

The museum that is a'live and a'woke

Using artist interventions in adding multiperspectivity to the meta-narrative of colonial collections in Dutch historic museums.

A thesis presented

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Abstract

The last decade the debate about the heritage of Dutch colonialism is widespread. Dutch museums with colonial collections are forced by society to reflect and act on their own role in the contested part of the Dutch colonial history. This reflexive approach is of great importance to the future of museum politics in dealing with colonial collections. Or as Achille Mbembe rightly notices, transform the archive from the past into new possibilities in the present.¹ In other words make the museum live and awake and give objects from the past a place in present society.

Artists' interventions can play a role in adding multiperspectivity to the narrative being told by museums. This thesis critically explores how the voice of artists can re-contextualize, counter or change the meta-narrative of colonial collections in Dutch historic museums. Critical reflection of the formation of exhibitions and their narrative exposes the importance of an equivalent collaboration between the artist and the museum to realize multiperspectivity. To represent an inclusive exhibition, that reflects on the colonial past you should not only change the narrative, but also likewise change the power structures in museum practices.

(multiperspectivity; meta-narrative; historic museums; colonial history; art interventions)

¹ Ian Chambers, "Afterword: After the Museum," in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and Pressures of History*, ed. Ian Chambers et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 289-295, <https://www.bol.com/nl/p/the-postcolonial-museum/9200000056197933/?suggestionType=typedsearch&bltgh=gs4FT7cVfuWSDjocLUxCeQ.1.2.ProductTitle>.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2017 curator Imara Limon has been declared museum talent of the year 2017 for her effort in making inclusive exhibitions for the Amsterdam Museum. She introduced the program New Narratives at the Amsterdam Museum, where guest guides from diverse backgrounds take museum visitors on a tour through the museum. The guides add context to the objects that are displayed by telling their view on the collection. Limon affirms the lack of knowledge of museums to include and attract other visitors than the Dutch white 65+ visitors. In her opinion the Amsterdam Museum has a leading role in the diversity debate.² The latter is a hot topic not only in the cultural sector, but also in Dutch society. Debates about diversity and inclusivity fill the rooms of symposiums of all fields and are now a central part in Dutch policy. No wonder that museums with colonial collections are insecure about the methods they use in telling the story of their collection. The Dutch Museum of World Cultures and the Amsterdam Museum now have a stimulating role in acting as a role model for museums that deal with colonial collections, but many museums have to leap forward and are struggling to find the right methodology.

In the Dutch colonial history debate, the methodology of multiperspectivity in storytelling gains ground. Historian and curator Alex van Stipriaan notes that the Dutch historic canon above all is Eurocentric and 'white'. Van Stipriaan advocates a 'subaltern' discourse in creating a more multi-voiced historiography.³ Institutions affiliated with the colonial past are becoming more aware of the dominant and one-sided story that is being told. Due to the pressure of postcolonial communities and the global influence like that of the *Black Lives Matter* movement, institutions like museums have to change, or nuance their narratives. Especially now that the Dutch government emphasizes the implementation of the 'Cultural Diversity Code' and the emerging need to multiperspective approaches, museums can no longer negate their accountability in the narrative of the colonial past.⁴ The emerging of debates and critique in representing a complete narrative have segregated museums with colonial collections. Museums that act as a precursor dissociate themselves from museums that negate the contested part of Dutch colonial history in their narratives. In between, museums that are struggling to find their role in the debate. Contemporary activists like *Decolonize the Museum* enlarge the differences between Museums. The Dutch National Museum of World Cultures started collaborating with the activists in 2015, that resulted in reflexive changes in the museum. Museum labels, displays and narratives were altered to deconstruct the existing dominant Eurocentric perspective and create multiperspectivity.

