

Sweeping Colonialism Under the Historical Rug:
A Comparative Analysis of Remembrance of the Dead and Ketj Koti
Commemorations in the Netherlands

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Introduction

“Diaspora
sporen van een roofstaat” (‘Koningsdag’, Zwart Licht
ft. Winne)

It was on a Tuesday morning as I stepped into a large and broad university building on the Kloveniersburgwal in Amsterdam, the Bushuis. Since I do not live in Utrecht I gladly make use of the UvA libraries to study, as with most buildings in the city I do not know anything about their history or what they formerly were used for. The same goes for the Bushuis. I sat down when I found a free spot in the hall with high ceilings, wondering about this impressive space in the middle of the city centre. I had just started doing research for this thesis and was mostly looking into websites and reading online articles. I stumbled upon the website of the mapping slavery project that works to show historical places and their slavery heritage. As I started to read short descriptions of places and buildings on their map of Amsterdam I noticed that there was also a building on the Kloveniersburgwal. I started reading about the place, the East Indies House, it was described as the VOC headquarters. When I looked up the house number I realized that right where I sat down to write and research our colonial past, was the same place where men working for the VOC had done their trading, one of which was the trade in enslaved people. Although I know how much this country is filled with marks from our colonial past, it became all the more clear to me how most people live their lives and easily move through the city without noticing this. In the Bushuis there is no easily available information on what the building was used for in the past, to make it even worse the conference room called the VOC room is in use without any side note about its name or about why we should be aware of and never forget the horrific things that people working for the VOC did. The fact that our colonial heritage is so highly visible but no attention is being paid to it, is one of the things that lies on the basis of current debates in Dutch society. The need to re-think our identity and who is included in this self-image is an urgent matter. Voices of people of color are finally being heard in the public debate and this is why it becomes all the more relevant to think about this matter of culture and belongingness.

In 2014, prime minister Mark Rutte was asked about his thoughts on Black Pete during a conference on nuclear security. Rutte made remarks that were very illustrative for how many, mostly white people in the Netherlands were and are still thinking about the racist tradition of blackface during Sinterklaas every December. He said:

“I can only say that my friends in the Dutch Antilles, they are very happy when they have Sinterklaas because they don’t have to paint their faces and when I’m playing for Black Pete... I’m... for days trying to get off eh... the stuff on my face.” (NOS, *Rutte krijgt vraag over Zwarte Piet*)

The words of the Dutch prime minister serve as an example of how Dutch people are used to think about racism, our slavery heritage, and history as colonizers. Everything needs to be ‘gezellig’, meaning something like nice, cozy, and fun. Bringing up the discomfort of racism is hard, as is shown in Rutte’s reaction. Instead of acknowledging the racism, he is describing how the blackface tradition is something in which he as a white man is facing difficulties as opposed to people of color. Or as Rutte likes to say his ‘friends in the Dutch Antilles’, as if there are no black people and people of color living in the Netherlands. The tendency to jump into a defensive attitude when being called out is very common in situations of accusations. This is not harmful when, for example no one wants to admit that it was them who ate the last cookie, but when it is about institutional racist statements by a prime minister, it is.

The Netherlands’s colonial and slavery heritage is not an issue that is only being discussed in formal and political situations, in popular culture it is a topic of interest as well. For example a lyric from the song ‘Van de Regen Naar de Zon’ by rapper Typhoon: “‘Wij’ wordt bepaald door waar we gaan, niet waar we waren.” This lyric by Surinamese-Dutch rapper Typhoon, can be translated to: ‘we’ is determined by where we are going, not where we were. The song is about the Netherlands’s colonial and slavery heritage and how this is still visible today. Typhoon’s words are stating that ‘we’, meaning the Dutch people, should not hang on to who we were in the past. But that all that matters right now, is how we handle what happened. By acknowledging and talking about how the colonial past shaped our country is how we move forward. The concept of ‘we’ the Dutch, should not be formed by holding onto the idea of a wealthy and innocent country, but by the idea of a country that adequately works through the shame and pain caused by our ancestors. One form of acknowledgement is how a country commemorates and embodies their history through monuments. Because there is still

enough to write about decolonization in the Dutch context it is obvious why there is a need to reflect on what people in our society find normal about how we commemorate and think about our national history. The past is shaping our present but this is currently not being acknowledged. Before a problem can be resolved it needs to be acknowledged as such, this acknowledging is what is shown to be quite hard for the Netherlands and Dutch people.

The two anecdotes presented at the beginning of this thesis exemplify the urgency of the matter that is going to be addressed. The issue of the Dutch slavery heritage is one that is coming up more and more in the public debate. The municipality of Amsterdam has put out a call for ideas about how they should give form to a slavery museum facility. This development is showing that more time is being invested in talking about slavery and the role of the Dutch. It is interesting to see how this issue is being addressed in comparison to other commemorations of our national history.

For this thesis I made use of scholarly literature, newspapers, television, and the knowledge I gained during my masters in Gender studies. As well as my lived experiences as a woman of color growing up in the Netherlands, and being schooled in the Dutch educational system. In addition, my methodology should also briefly be discussed. Since there was no field work done for this research it exists solely out of literature research and information gathered from newspaper articles, online websites, and my personal knowledge about the current public discourse on the Netherlands's slavery heritage. By collecting as much as I could in the process before and during my writing I aimed to assemble a context for my analysis. Following the ideas of Harding's "standpoint theory" (1993) my research was shaped by the person that I am. In no way do I wish to argue that I did my analysis in an 'objective' manner, because everything a person does is highly subjective and formed by their own lived experiences. Therefore, I wish to provide my 'politics of location' as I have learned by reading Adrienne Rich's (1984). I was born in Amsterdam as the first child of my parents. My mother is of Surinamese-Javanese descent and moved to the Netherlands when she was very young, my father is a white Dutch man who grew up in a privileged environment. My mother and her family have endured many small to big racist encounters as people of color living in the Netherlands. I am a light-skinned, cisgendered woman identifying as heterosexual. I sympathize with and support the radical-left political party BIJ1 which was

founded by Sylvana Simons as the first party led by a woman of color. I highly denounce the Netherlands's racist tradition of Black Pete and occasionally find myself engaging in anti-racist activism. Because of my interest in decolonization, anti-racism and the way in which our colonial past is hidden but is still visible in our current society, I have chosen to write my thesis on this topic. A personal component is that of course, the personal is political and my personal encounters with racism have caused me to care deeply about this topic. Because I had the privilege to receive my education on university levels I was able to engage with the scholarly work that was done on this and related subjects. From this place, my aim is to provide new attention to the case of decolonizing public space through re-thinking commemorative monuments and making the link with Dutch identity. The wish to stand up against the oppression of marginalized groups and the hope that one small step at a time, it is possible to change our society to become more acceptant and respectful towards one another, has been my biggest motivation for this research.

