone at the National Holocaust Names Memorial, September 19, 2021. Photo by Mischa Schoemaker.

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- Fig. 34. Peggy Wijntuin beside a photo of mother, Juliana Jozephina Wijntuin. July 1, 2020. “Slavernijverleden zie je nu terug in Black Lives Matter-demonstraties” Still from NOS.nl (30 June 2020) <https://nos.nl/l/2339093>. Copyright: NOS.

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or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording, or otherwise, without the prior written consent of the publisher.

Disturbing Tensions refers to the friction that exists between those involved in commemorating the Shoah and commemorating slavery in the Netherlands. In her study, Judy Jaffe-Schagen examines the role that heritage professionals play in various commemorative events and the strained relations that permeate the heritage world and society as a whole.

Engaging with participants, locations and objects from all sides of the spectrum in both planned and chance encounters, she explores the historical origins and contemporary triggers of these tensions in commemorative practice. She discusses her own thoughts about the dynamic practices that reflect the ongoing cultural impact of their respective histories, presenting recommendations to enable heritage professionals to address these tensions and to approach commemorative practices with greater empathy.

Conversations with:

Sophie van den Bergh, Peggy Brandon,
Joandi Hartendorp, Eline Jongsma,
Patrick Meershoek, Wayne Modest,
Linda Nooitmeer, Kel O'Neill,
Younes Saramifar, Emile Schrijver,
Gloria Wekker, Annemarie de Wildt



Judy Jaffe-Schagen is an independent historian and heritage professional who works with various museums around the world. She obtained her PhD in political history from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

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