In 2018 the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures published 'Words Matter', a purpose guide for the cultural sector in writing inclusive texts. The essay 'Perspectives Matter' by Simone Zeefuik and Wayne Modest addresses the power of language. According to Zeefuik and Modest many museums still write exclusionary texts. For example texts about the Dutch constitution of 1798, celebrating the institutionalization of equality, this equality was not the case for everyone in the Dutch society. Many people were oppressed in the Dutch colonies and the formal abolishment of slavery wasn't there until 1863.⁵ This is only one of the many examples of exclusive texts in museums. Zeefuik and Modest refer

² Danny Koks, "Neerlands Hoop: Imara Limon, curator van het Amsterdam Museum," *Revu*, May 23, 2018, <https://revu.nl/interviews/neerlands-hoop-imara-limon>.

³ Alex van Stipriaan, "Disrupting the Canon: The Case of Slavery," in *Beyond the Canon*, ed. Maria Grever and Siep Stuurman (Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, 2007), 205-219, <https://alexvanstipriaan.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/2007-Disrupting-the-canon.pdf>.

⁴ "De Code," Code Culturele Diversiteit, accessed March 16, 2019, <http://codeculturelediversiteit.com/de-code/>.

⁵ Wayne Modest and Simone Zeefuik, "Perspectives that Matter" in *Words Matter: An Unfinished Guide to Word Choices in the Cultural Sector*, ed. Wayne Modest and Robin Lelijveld. (Amsterdam: The National Museum for World Cultures, 2018): 34-38,

here to the link with Dutch identity politics, questioning the understanding of being Dutch. The fact remains that museums often write texts from a 'white' and Eurocentric perspective, simply because it is the frame of reference of most Dutch curators and historians.

The general director of the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures, Stijn Schoonderwoerd enhances the important role that museums have in representing diverse cultures with integrity.⁶ According to Schoonderwoerd it has become a necessity for museums to be self-critical about the types of narratives museums develop and the words they use.

A next step for museums in a more inclusive and multiperspective approach of their colonial collections can be to choose for an artist intervention. A clear definition of artists' interventions is given by Claire Robins who claims it to be: 'A genre of art that becomes an interlocutor within the discourse of museum collections. It has the additional sense of alignment with the potential for inciting change in the museum.'⁷

This potential creates possibilities in disrupting dominant power structures, perspectives and narratives in museums and can contribute to a more reflexive museum. Adding the perspective of an artist to the dominant narrative of colonial collections or even replace it can be seen as a multiperspective method. The question remains how artists' interventions can best be used by museums to become multiperspective. Yet many museums still are hesitant in inserting artists' interventions in their museum setup and if so, the freedom of the artist is not guaranteed and contested collections are carefully kept away. The call of activists, communities and scholars to tell a complete and inclusive narrative gives space for artists' interventions to contribute.

Although some Dutch museums use artists' interventions in relation to the Dutch colonial past, powerful examples of artists' interventions in historic museums are rare. In many cases the intervention does not communicate with the colonial collection, but is put aside from the 'original' dominant narrative of the collection. Fortunately there are interesting efforts like the exhibition 'Suspended Histories' curated by Thomas Berghuis in Museum Van Loon in Amsterdam that was open from 2012-2014. The museum is the former private residence of the Noble family Van Loon. Willem van Loon was in 1602 the founding member of the VOC (Dutch East India Company) and the family was closely interwoven with the Dutch overseas territories. The rich collection of the family came together through their profits from the overseas trade. The exhibition was initiated by the youngest heiress of the family, Philippa van Loon to accommodate a dialogue with the public about the contested part of the family history and its collection. The title 'Suspended Histories' refers to the dynamic process of history that should always be viewed from a contemporary perspective. For this exhibition artists with roots in areas that were connected to the VOC trade were invited to make or select work for Museum Van Loon.⁸ The artworks were placed in the collection of the museum and facilitated a contemporary dialogue with the colonial past of the museum. The personal perspectives of the artists on the museum collection give diverse interpretations of the past. Interventions like these act as a counter discourse or as Helen Tiffin nicely captured as 'canonical counter discourse'.⁹

https://issuu.com/tropenmuseum/docs/wordsmatter_english

⁶ Stijn Schoonderwoerd, "Foreword," in *Words Matter: An Unfinished Guide to Word Choices in the Cultural Sector*, ed. Wayne Modest and Robin Lelijveld (Amsterdam: The National Museum for World Cultures, 2018), 6-10,

https://issuu.com/tropenmuseum/docs/wordsmatter_english.