Furthermore, the process of decolonization goes through language as well. Words are of much importance, and words that we are used to are not always the words that are best. The words that we use to address certain issues are shaping how we think about these issues. Therefore, I have put much thought in the words that I will be using throughout this thesis. To some people it sometimes might seem as a hassle to use new words than the ones that we are used to. Nevertheless, I believe that it is very important to do this when wanting to contribute to an inclusive and decolonial discourse. Replacing words like 'slave' with enslaved, and 'slavery' with enslavement might take some time to get accustomed to but will eventually help to create a more equal discourse. I have made an effort to re-think my own use of words and have tried my best to use respectful and anti-colonial words and descriptions in my research.

Starting off, my research question was more focused on how societies should deal with monuments that are honoring colonial 'heroes', such as in the #RhodesMustFall movement in Cape Town. But as I delve into the literature and scholarly work, gradually I came to focus more on a slightly different topic. The question that needed to be investigated was how the Netherlands is handling events and days of commemoration that are related to our colonial past and national identity. Beginning with laying out the context of commemorations and monuments, I wish to mark a few point that show what is still lacking in the public and

academic debate surrounding this topic. The issue of the heritage of Nazi Germany is discussed and will be used as a comparison for other countries. In my theoretical framework I am engaging with the work of Gloria Wekker on the cultural archive and Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony.

In analyzing and comparing the commemorations of World War II, in which the Netherlands is perceived as victim, with the commemorations of slavery in which the Netherlands takes up the role of perpetrator, I am placing these two cases in a theoretical structure that provides a fresh view on their importance. By doing so, it becomes clear how their history and present is linked to Dutch identity and the significance of the visibility of different historical narratives.

Literature Review

“[...] the ‘question’ was not which heroes or which victories ought to be celebrated, but what ideas deserved representation.” (Savage 128)

In order to answer the question of how the Netherlands is handling commemorative events and monuments that are related to our colonial past, it is necessary to provide a context for this research. What is the current public debate around this topic and how are we as a country handling commemorations and the critiques that are being expressed? How are other countries like Germany, France and England dealing with the heritage of their colonial history and what kind of critiques are they facing about their ways of commemorating? By providing this literary context I wish to bring a clear view on the current public debate and point out what aspects are still being overlooked in the Dutch context.

There is a lot of debate going on in countries around the world, about ways in which we are commemorating and remembering our history or certain parts of our history. Activists have taken a critical stand towards statues of historical figures who have played a key role in enslavement, murdering, and the oppression of people from their former colonies. Here, I will go from the critique that is being expressed about the 4th of May Remembrance of the Dead that is held annually in the Netherlands, to the way in which the Holocaust monument in Berlin is commemorating the victims of World War II. From there I will move to discussing the mapping of the slavery heritage in the city of Amsterdam. Furthermore, I will go into the debate about several merchants of enslaved people and their monuments in England, Brazil and Benin. Then, I will go on with how re-naming of monuments and places is seen as a solution to make visible the horrific acts that were committed by national ‘heroes’. I will end by providing a link to the Dutch context and the role of national identity in the commemorations that are held in our country.

“On the 4th of May is the annual Remembrance of the Dead in the Netherlands to commemorate all civilians and soldiers, who died or got killed in war situations or during peace operations throughout the world” (*Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei*). In 2016, a Dutch

woman of color named Christa Noëlla received a lot of backlash from the entire country when she came up with the hashtag *#geen4meivoormij* which translates to ‘no 4th of May for me’. In 2018, the discussion is still going on. A group of activists wanted to organize a noise protest during the two minutes of silence on this day to receive attention for the non-inclusive way in which the National Committee 4th and 5th of May is organizing the remembrance. One of the points of critique is that the committee is not including the victims of enslavement and the WWII victims in the Dutch Indies during the Japanese occupation that were not Dutch citizens but did fall under Dutch imperial ruling. The same goes for the victims in the Indonesian struggle for independence (1945-1949), or as we ambiguously call it in the Netherlands: ‘the police actions’. “It is very hypocrite to say that we are commemorating all the victims but then only commemorate the Dutch soldiers and not mention the numerous Indonesian victims that were killed by Dutch soldiers” (van Pagee). A form of commemorating the victims that were caused by soldiers of one’s own country is by erecting a monument for them.

A good example of this kind of monument, is Germany and how they as a country are dealing with their traumatic history, as Hugh Gusterson notes: “most of Berlin’s war monuments memorialize the *victims* of German militarism – not the country’s own fallen soldiers”. The Holocaust Memorial in Berlin is the best-known example, “it is a very public proclamation of Germany’s declared responsibility and remorse for the Nazi Holocaust” (Gusterson). By erecting this Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, the Germans are making their history inescapably visible in public space. This way of making their victims visible can be seen as not walking away from the responsibility of making sure that events like these will never happen again, and that we should make sure that we educate children about the good, but mostly about the shameful parts of national history. A way of educating and making history visible in public space is by acknowledging the heritage that can still be found in streets, houses, squares, and statues.

In Amsterdam, since 2013 there are the Black Heritage Tours. This tour through the city was launched by Jennifer Tosch who herself is of Surinamese-American descent. With the emergence of these tours there was also a guide written called the Amsterdam Slavery Heritage Guide. “This guide tells the story of Amsterdam’s slavery history in over one hundred locations” (Hondius et al. 11). The guide is separated in different themes that show

the direct or indirect connection between Amsterdam and the history of enslavement. The themes are: Trade & profit, Black in the city, Resistance & abolitionism, and Museums & archives. This guide is a perfect example of ways in which it is possible to make the ‘hidden’ parts of our history more visible and not only pay attention to the so-called good parts, because the good and the bad are all interwoven. Without enslavement, the Dutch could never have gained the wealth that it did during the ‘Golden’ Century. Luckily, “with the presence of postcolonial migrants, there is gradually more attention being paid to the history of slavery in post-colonial Netherlands” (Hondius et al. 17). Unfortunately, there is still a lot that can be done to make the public space more inclusive and to educate people about this part of history so that they can see how it is still very much visible in our country. “Generally speaking the level of attention for the heritage of slavery is minute when compared for instance with the commemoration of World War II” (Hondius et al. 18). By mapping these locations and telling the stories about the period of colonialism and enslavement from which they originate, the stories of Dutch people of Surinamese, Indonesian and African descent are being told and included in national history. According to John R. Gillis there is “good evidence that ordinary people are more interested in and know more about their pasts than ever before” (17). But still, “many people in the Netherlands know very little about Dutch involvement in slavery and the slave trade” (Hondius et al. vi). For example, the building of the Royal Palace located on Dam Square in Amsterdam. This palace was built in the 17th century as town hall for the city, nowadays it is open for visits but also still in active use (*Paleis Amsterdam*). Across the Royal Palace, on the same square, is the National Monument where the national commemoration Remembrance of the Dead is held annually on the 4th of May. What is “less well known” about the Royal Palace “is the fact that the colonial rulers met there to discuss business involving slavery” (Hondius et al. 11). It is a typical example of the way in which the Netherlands is keeping its colonial past and horrific acts hidden. We are commemorating the deaths since World War II – in which we can be in the role of victims of the Germans – on a site where from all directions the heritage of enslavement and colonialism can be seen, but still not mentioning the deaths that we caused during this period of time. In the Netherlands, “the dominant self-image is that of innocent victim of German occupation during World War II” (Wekker 12). There are numerous ways in which a country can deal with the monuments, memorials and sites that are a commemoration of persons from their colonial past.

In *Politics of Memory*, Ana Lucia Araujo describes three cases of public memory of the Atlantic slave trade, in the chapter Transnational Memory of Slave Merchants she “seeks to explain how despite the official international projects aimed at promoting the memory of the victims of the Atlantic slave trade, the memory of these perpetrators continues to occupy a prominent place in the public space” (15). Araujo notices the similarities in the acknowledged depiction of three merchants of enslaved people as heroes and adequate business men. She states that:

In some countries, by expressing regret and addressing public apologies for the errors of their ancestors, the families of the perpetrators are also acquiring public visibility. In other countries, despite the construction of new monuments and memorials honoring the victims of the Atlantic slave trade, numerous public statues honoring individuals highly involved in the slave trade business remain intact and unquestioned. (Araujo 16)

“Monuments can be reappropriated, combatted with countermonuments, or even [...] taken back down” (Savage 143). In the case of Brazilian slave merchant Francisco Félix de Souza (1754-1849) and his memorial in Benin, Araujo has concluded that “at least in the public sphere” there is a “harmonious coexistence” between the “memories of the victims and the perpetrators”. The memory and monument of the slave merchant is not being reappropriated nor is it taken down. New monuments did arise for the victims but “the public memory of the perpetrators is not radically transformed” (19). Furthermore, Araujo discusses the statue of slave merchant Joaquim Pereira Marinho (1816- 1887) in Brazil. “Like de Souza, he was among those who made important profits with the illegal slave trade”. “The public memory of those wealthy individuals who largely benefited from the trade in human beings remains almost intact in Salvador” (Araujo 21). As with the Royal Palace in Amsterdam, and many other sites and monuments in our country, in Salvador many people as well have no idea about how much the statues and monuments for national heroes are connected to enslavement. Marinho’s statue depicts him not as a horrendous slave merchant but “as a businessman distinctively dressed and wearing a long beard”, hereby showing his well-doing as if he has no bad record at all. Despite his reputation, Marinho’s “public memory as a benefactor is still visible in Salvador’s public space” (Araujo 23, 22). In this case there are no changes being

made in public space and memory, regardless of the knowledge that is available about the history as slave merchant of the person being honored.

The third case that Araujo explores is that of British slave merchant Robert Milligan (1746 – 1809). “His bronze statue was commissioned by the West India Dock Company to honor its creator” (Ajauro 29). The Museum of London Docklands produced two walking tours that highlighted several landmarks associated with the British slave trade, one of the landmarks was the statue of Robert Milligan who is described as “the son of a plantation-owning family in the Caribbean” and with no “mention of the Atlantic slave trade” (27). The plaque of Milligan’s statue has no mention of his “involvement in slave-trade activities” (29). Araujo states that “London public authorities decided” to keep the fact hidden that “one of the city’s prominent men” was a “slave merchant”, even though he is being commemorated in public space and they have the responsibility to tell about Milligan’s and their country’s history (30). In 2008, there was a project initiated by the Museum of London Docklands that asked people to “reinterpret Milligan’s statue”, this was the first time that the opportunity was given to “create virtual slavery countermonuments”. Unfortunately, “despite this initiative, no plaque explaining Milligan’s involvement in the Atlantic slave trade was added to his statue” (30). Therefore, keeping intact his ‘heroic’ legacy of a wealthy and good man. Araujo’s conclusion entails her finding that “the process of identifying some perpetrators in the public space was a fruitful way to foment the discussion about the Atlantic slave past” but in a “former slave society” like Brazil they have only just begun with “the process of acknowledging the country’s slave past”. (31). These findings raise questions like: when does a national ‘hero’ have a bad record that is lengthy enough to let it be more important than the few ‘good’ things that this person did for the wealth of their country? Knowing the fact that these good things could only have happened because of the exploitation and oppression of other people. “Many of those given statues” have “had substantial connections with colonial history and culture that were overshadowed by other achievements” (Aldrich 194). The task lies in acknowledging these connections and showing them instead of concealing it. Showing how Araujo analyzed and researched these three cases shows the lack of research and knowledge about our own national ‘heroes’. Moreover, the lack of education in general about the Dutch colonies and trading of companies such as the VOC and the WIC.

Jessica Namakkal argues for acknowledgement through re-naming as a form of decolonization. Buildings, streets, lakes, and other sites called after men involved in colonialism and the enslavement of people in colonized countries should be given new decolonized names. She writes that “re-naming never erases history; it only makes the historical record richer”. The fact that so many things and places carry these blood-stained names is a way of showing how in society there is still so much visible from this part of history. There is a very one-sided representation in public space of who is visible and who is not, it shows only the people who historically (and still currently) have been in power. Because “public monuments do not arise as if by natural law to celebrate the deserving; they are built by people with sufficient power to marshal (or impose) public consent for their erection” (Savage 135). Therefore, the upholding of monuments and the continuation of privileged commemorations are a form of showing who is in power.

These monuments, statues, memorials, and street names are a way in which national history is depicted in public space. National history is automatically linked to what Gloria Wekker refers to as the “cultural archive”, originally conceptualized by Edward Saïd. What is in our cultural archive is shown in public space but is non-inclusive of marginalized groups in our society. The cultural archive is defined by Wekker as:

The way we think, do things, and look at the world, in what we find (sexually) attractive, in how our affective and rational economies are organized and intertwined.
(19)

Her idea about the cultural archive is a way of seeing the world through the eyes of the culturally dominant group. What is included in the archive is also what shapes the way that people think of their own group, their fellow Dutch people. One of the aspects of our Dutch self-image is described by her as ‘white innocence’. Moreover, Wekker’s notion of “white innocence” is seated in the fact that “judging by curricula at various educational levels, from grade school to university level, it is the best-kept secret that the Netherlands has been a formidable imperial nation” (13). The Netherlands and its citizens prefer to remain ignorant even though we are being surrounded by objects, places, and buildings that should be noticed and seen as a commemoration of our colonial past. The fact that the entire country is quiet for two minutes on the 4th of May to commemorate the deaths during World War II, but only a

few people know that Ketu Koti (Breaking Chains) on the 1st of July is not an ‘exotic’ food and music festival but the celebration of the abolition of slavery, speaks for itself. This discrepancy will be further discussed later in this thesis.