⁷ Claire Robins, *Curious Lessons in the Museum: The Pedagogic Potential of Artists' Interventions*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 15-27,

<https://www.bol.com/nl/p/curious-lessons-in-the-museum/9200000058627663/?suggestionType=typedsearch&bltgh=oRXHoZsSH1TUTmkLTCxL7g.1.4.ProductImage>.

⁸ Vera van de Velde, "Suspended Histories," *Mister Motley*, November 20, 2013,

<http://www.mistertmotley.nl/art-everyday-life/suspended-histories>.

⁹ Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," *Kunapipi* 9, no. 3 (1987): 17-34,

<http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol9/iss3/4>.

But do they add multiple perspectives on the colonial collection of the museum and the meta-narrative of this collection? And how was the artist assignment being framed by the museum? How free was the artist to express critique on the museum and its collection? This thesis investigates the phenomenon of artists' interventions in Dutch museums and examines their ability to add multiperspectivity to the meta-narrative of the Dutch colonial past.

The central question of this thesis is:

How can artists' interventions add multiperspectivity to the meta-narrative of Dutch colonial collections in Dutch historic museums?

Sub-questions:

- *What types of artist's interventions are being shown in museums?*
- *What types of artist's interventions are being used in historic museums?*
- *To what extent do artists see art interventions as a multiperspective approach in the meta-narrative of colonial collections in historic museums?*
- *To what extent do exhibition makers in historic museums see art interventions as a multiperspective approach in the meta-narrative of colonial collections?*

The first chapter will give an overview of the academic discourse on colonial collections and the use of multiperspectivity in Dutch museums. The second chapter will look into the phenomenon of the artist as a storyteller and the tension between the perspective of the artist and the narrative of the museum. In the third chapter two contemporary case studies of artists' interventions that react on the dominant Dutch historical narrative and were represented and commissioned by Dutch museums observe the role of art interventions in the representation of the Dutch colonial past. Due to the reflexive subject of this thesis I will add a self-reflection part in the fourth chapter, where I approach this research process as an artist.

The research for this study will be primarily qualitative. Exhibition catalogues and descriptions of exhibitions give insight in the perspectives and narratives that are being represented. Interviews with artists, exhibition makers and museum curators, who are engaged in the Dutch colonial narrative will focus on the use of artists' interventions as a multiperspective approach of the meta-narrative of colonial collections in historic museums and the obstacles and progress they encounter.

To gain insight in my own research and design process as an artist, I will choose an object from the exhibition 'Afterlives of Slavery' in the Tropenmuseum, related to the Dutch history of slavery. The concept for my own artist intervention will be reevaluated after the research of my thesis. Would I change my concept or stick with it, and why or why not did this research change my perspective on my own concept and research process?

CHAPTER 1 Dutch contested colonial collections in Dutch museums

Western museum collections have always been purveyors of narratives and knowledge. With the arrival of nation-states and the expanding of European empires in the 15th century, museums developed themselves as pedagogic and political institutions. Western national museums expanded in the 18th century due to scientific experiments and rationalism. Collections enlarged through donations by donors who brought artefacts from the colonies and historic museums became the proud presenters of the empire's wealth in the 19th century. The collapsing of the authority of the nation-state and the globalization of the world together with the arrival of the postcolonial discourse encountered a shift in museology. Especially historic museums that told the master narratives of nations and served the nation in educating society became the target for critique by scholars interested in issues of national identity and museums by the end of the 20th century.¹⁰ Museums had to shift from serving the nation-state to serving society. In western historic museums, colonial collections, displays and writings were reviewed in response to the aspirations of contemporary society. Historic museum policy in the 21st century is characterized by the struggle to represent an inclusive narrative. Communities and scholars affiliated with the colonial history of Europe increasingly address the relevancy between the colonial past and present sensitive issues like racism and discrimination. A more inclusive perspective on historic museum collections was not only advocated by scholars in the museum field like Peter Vergo (1989) on 'New Museology' and the following 'Critical Museology', but also found support in history education.¹¹ The introduction of multiperspectivity as a method for history teaching by Robert Stradling (2003), promoted the use of multiple perspectives on history as counter perspectives to the dominant Eurocentric narrative.¹²