To conclude, there are three ways in which it is possible to deal with monuments and statues that are commemorating or honoring acts and people from a ‘hidden’ colonial past: to reappropriate, to erect countermonuments, or to take them down. There are different forms in which this can be done but in many places the decolonization of public space is not moving quite so fast. I would like to raise the question of how this non-inclusion and concealing of certain parts of Dutch colonial history relates to the notion of national identity and the cultural archive. In the next chapter I will continue to explore the theoretical notion of the cultural archive and link it to the Dutch self-image and national commemorations.

Theory: Commemorations & Identity

“Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, [...] we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” (Hall 222)

In this chapter I wish to elaborate on the main theoretical themes of this analytical research. I will provide context to substantial themes such as the Dutch self-image, the cultural archive, cultural hegemony, and how these are related to commemorative monuments in the Netherlands. The public debate on decolonizing public space, rethinking monuments, and making commemorative events more inclusive, will also be further illustrated.

Through monuments, statues, street names, and all other forms of commemorations a nation is representing its history (Bodnar 74). The visibility of history in public space should not be one-sided but inclusive of the entire narrative of a nation. Ideally, every incident is considered as being as important as any other part of history. Certainly if you believe that every citizen has the same value, and think of your country as multicultural, as is the case in the Netherlands. Currently, some parts of our history are not very visible even though enslavement and colonialism are a big part of it. The educational canon is not representative, it is only until very recently that the history of enslavement by the Dutch became a mandatory chapter in education (Balkenhol 138). Because these parts are invisible or are not being addressed in public space, it is not included in our shared knowledge of history and culture. This shared knowledge, amongst other things, is what makes a country an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson). By representing this shared knowledge which is embedded in the cultural archive, we are creating a Dutch national identity. The shared knowledge about our nation’s history is included in the Dutch cultural archive and forms the Dutch national identity through this shared knowledge of our past. Commemorations and monuments are a part of the physical representation of our cultural archive. In this thesis, I will provide my analysis of two commemorations, their monuments, and their erection through this line of thought, to explore how our monuments are representing Dutch identity and what this means for our national self-image.

Representation through monuments

When a country wants to commemorate a national event or person in history, it is a logical step to erect a monument. For example in the form of a statue or some other kind of artwork, a fountain, name a street after a person, a tunnel or museum. Monuments in our public space are one of the ways in which we are able to embody our history and represent the things that happened, good and bad. Through monuments stories can be told and people are reminded to these stories in order to not forget that they happened. Monuments are, so to say, a representation of what people in a country have gone through or what someone did for their country. It is a form of showing pride for your country to occupy spaces with the proud narratives of a nation's history. Through monuments it is possible to represent the histories and experiences of the people living in a country. All of their stories should be visible and be important when a country aspires to be multicultural, as is the case in the Netherlands.

As John R. Gillis argues in the introduction of his book *Commemorations: the politics of national identity*, memory and identity are inseparably connected to each other (3). Monuments serve to represent a history experienced by the people living in a country, the idea of aesthetic formations is that a nation is imagined by the idea that all these people share the same values, history, and culture (Meyer). Monuments are in some sense the embodiment of these shared values. The representation in public space through monuments, is mostly a reproduction of the group that is in power, since these histories are the ones that are being legitimized by those in power. Furthermore, Levinson notes: "states always promote privileged narratives of the national experience and thus attempt to form a particular kind of national consciousness, yet it is obvious that there is rarely a placid consensus from which the state may draw" (10). The idea of national consciousness is connected to national identity because it provides a shared sense of this identity. National consciousness is, in my view, much related to Wekker's idea of the cultural archive.

The cultural archive, as used by Gloria Wekker, is a concept that I will use throughout my analysis. It is not an archive in the sense that it can be visited, touched or looked at as a physical object. It is the collection of cultural ideas, stories, and values that is known by a group of people (20). Wekker's use of the notion of the cultural archive derived from the way in which Edward Saïd uses it, she acknowledges how Saïd lacks to provide information on how to operationalize the cultural archive outside of literary culture (19). Wekker goes on to

describe the cultural archive in a manner that makes race an important feature of the concept. Dutch ideas about race and imperialism are deeply embedded within this cultural archive and work to influence “policies, organizational rules and commonsense everyday knowledge” (Wekker 19). To help and get a grip on how to conceptualize the cultural archive, Wekker uses the example of Bourdieu’s (1977) *habitus* which can be understood as “that presence of the past in the present” (qtd. in Wekker 20). This shows exactly why I find this concept useful for my analysis. It demonstrates how the present is being framed by the past, in the Dutch case a past filled with imperial ruling, colonialism, enslavement and the oppression of indigenous peoples. Wekker states how she reads “imperial continuities back into a variety of current popular culture and organizational phenomena” (20). This is something that, in my view, can be backed by looking at different commemorative monuments in our country and how they are politically being organized. Not only is the cultural archive shaping organizational rules and everyday knowledge of Dutch citizens, it is shaping how we think about our past and who belongs to the Dutch nation as such.

The Netherlands as aesthetic formation

For a cultural archive, or any other form of the expression of togetherness, to exist it is needed that the people living in a nation have a sense of belonging to the same nation. This sense of belongingness is described by Benedict Anderson as “imagined communities” and elaborated by Birgit Meyer as “aesthetic formations”. Anderson describes how the nation can be seen as a community that is imagined, it relies on feelings of sameness and belonging. The idea of belonging to the same group of people of which you will never see everyone that belongs to the same group, hence the imagined part (Anderson 6). Furthermore, the nation is a community because it is seen by its members as a “deep, horizontal comradeship” for which people are willing to give their life (Anderson 7). However, the concept of imagined communities as described by Anderson focusses, in my opinion, too much on the role of script in representing history. Therefore, I will continue to speak of “aesthetic formations”, originally coined by Birgit Meyer. As she argues, with aesthetic formations there is more attention being paid to “the role played by things, media, and the body in actual processes of community making” (6). Because imagined communities are “of limited use to show how

imaginations become tangible by materializing in spaces and objects and by being embodied in subjects” (Meyer 5).

I like to make the connection from commemorating historical events to identity and national self-image. Because they are important for keeping each other in place and “the core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity” (Gillis 3). This assumed identity, can be seen as the national identity that is assumed by citizens themselves and how this identity is conceptualized. In the Dutch case, there is much to say about what our national identity is about and what this entails. A long history of exclusion and ignorance has shaped the way in which ‘we’ see ourselves. It is for example, shown in a typical Dutch saying that loosely translates to: “what the farmer does not know, he does not eat”. It means not only that we, Dutch people, are not very open to trying new foods. It is meant in the bigger sense, and appropriate to comment when someone is not open to trying new things or accepting changes. That it does not go very smoothly for (white) Dutch people to accept changes is shown in multiple examples, from the racist character of Black Pete during Sinterklaas to the change of saying white instead of ‘blank’ to indicate one’s skin color. These things are embedded in the cultural archive and are making the identity of a Dutch person into someone who is afraid of changing the current narrative, the narrative that was formed by the privileged people in power. This change in narrative might alter the superior position that people feel like they are entitled to. This anxiety and fragility is conceptualized in the idea described by Wekker as white innocence. Dutch people tend to hold onto the innocent and pure idea of our identity as honest, open and harmless.