1.1 The meta-narrative of colonial collections in Dutch museums

The concept of the museum as a promoter of the meta-narrative was founded during The Age of Enlightenment. Museums were institutions that served the narrative of the nation. History museums were established to construct and promote national and imperial identities. Colonial and ethnographic museums displayed their collections of artefacts from far away and 'exotic' communities to the public. Their aim was to promote imperialism and educate the visitor in the 'other'. Scientific museums endorsed 'the other' through physical anthropology. The study and classification of human beings in species was spread into the displays of museums. Museums labelled their objects by race, class and gender.¹³ The founder of physical anthropology was the German physician Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who was inspired by the work of Charles Darwin and divided humanity into five major races: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, Malayan and American. In the colonial era the concept of race was used to defend slavery. The notion that one race was more superior than the other helped the colonizer to expand its power and institutionalize racism.¹⁴ Anthropology had a major influence in how colonial collections were presented and preserved in museums. Museum archives are still based on the principles of categorisation by race, tribe and gender. In recent years museum records are

¹⁰ Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan, "Making and Remaking National Identities," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 166.

¹¹ Wilke, Heijnen, "The new professional: Underdog or Expert? New Museology in the 21st century," *Sociomuseology* 3, Vol. 37 (2010): 13-29,

<http://revistas.ulusofona.pt/index.php/cadernosociomuseologia/article/view/1631/1297>.

¹² Robert Stradling, *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2003), 11.

¹³ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Multiculturalism and Museums: Discourse about Other in the Age of Globalization," *Theory, Culture & Society* 14, no. 4 (November 1997):131,

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/026327697014004006>.

¹⁴ Lee D. Baker, "Anthropology, History of," in *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, ed. John Hartwell Moore (USA: Macmillan Reference, 2008), 1:93-97,

<http://people.duke.edu/~ldbaker/documents/baker36.pdf>.

critiqued and accused of administrative racism.¹⁵ Although museums have digitalized their archives, the categorization of collections was adopted word for word from the colonial registrations and thus remains the same. This system of categorization forms the basis for museum curators in making exhibitions and writing exhibition texts. It's not surprising that the meta-narrative of museums with colonial collections still use terms as 'Hottentot', 'Negro' and 'Primitive', words that are founded in the colonial context, to distinguish the 'civilized white' people from the 'primitive black' people. Categorization does not only take place in the descriptions of objects or exhibition texts, but can likewise be seen in the set ups of exhibitions in museums. Ethnographic collections are mostly clustered in object groups that represent a certain tribe or culture. Historic art museums like the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Mauritshuis in Den Hague display their centrepieces from the Dutch Golden Age in a hall of fame, glorifying Dutch imperialism. In the essay of Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff about the new Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Dutch colonial past, both cultural historians advocate the placing of colonial collections in a broader historic framework, to create more space for multiple perspectives on the Dutch colonial history. Their advice is to choose other objects than the stereotypical ones that show an alternative perspective on the Dutch colonial history. They suggest the adding of Asian objects to the hall of fame, to create awareness in the cultural hierarchy of the museum.¹⁶