The image of the Dutch Self

Gloria Wekker is one of the scholars who inspired me so much in this field, her research and understanding of the world in its history of colonialism and oppression is strikingly accurate. White innocence is the idea that Dutch people view themselves as being innocent. She describes in her book titled *White Innocence* how this idea is visible in Dutch identity. The idea of being a small and helpless country is well known by Dutch people, we take pride in being small but powerful. Especially, the fact that the Netherlands is such a relatively small country makes it even more outstanding that we are so prosperous and able to

‘play with the big guys’. As Wekker shows, this idea of being innocent and small was being confirmed during and after World War II. The Dutch were occupied by the Germans and in our national narrative it is conveniently being overlooked that in the same time period the Dutch aggressively oppressed the people in Indonesia, innocently calling this ‘police actions’ (Wekker 12). The term white innocence comes from this Dutch self-image of “being a small but just and ethical guiding nation, internationally” (Wekker 13).

In the field of social sciences, it is a well known phenomenon that people prefer to be consistent and affirmative in their ways of thinking and behaving to avoid feelings of discomfort, this is called cognitive dissonance (Festinger). In the case of the Dutch self-image, cognitive dissonance becomes apparent in the notion of white innocence. The idea of being a tolerant and open-minded country that does no harm is in direct conflict with our history of colonialism and oppression. By acknowledging that the Netherlands was (and in some ways still is) a country that owes its welfare to enslaving people and violently oppressing them, we would have to adjust our idea of what our national identity entails. This shows that it is not solely a matter of ignorance and not knowing enough about the different aspects of our colonial history, we also benefit from not *wanting* to know about it.

Descriptions of a “sentiment of responsibility” (Baehr) show how much this white innocence is shown in literature and throughout the entire discourse about colonialism, enslavement, and the “Golden” Age. I have put this term between quotation marks to emphasize that the name that is used to indicate the 17th century in the Netherlands, is a true euphemism that hides the fact that the wealth we gained in this period of time was at the expense of other people. By remaining with this sense of innocence it is often said that it is not ‘our’ fault that our ancestors did what they did during the period of enslavement and imperial ruling. A classic fallacy in argumentation is made all the time by Dutch people. The idea that ‘we’ as a country are in no way obliged to express our apologies for our imperial power, colonialism and enslavement because other people did wrongful things as well, is completely and willfully ignorant. Just because there are other wrongful actions that took place and are still taking place in the world, does not mean that we are not obliged to acknowledge our horrific past. It is a matter of white privilege that many Dutch people do not take into account that their white historical narratives are the only ones being on display in our public space.

Power expressed through commemorations

As John R. Gillis writes: “commemorative activity is by definition social and political, for it involves the coordination of individual and group memories” (Gillis 5). The act of commemorating by organizing annual moments of remembrance or by erecting monuments, is linked to national identity in the sense that these commemorations are a depiction of our history. Moreover, it is a depiction of the history that we are willing to show and teach our children about. Unfortunately, “just as memory and identity support one another, they also sustain certain subjective positions, social boundaries, and, of course, power” (Gillis 4).

To try and make sense of how monuments and acts of commemorating, which are a representation of cultural memory, are entangled with issues of national identity it is useful to take feelings of belonging into account. Because “the monuments are clearly an intervention into a symbolic topography of the past through which the Dutch nation imagines itself” (Balkenhol 140). Monuments are a direct embodiment of a narrative of history that includes only a certain part of ‘being Dutch’. Embodiment in this sense is meant not in the literal way of living and breathing bodies but in the sense that through the material of monuments, certain historical narratives are literally taking up spaces in the public landscape. Moreover, “in the public sphere the assimilation model of monoethnicism and monoculturalism is so thorough that all signs of being from elsewhere should be erased” (Wekker 7). This way, there is only room available for the embodiment of narratives that validate our white innocence. By viewing monuments as embodiment of historical narrative and cultural memory, Balkenhols argues: “the body is a matter of belonging - it is the site upon which politics of belonging are being played out” (144). The power that lies behind commemorations and monuments can be explained by the concept of cultural hegemony as described by Antonio Gramsci. Cultural hegemony is the cultural domination by the group that is in power, it leads to questioning who is in power and offers a connection to class and wealth (Lears 572). “It allows one to analyze the systemic features of a society characterized by inequalities of power without reducing that society to a system” (Lears 572). By being in charge of the erection of monuments and the way in which a country commemorates historical events, it is imposing a dominant worldview and experience through cultural acts and making it into the norm.

In order to explore how commemorative acts and monuments act as an embodiment of national history, and are encouraging the notion of white innocence embedded in Dutch national identity, it is therefore necessary to place the analysis of some monuments and commemorative acts in the Netherlands in the theoretical framework discussed above. My aim is to discuss the erection of two monuments and commemorations from a frame that starts off from the notion of white innocence, the cultural archive and the embodiment of national identity in the public sphere. Wekker quotes the work of Legêne, describing that her work “is based on the assumption that Dutch culture developed in many respects as a colonial culture and that the traces of this are discernible in our contemporary society” (Legêne, 2010, 8 qtd. in Wekker 84). These traces can be exposed through analysis of our current public debate about commemorations and re-thinking monuments.

To end, wishing to envision a way in which we as a country can deal with monuments and commemorations that are part of our colonial past, I propose to consider these cases as examples of white innocence embedded in our national identity. Furthermore, to uncover the general narrative that the Netherlands is a tolerant and open-minded country by showing how these cases are still a repetition of our imperialist cultural views. As Wekker puts it eloquently:

Imperialist nostalgia is so effective because it invokes a register of innocence; the responsible imperial agent is transformed into an innocent bystander, masking his involvement with processes of domination. (Wekker 109)

Analysis

“Zonder donker kan het licht zichzelf niet kennen.” (Typhoon, ‘*Van De Regen Naar De Zon*’)

So far within this thesis I have provided some information about the scholarly work that has been done surrounding the subject of monuments and identity. Furthermore, I have shown that there is still much work to be done in doing research on the ways in which commemorating and monuments are an embodiment of national identity, and how this plays into the confirmation of white innocence.

In the following part of this thesis I will continue with this line of thought by analyzing two cases of commemorations and monuments in the Dutch context. The cases that are going to be addressed are the commemorations of the abolishment of slavery (30th of June/1st of July), called *Keti Koti*. With on the other hand the 4th and 5th of May when in the Netherlands the annual remembrance of World War II is held. Moreover, the national slavery monument that is located in Amsterdam and the national monument on Dam Square that is the site for the 4th of May commemorations. The history of these cases will be part of this analysis to show how the ways in which we deal with monuments and acts of commemorations is influenced by our ‘white innocent’ national self-image.

Starting off with providing a context of the Remembrance of the Dead (May 4th) I will draw a comparison between this commemoration of what happened during World War II and the Dutch past of enslavement. Both of these events have two days dedicated to commemorating this history and celebrating that these events came to an end as well. My analysis of these cases will eventually serve as a platter upon which I will present my conclusions about the connection between commemorations and the upholding of the Dutch sense of national identity. I appreciate Kirk Savage’s line of thought, as he puts it:

“Public monuments do not arise as if by natural law to celebrate the deserving; they are built by people with sufficient power to marshal (or impose) public consent for their erection.” A “public monument represents a kind of collective recognition – in short, legitimacy – for the memory deposited there.” (Savage 135)

4th of May: Remembrance of the Dead

It is possible to draw a comparison between two moments of commemorations in the Netherlands. On the one hand the annual Remembrance of the Dead, nationally held on the 4th of May. This date logically followed from the celebration of the end of World War II in the Netherlands on the 5th of May in 1945. The 5th of May is still the date on which the Netherlands annually celebrates Liberation Day, I will come back to this day in the next section of this analysis. On the other hand the Day of Awareness (“Dag van Besef”) on the 30th of June, held at the Tree of Life, Monument of Realization (“Levensboom, Monument van Besef”) on the Surinam Square in Amsterdam. This day is to commemorate the enslavement by the Dutch, and the abolishment of slavery in the Dutch colonies in 1863. In Amsterdam, the commemoration on the 30th of June only started in 1993 and then became a tradition, in Surinam this commemoration was already being held annually since 1863 (Hondius et al. 9).

Comparing the 4th of May with June 30th, is respectively like comparing an inescapable tornado with a local breeze. First off, national news coverage is very extensive for Remembrance of the Dead, it is made nearly impossible to forget about the two minutes of silence that are held throughout the country at exactly 8pm. Everyone stops what they are doing for two minutes to think about the people that have died in World War II, and all the Dutch citizens that died in wars or similar situations ever since. The emphasis though, still lies on the former. Information about the history of World War II is something that is taught in schools as one of the most important events and it is safe to say that if you went to school in the Netherlands, you will get a fair amount of information about this period of time. The text books that are used for history lessons in school, serve as a good example of cultural hegemony in the Dutch context. The material that is used to teach children about Dutch national history derived from the educational canon that was put together by the government. In no way is this neutral and in every way is this providing information from the side of the people that are in charge and have hegemony over culture and education. Sanford Levinson finds the relevance of public monuments quite clear when he is taking formal schooling as an obvious example of “self-conscious civic education designed to create, or at least to maintain, a privileged notion of community identity” (85). In this sense, the information that is provided

to learn about our nation's collective memory is maintaining the one-sided notions about what it means to be Dutch. To be Dutch means to be white and to value WWII commemorations more than historical events in which we ourselves were the perpetrators.

When comparing education about World War II to the education about the Netherlands's colonial past of enslavement and oppression, it can be concluded that the information on the latter is more hidden and students need to find it by themselves. Of course, the Dutch Golden Age (approximately the 17th century) is extremely well-known amongst the Dutch people nowadays and forms the basis for proud remarks about how our country blossomed with welfare and how powerful 'we' were back then. I would like to compare this to the 'we' people speak of when their national soccer team has won an important game. Even though, it was only the 11 people in orange uniforms that truly played and won, the team did it for their country so everyone will speak of the game in terms of 'we' won, making it sound like the entire Dutch population was present on the playing field. The same goes for making comments about the Dutch Golden Age, it was 'our' time of prosperity of which we still profit from. Ignorantly and very conveniently, in our collective memory it is left out how extremely shameful and humble we actually should be about this time in our history. What is striking about when people speak of 'we' or not is that when an event was positive or successful we like to identify with it but when an event is negative or shameful we, logically, immediately tend to distance ourselves from it. This tendency, I find, serves to avoid the feeling of cognitive dissonance. It is an uncomfortable feeling to question the good things that we were taught about our country. As I have mentioned before, cognitive dissonance is the uneasy feeling that things do not cohere with another. When this feeling occurs in our minds, we will try to make it go away by making things cohere again. In this case, an easy way to do this is by moving away from the negative and arguing that we (the Dutch people living now) have nothing to do with what 'we' (Dutch people in the 17th century) did. It is quite logical to make this change in thinking because throughout our education we are not being made aware of how our country nowadays, is still profiting from what 'we' did back in the days of colonialism and imperialist ruling.

Coming back to the case of Remembrance of the Dead and the commemoration of slavery, I argue that even though these occasions are of equal importance, these days are not

given equal attention and support, governmental as well as from citizens. This argument is not meant to point fingers to who is guilty or not or a way of making sure that we as Dutch people will start to feel (more) shame about our past. Because, shame alone will not be enough to create a society in which all Dutch people can carry out their right to commemorate a past in which they are included and acknowledged. To feel as though you belong to a country's citizens, it is necessary to have your heritage included in that country's cultural archive, as Meyer argues while elaborating on Anderson's notion of imagined communities. Meyer's notion of aesthetic formations is stretching the importance of embodiment and the style in which aesthetic formations are imagined, how these imaginations are becoming materialized in public space and through the media (Meyer 6). This idea can be very much related to the ways in which Wekker writes about the cultural archive. The cultural archive is the glue that is binding a nation together, in the cultural archive lies the common knowledge about a nation's history and how this history is being represented in public space and in the media. Commemorations are a very obvious form of representing history.

The Remembrance of the Dead annually entails a commemorative event on Dam Square in Amsterdam at the National Monument, a monument for World War II. This event includes two minutes of complete silence. How important and sensitive this event is, can be shown by several examples. There was the uproar in 2016 surrounding the hashtag #Geen4MeiVoorMij, it is striking how many people were deeply offended by this hashtag and the opinion that it was accompanied by. The idea that a Dutch woman of color was putting question marks at how we are commemorating on this day was rubbing many Dutch people the wrong way. The Remembrance of the Dead is made into an event where it is all about who is really Dutch and who is not (Philipse 2018). Second, the announcement this year that a group of people would be making noise during the moment of silence on Dam Square resulted in a case that had to go to court. The news article *Lawaai protest Dodenherdenking gaat niet door, zegt actiegroep* by the NOS, informed that the judge eventually decided that the group was not allowed to do the noise protest. The group also withdrew their announcement and said that they would not be making any noise and that they were happy with the publicity it caused surrounding this subject as that was of most importance. The commotion did get much publicity and the critique on the commemoration of May 4th was discussed on many on- and offline platforms. With the 30th of June, it is a whole different case. The remembrance on this

day could easily pass you by unless you are already moving around in an environment that acknowledges the importance of it. Prior to June 30th there is barely any national coverage in the news, although in the capital as well as in Rotterdam it is given more attention. In no way do I want to diminish the ways in which this day is being made visible but I do want to show the discrepancy between the commemorations on June 30th and the 4th of May.