Despite the fact that the meta-narrative of colonial collections in Dutch museums still embody a 'white' and Eurocentric perspective, adjustments are made through the years. The rise of postcolonial critique on museums and museum practices in the 1980s and 1990s created a sense of historical consciousness among scholars, historians and communities who did not feel represented in the meta-narratives of museums.¹⁷ The knowledge system where Western museum relied on in collecting, preserving and exhibiting their non-Western collections was in dispute. The arrival of critical and comparative museology created awareness in the Eurocentric museology that excludes perspectives and voices of the cultures that they represent in their collections. This museological discourse together with the independence of former Dutch colonies like the Dutch Indies (1949), Suriname (1975) and the Dutch Antilles: Aruba in 1986 and in 2010 Curacao, Sint Maarten, Saba, Sint Eustatius and Bonaire, caused a growing interest in the contested part of the Dutch colonial past. The fact that most of the communities from Suriname and the Antilles in the Netherlands have ancestors that were enslaved under the Dutch colonial rule, explains the strong support in demanding the implementation of slavery as a central theme in the Dutch colonial narrative. The lobby of this Afro-Caribbean community led to debates about the master narrative of the Dutch colonial past, among Dutch historians, scholars and politicians. Commissioned by the Dutch state, the committee Van Oostrom designed a canonical version of the Dutch history in 2006 that represented the Dutch history and culture. Fifty 'windows' show the main events in Dutch history, five of these themes represent the Dutch colonial past, of which one portrays the past of slavery.¹⁸ Although the Dutch historic narrative is altered and the Dutch government and institutions supported initiatives to commemorative slavery, Caribbean communities continued to seek ownership in Dutch history.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ciraj Rassool, "Museum Labels and Coloniality" in *Words Matter: An Unfinished Guide to Word Choices in the Cultural Sector*, ed. Wayne Modest and Robin Lelijveld. (Amsterdam: The National Museum for World Cultures, 2018): 20-24, https://issuu.com/tropenmuseum/docs/wordsmatter_english.

¹⁶ Marieke Bloembergen en Martijn Eickhoff, "Een Klein Land dat de Wereld Bestormt: Het Nieuwe Rijksmuseum en het Nederlandse Koloniale Verleden," *Low Countries Historical Review* 129, no. 1 (2014):168, https://www.academia.edu/8861980/Een_klein_land_dat_de_wereld_bestormt._Het_nieuwe_Rijksmuseum_en_het_Nederlands_e_koloniale_verleden_in_BMGN_-_The_Low_Countries_Historical_Review_129-1_2014_156-169.

¹⁷ Christina Kreps, "Non-Western Models of Museums and Curation in Cross-cultural Perspective," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. By Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 458.

¹⁸ "Canon van Nederland," Toen en Nu, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.entoen.nu/>.

¹⁹ Gert Oostindie, "Public Memories of the Atlantic Slave Trade in Contemporary Europe," *European Review* 17, nos. 3&4 (2009): 621,

They critiqued the representation of the Dutch colonial past that leaves out counter-narratives and therefore remains non-inclusive. The opening in 2017 of the permanent exhibition showing the fifty windows of the canon in the Dutch Open Air Museum in Arnhem, affirms this opinion. The stereotypical image of enslaved people as passive and submissive negates the narrative of resistance. No wonder that descendants of Dutch colonies do not feel represented in this historic canon and criticize it by only showing the Dutch imperial identity. Which in 2018 has led to a new discussion about the composition of the canon in Dutch politics. The recognition for the atrocities during the Dutch colonial period is closely linked to the formation of identity. In sociology the term 'cultural trauma' refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning of a social group through the transgenerational transmission of a traumatic memory.²⁰ In the case of slavery, much has been written about the dehumanising experience of slavery, but as Gert Oostindie clarifies also has a close link to the internalisation of racism and the failure of recognition in the post-slavery period.²¹ The loyal following among black communities in the Netherlands have contributed to the possible construction of a National Museum of Slavery in Amsterdam.