Moreover, it is argued by Nimako, Abdou and Willemsen that the primary reason that the Dutch slavery past started to be commemorated, more than 130 years after the abolition, is because of the actions by a group of Dutch citizens of Surinamese and Antillean origins (44). Even though the efforts of this community put the heritage of Dutch enslavement on the national and international political agenda, and erected a national monument in Amsterdam's Oosterpark, there was no political or academic change in the way that slavery and racism was viewed (Nimako, Abdou and Willemsen 46). Many commemorations came into existence after descendants of the enslaved came to live in the country of their former colonizer. The hard to miss, mixed population in Amsterdam is one of the ways in which the heritage of slavery is most easily visible (Hondius et al. 17).

Liberation Day & Keti Koti

The day after commemorations is the day to celebrate that we do not live in situations like these anymore. For most Dutch people this freedom is celebrated solely on the 5th of May, the date that the Netherlands were freed from occupation by Nazi Germany. Every year on this day there is a concert on the canals of Amsterdam called the Liberation Concert ('Bevrijdingsconcert'). The news coverage is extensive and the concert is attended by the King and Queen. To illustrate, the website of AD newspaper reported that the broadcasting of the concert on television was watched by over 1.4 million viewers making it the second best viewed program that night (*Ruim 1,4 miljoen kijkers voor Bevrijdingsconcert*). Moreover, the live concert is attended by many people who come to the Amstel canal to listen from the quay, streets going to this part of the canal are partly blocked and many security is put in place. The range of festivals that take place throughout the country on this day are proving my point of how important Liberation Day is for Dutch people and even more relevant, how much attention it is given.

The event on the 1st of July is called *Keti Koti*, meaning ‘break the chains’ in Sranantongo. This date marks the day of the abolishment of Dutch slavery. In Amsterdam, the festivities traditionally start off with the *big spikri* (‘big mirror’), this parade is also being held in Rotterdam. It consists of people in *kotomisi* and other traditional colorful clothing walking from the city hall to the Oosterpark where the national monument is located. In 1993, a group of Afro-Surinamese people founded the June 30/July 1 Committee, a name that was deliberately confrontational in copying the name of the Committee 4th and 5th of May (Kardux 91-92). For long, news coverage about *Keti Koti* was mostly making it into a multicultural event instead of an important commemoration (Kardux 92). It has changed a little bit but this year in 2018, *Keti Koti* is being referred to as a festival and people tend to think that it is an ‘exotic’ festivity with food and music. Not enough information is provided about why this day should not only be considered important by people from the black community in the Netherlands but by white citizens as well. From a point of view that acknowledges the notion of white innocence, it is unsurprising but characteristic that the festivities of *Keti Koti* draws mostly black people and people of color from Surinamese and Antillean descent to the Oosterpark to celebrate.

Looking at how *Keti Koti* came into the public debate, and the events prior to the 2002 erection of the National Monument for the Remembrance of the Slavery Past in the Netherlands, it is supporting the white innocence embedded in the Dutch image of the self. As Johanna C. Kardux notes, the example of the erection of the Slavery Monument in Amsterdam suggests that “the sense of national unity and identity [...] may have been based not so much on collective memory as on collective forgetfulness” (91). This forgetfulness is caught in the notion of white innocence, because by forgetting and thus not-knowing, the belief in innocence can be continued. Continuing Kardux’s line of thought, the same can be seen in how the ‘Golden Age’ is being thought of. This happens in a form that is supportive of the tolerant national self-image by virtually erasing the fact that the Dutch were horrific slave traders (Kardux 91).

Considering how the Slavery Monument in Oosterpark came to be, it is a nice gesture as well as a good start, but it is not yet enough to give the heritage of slavery and the enslaved the place it deserves in our collective memory. Because, monuments as physical manifestations of memory are not merely showing collective memory but are pointing to the

political, cultural and economic forces that were binding together at that moment, to produce a vision of the way a (dominant) society perceived and represented itself to itself (Mitchell 448). The monument is located in the Oosterpark in Amsterdam. The location of a monument is of significance, it is an indirect way of showing the importance of this heritage and memory. The notion of Gramsci's cultural hegemony, as discussed in the previous chapter, is strongly applicable to the case of this monument. The monument is an example of the government taking over the project of this commemoration and hereby reinforcing their power of cultural dominance. The National Platform that was formed to develop a plan of action for commemorating the slavery past, decided to let the monument be funded by the government, this way it could be a form of reparations (Kardux 93). By giving the funding out of hand, the National Platform gave away much of their control over the decision making and became dependent on the government. It is similar to how John Bodnar describes a case in the U.S. state Cleveland, he argues that: "The lack of black political power is an important reason why impulses to commemorate a black past take a long time to start to exist in public spaces outside of the black community" (86). Although, in the case of a Dutch slavery monument it was emphasized that it should be erected for everyone and that it was not only an issue for the descendants of the enslaved, living in this country. It is true though that people of color are being underrepresented in the government and in other positions of power. Partly because of this institutional whiteness in the Netherlands, did it take so long to even begin to think about a monument for Dutch slavery.

Furthermore, Katharyne Mitchell notes how it is not only the financial means of producing a memorial, but also the public reception via the media that are a continuing reflection of dominant systems of power and control. However, in contemporary debates there is a growing place for agendas that are challenging the current hegemonic agenda (453). At the time of the developments surrounding the slavery monument, it was Roger van Boxtel, then minister of Interior and Kingdom Relations who made the announcement that the monument would get a spot in the Oosterpark in Amsterdam. The decision of placing the monument in the capital instead of for example Middelburg, the former main slave trading port in the Netherlands, was of symbolic importance. This decision highlighted the connection of "the colonial and slavery past with the postcolonial present" (Kardux 95). Amsterdam being the city with the biggest Afro-Dutch population was a logical choice as main location

for the commemoration of our slavery past, even though it was stated that the monument should be erected not only for Dutch people of color. Unfortunately, the choice of the Oosterpark felt a bit out of context for many people. The park has no obvious or symbolic ties to the slavery past nor is it a prominent location in the city. The only link might be that the ethnographic Museum of the Tropics is located around the corner of the park. Especially in comparison to the National Monument on Dam Square, it seems as if the commemorations and monument for the slavery past were not fully taken seriously by the government. It was argued by Levinson that the state will always promote the “privileged narratives of the national experience”, hereby trying to create a specific sense of shared national identity (10). By giving the slavery monument a not-so-prominent spot in the city, the Dutch government is acting like they are willing to pay attention (and money) to this history but they are still trying to hide this heritage in plain sight. By erecting a monument for the commemoration of Dutch enslavement, we as a country or aesthetic formation, are buying off our guilt but still not fully acknowledging it. In *Commemorations*, it is described how critics of monuments have argued that these “traditional memory sites actually discourage engagement with the past and induce forgetting rather than remembering” (Gilles 16). A monument without institutional change, like the National Slavery Monument, where people are not being encouraged to engage with this past is still serving to cater to our white innocence instead of going through the discomfort of truly acknowledging it. The power that lies in getting to choose which histories deserve to be exposed in public space and to get extensive attention in education and commemoration, can easily be overlooked. It is a privilege to see your narrative be visible throughout your country. These factors are supporting the feelings of belongingness in a country, and to what extent one’s heritage and experiences are taken seriously and are being valued by their government.

Additionally, no mistake should be made by thinking that the people from the Afro-Dutch community are all agreeing with one and the same opinion. Many conflicting views and opinions within this community were making the case of the commemorative monument into a battleground for disagreements about identity, memory, and its politics (Kardux 94). Illustrative of the many different opinions regarding the monument is how the reactions were when different artists provided their ideas about how they would give form to a slavery monument. After a public vote for the best design, that of Surinamese artist Erwin de Vries

was chosen. Conflicting opinions came about regarding his Surinamese descent, choosing an artist from Surinam would make the issue of slavery commemorations into something that only concerns people from the Afro-Dutch community and not white people. Moreover, de Vries's design followed the assignment with the most obvious references in his statue design. The monument consists out of three elements, each symbolizing a different phase. First, the past embodied as a group of enslaved people in chains. Second, an individual that symbolizes the strength to be free and move further. Last, the figure of a woman who symbolizes the pressing matter of liberty and a brighter future. Even though de Vries told the *NRC Handelsblad* newspaper in an interview that he feels like monuments should be obvious in what they commemorate, and that that is exactly what he did, there are of course people that do not necessarily agree with this point of view (Duursma 2001). With many different opinions, and the feeling in the Afro-Dutch community that they already waited much too long for a public monument to be erected, it is understandably difficult to meet everyone's demands. "The Dutch slavery monument project thus came to represent conflicting ideas about collective memory and identity" (Kardux 97).

Moreover, moving towards the way in which the Netherlands is currently dealing with Ketikoti, its commemorative side and its festive side, there have been developments. These developments have been positive in the sense that there has been more attention to the events on the 1st of July. Right now, at the end of June 2018, there are posters hanging around in Amsterdam to announce Ketikoti. One thing that immediately catches the eye, is how the commemoration as well as the celebration of the abolishment of slavery are being called attention for in the same poster. The event is called Ketikoti Festival, this is similar to the multiple festivals that take place on the 5th of May. The difference is though, that the commemorations on the 30th of June are losing attention and are going back to being included on July 1st. The fact that the remembrance and the festivities are again going to be held on the same day is an example of how Ketikoti is mostly serving as a party with dance, music, and food instead of having a separate day for the commemorations and awareness and one day for the festivities. Not to say that the act of commemorating should be something that can only be done in a very serious sphere, but stating the Ketikoti celebrations as a festival on posters distributed throughout the city, is acting as though it is yet another music festival in

the summer months. Especially, knowing that the stereotypes about people of color are that they are always laughing, happy and dancing, eating food, the act of calling Keti Koti a festival plays into this prejudice. Because “names are important, and the ability to assign a definitive name is a significant power manifested”, therefore we should not think of it lightly as there lies much power in naming (Levinson 19). The uttering of Dutch slavery commemorations as a festival is a form of cultural hegemony in which it is not being taken serious enough. This is visible in a few things, by not giving it the time and attention it deserves, by giving it a location in the corner of a park that has neither symbolic value nor is it prominently located, and by calling the only event on that day a festival. While fully agreeing that the abolishment of slavery in the Netherlands is something that should be celebrated, the more serious and thorough act of remembering is still lacking. It is lacking because it is partly being overshadowed by mere festivities and festivities are not an appropriate remembrance for all the harm that was done during the enslavement of people by the Dutch.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have aimed to demonstrate the relation between commemorations and national identity, I did this with my analysis of two commemorations in the Dutch context. The nationally held events on the 4th and 5th of May, respectively Remembrance of the Dead and Liberation Day, and Ketikoti on the 1st of July which is the commemoration and celebration of (the abolishment) of slavery. By researching how the concepts of commemorating and identity relate, I intended to demonstrate the discrepancy that is shown in these two events. I tried to do this by first setting out the context around commemorations and monuments in different countries with colonial histories. In my research I focussed on what was still lacking in the information that was available and on how literature should be read and interpreted from a decolonial perspective. I wanted to display how the Netherlands's long history of colonialism and exploitation can be visible in many facets of our society, even if it is not that obvious at first.

When starting off with the writing and researching for this thesis, I was aiming to research Dutch monuments that are depicting and honoring colonial figures, hereby idealizing this time in Dutch history. While working on this subject it became to be more about commemorations and the current state of identity in Dutch society. Acts of commemoration and who is being involved in these acts is shown to be an illustrative example of how white innocence in being maintained in the Netherlands.

By describing the context in literature and popular media on commemorations and monuments in other countries I have shown that there is still a lack of information on this in the Netherlands. Fairly little research has been done on this subject and only until recently with the presentation of Gloria Wekker's long awaited book 'White Innocence' has the public discourse around racism and decolonization gotten new input. I started off with describing the current public debate in the Netherlands around facing up to the past and uncovering the dark sides of our colonial ruling and trading. By discussing how Germany is managing the remains of Nazi Germany and World War II, I provided an example of what are ways to deal with a past that is so painful that people in a country would rather forget that it ever happened.

Furthermore, the thorough demonstration of three monuments of merchants of enslaved people in various countries shows three ways of handling a memory of enslavement. The depiction of national memory happens through monuments and commemorative events and is a way in which the culture is being dominated. This cultural hegemony is illustrated by the unequal balance between the attention given to Ketj Koti and the Remembrance of the Dead/Liberation Day. I have linked this to the cultural archive and the expression of our cultural archive through the expression of our national self-image.

In the process of working through a theoretical framework that would be useful in analyzing the cases that I have brought up in the Dutch context, the concepts of national identity and the cultural archive became linked to commemorations. In this explanation of looking at the events of the 4th and 5th of May and Ketj Koti I showed how these equally important issues are not being treated as such. This unequal distribution of attention and awareness is shown to be a classic effect of maintaining our 'white innocence' self-image. I used Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony to illustrate the power that is embedded in commemorative traditions. Through the imbalance that I described between 4 and 5 July and Ketj Koti, it is shown how white innocence is being upheld through acts of commemorating while partly denying our national history.

Beginning this thesis with an idea that turned out a bit differently, has shown me how many topics about power structures, ignorance and identity are intertwined. My aim was mainly to understand more of the underlying structures and implications of commemorating a national history. Through my analysis I have learned to understand that being aware of the lack of information about our national history is at the basis of the ignorance and exclusion in our society. In reflection I believe that this thesis will help to provide more context and understanding about this topic, hopefully leading to more common knowledge about Dutch people as colonizers without it having to inflict with our national self-image.

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