1.2 Multiperspectivity in Dutch museums

The influence of on one side the critical debate of historians in the narration of the Dutch colonial past and on the other side the pressure of descendants of former Dutch colonies that do not feel represented in the Dutch meta-narrative has its effect on the way Dutch museums present their colonial collections. The need for a more inclusive history of the Dutch colonial past is more relevant than ever. The term multiperspectivity gained interest in the discourse on history teaching in the 1990's and found its way to the field of storytelling in museums. The aim of multiperspectivity is to add alternative stories and perspectives to the dominant Western narrative. In 1992 the European Union was established. In 2013 the union consisted of 28 Member states. Along the way European politics became more concerned about the European identity. The opening of the European borders caused a flow of immigrants that brought different social and cultural values. Together with the blurring of national borders through globalization emerged the need for a new European meta-narrative. It is not surprising that European political parties became interested in the concept of multiperspectivity that is designed to include diverse cultural perspectives. In 2016 the project 'EuroVision Museums Exhibition Europe (EMEE)' published: *Toolkit no. 1 Making Europe Visible*.²² It is designed as a manual to interpret museum collections from a trans-regional European perspective. The manual is specifically designed for members of staff in historical, historio-cultural, ethnological museums and regional museums.

Robert Stradling characterized multiperspectivity in his teachers guide as "a way of viewing, and a predisposition to views, historical events, personalities, developments, cultures and societies from different perspectives through drawing on procedures and processes which are fundamental to history as a discipline."²³ According to Stradling, multiperspectivity is not simply the application of a

<https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1163/ej.9789004176201.i-340.70>.

²⁰ Ron Eyerman, "The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory," *Acta Sociologica* 47, no.2 (June 2004):159-169,

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0001699304043853>.

²¹ Gert Oostindie, "History Brought Home: Post-colonial migrations and the Dutch rediscovery of slavery," in *Post-Colonial Immigrants and Identity Formations in the Netherlands*, ed. U. Bosma (Amsterdam: IMISCOE/Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 155-173,

https://pure.knaw.nl/portal/files/477384/Oostindie,_History_brought_home_2012.pdf.

²² Anna-Lena Fuhrmann, Jutta Schumann, Susanne Popp, Susanne Schilling & Olviver Mayer-Simmet, *Making Europe Visible: Re-interpretation of Museum Objects and Topics; a manual*. (EMEE, 2016),

http://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/EMEE_Toolkit_N1_DIG-1.pdf.

²³ Robert Stradling, *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching: A Guide for Teachers* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2003), 14, http://biblioteca.esec.pt/cdi/ebooks/docs/Multiperspectivity_history.pdf.

historical method, but an extend to the scope of historical analysis that can be done in various ways.²⁴ In advocating multiperspectivity as a tool to broaden historic narratives Stradling elaborates four potential benefits. First, multiperspectivity adds stories of “significant others” and therefor creates a more inclusive historic narrative. Second, it includes the impact of historic events on different communities. For example when a country is colonized there is the perspective of the colonizer and there is the perspective of the colonized, who both experience the impact of territorial occupation in a very different way. Third, multiperspectivity can help emphasize with different parties in a conflict and contextualize the problem better by reflecting on preconceptions. Fourth, is the knowledge that different perspectives have a symbiotic relationship with each other and the fact that each perspective fits a bigger image. Other important components of multiperspectivity that Stradler adds to his guide are ‘empathy’ and ‘relational dimension’.²⁵ Both give context to the way in how and who establishes the narrative. In what context decisions were taken and what the motives of the decision makers were, are very important basics to take in account in any multiperspectival narrative.

Historian and former curator of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, Susan Legêne affirms Stradlers vision and interestingly suggests that instead of preserving colonial heritage, the mechanisms that turned these objects into heritage should be thrown away, because they confirm the power of the colonizer in controlling the past and the future. There lies a challenge for heritage education to transform interpretation of these collections into a multiperspective historical awareness on the colonial past.²⁶ Essential to Legêne is that the institutional context of the object that is being displayed should be taken into account. The institutional context has an extensive effect in the ‘meaning making’ of an object. The historical meaning of objects in relation to the context, gives the visitor more knowledge in how perspectives and narratives are created and reveal the Western hegemony.

The suggestion to get rid of archival and curational systems that are designed from a Eurocentric perspective in a colonial context, is for many museums a no go area. Museum archive systems like TMS (The Museum System) accommodate thousands of objects and even more descriptions. The design and implementation of a new system requires a lot of research and rewriting. For museum budgets this is an unaffordable task. Although it is not an entire new system, The National Museum of World Cultures began to alter the descriptions of their collections in TMS. Since their partnership with the Museum of Word Cultures in Rotterdam in 2017, TMS accommodates 940.000 object records. In respond to the demand of the public to get access into museum collections, museums designed online catalogues that displayed their collection for the public. The texts that can be read online by the public are different from the texts that can be found in The Museum System. The texts in TMS still show the colonial descriptions and categorization together with the new alternatives. The latter is used in the texts for the public interface. The National Museum of World Cultures aims to add explanations to the online public collection site on why decisions were made to alter words or texts.²⁷ According to registrar and content manager of the National Museum of World Cultures Marijke Kunst the altering of texts “is not about making history look better than it was. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the meanings and connotations of words change over time, and that as a public institution we want to ensure that every visitor and researcher feels included and not offended when they engage

²⁴ Stradler, *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching*, 19.

²⁵ Ibid, 43.

²⁶ Susan Legêne, *Nu of nooit: over de actualiteit van museale collecties* (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA, 2005), 25, <https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=7ed4f24b-4be7-4a78-9ee4-7ca29a1cf4b4>.

²⁷ Marijke Kunst “Being True to the Catalogue,” in *Words Matter: An Unfinished Guide to Word Choices in the Cultural Sector*, ed. Wayne Modest and Robin Lelijveld. (Amsterdam: The National Museum of World Cultures, 2018): 31, https://issuu.com/tropenmuseum/docs/wordsmatter_english.

with our collections."²⁸ In addition Kunst points out the responsibility of a public museum to raise awareness in the use of language more broadly.

The ways in which museums add multiperspectivity to their meta-narrative differ from one another. According to Carla van Boxtel, Maria Grever and Stephan Klein museums and heritage organizations have the potential to trigger visitors to think, through active, embodied and multi-sensory experiences. Historical collections display the differences and similarities between the past and the present, through these objects visitors can identify aspects of continuity and change in history.²⁹ Bostel, Grever and Klein note the paradox of globalization: the more remote history becomes, the more need for history to strengthen the identity of local communities.³⁰ In an interview, historian Maria Grever divides multiperspectivity into two approaches: on a temporal level and a social level.³¹ Meanings change over periods of time; this is understood as the temporal level and focuses on objects, monuments, locations and landscapes. On the other hand these objects can be approached from different perspectives, like gender, class or ethnicity; the social approach. Grever appoints the importance of good argumentation of perspectives, listening to each other and creating a dialogue and implementing this to education and museums.

Dutch museums have various ways in adding multiperspectivity to their institute. One example mentioned above is the alteration of language and perspectives in writing. A leading figure in this approach is the National Museum of World Cultures and the recent edition of 'Words Matter: An Unfinished Guide to Word Choices in the Cultural Sector' (2018). In the exhibition 'Afterlives of Slavery' in the Tropenmuseum Amsterdam (part of the National Museum of World Cultures), the curators collaborated with the activists *Decolonize the Museum* and chose to represent the topic of slavery from a 'black' perspective instead of the commonly used 'white' perspective. The result is an exhibition that includes historic 'black' figures to tell the history of slavery and experts and spoken word artists to show the effect of slavery in present Dutch society. The curators advised by the activists, chose to reconstruct the past in their historical narrative by changing the narrative from a 'white' perspective into a 'black' perspective. Texts like 'The Dutch successfully captured the fortress' were changed in 'The fortress was successfully defended for a long time by Maroon fighters.'³² Still there is work to be done for institutions to lose the embedded colonial practices. Mitchel Esajas, co-founder of the Black Archives and advocate in telling hidden histories, points out the flaws in his reflection on his collaboration with the Tropenmuseum.³³ According to Esajas an equal collaboration consists of involving people outside the institution in the decision-making process: "Let the archives and collections speak to one another and let the staff of the Tropenmuseum share their resources and power with those who have been excluded from telling their stories and from deciding how their stories and histories should be told."

²⁸ Kunst, "Being True to the Catalogue," 32.

²⁹ Carla van Boxtel, Maria Grever and Stephan Klein, "Introduction: The Appeal of Heritage in Education," in *Sensitive Pasts: Questioning Heritage in Education*, ed. Carla van Boxtel, Maria Grever and Stephan Klein (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2016), 6, https://www.berghahnbooks.com/downloads/intros/VanBoxtelSensitive_intro.pdf.

³⁰ Van Boxtel, Grever and Klein, "Introduction," 34.

³¹ Maria Grever, "Genderview Maria Grever: "#MeToo-beweging: een historisch keerpunt," interview by Greetje Bijl, *Genderview*, Winter 2019, <http://www.gendergeschiedenis.nl/index.php/tijdschrift/genderview/219-genderview-winter-2018-maria-grever>.

³² Martin Berger and Richard Kofi, "Counterperspectives," in *CO-LAB, Afterlives of Slavery*, ed. Robin Lelijveld and Ninja Rijnks-Kleikamp, (Amsterdam: National Museum of World Cultures, 2018), https://issuu.com/tropenmuseum/docs/zine_colab_def_onlineversie/2?ff&e=1823887/66204021.

³³ Mitchel Esajas, "Can the Former Colonial Museum Truly Be Decolonized?," in *CO-LAB, Afterlives of Slavery*, ed. Robin Lelijveld and Ninja Rijnks-Kleikamp (Amsterdam: National Museum of World Cultures, 2018), https://issuu.com/tropenmuseum/docs/zine_colab_def_onlineversie/2?ff&e=1823887/66204021.

Where the Tropenmuseum tries to reconstruct the past in their historical narrative by choosing the 'Black' perspective, other museums prefer to present various perspectives on the past. One example is the exhibition 'The World of the VOC', that opened in February 2017 by The National Archive in Den Hague. The biggest archive of the Dutch history is owned by the The National Archive and captures 125 kilometre documents, 14 million pictures and 300.000 historic maps. In its library 60.000 reference books can be examined.³⁴ The narrative that is being told is one of contradictions. One-liners like 'No Business, Without Battle' and 'No Delft, Without China' are used to change the glorifying image of the VOC in the Netherlands. The aim of the National Archive was to show a neutral perspective on the Dutch East Indian Company, by telling both the wealth that the company brought to the Netherlands as well as the atrocities and mass murders they committed in claiming their wealth. Although the temporary exhibition received a silver IDCA Award for the best scenography, the sensory experience distracts the visitor from the content, according to historian Caroline Drieënhuizen.³⁵ Although Drieënhuizen recognizes the efforts that are made to add multiperspectivity, the attempts give little access to other perspectives than the 'white' Eurocentric one. The counter narratives are put in drawers and need extra action to access or remain general by not giving the coloured persons a name or the right context. The critique of Drieënhuizen was followed by others who claimed that the exhibition was constructed through the perspective of the company and lacks multiperspectivity. In reaction to these critical opinions the National Archive hosted a meeting and urged people to come and discuss the following issues: How can a shared past be displayed with a collection that is constructed through one perspective? How to deal with gaps in a collection? Are archives neutral or not? Which role does language play in relation to inclusivity? The panel that led the discussion, included curator Imara Limon (Amsterdam Museum) and Caroline Drieënhuizen.³⁶ The latter confirms the need for guidance in the search for multiperspectivity in museums with colonial collections and exposes embedded Eurocentric museum practices in the Dutch cultural sector.

Telling multiperspective narratives in museums are not only been realised through texts but also and equally important through objects and images. Another museum affiliated with the VOC history is the Westfries Museum in Hoorn. The museum ambition is to be the Dutch museum of the Golden Age. General director Ad Geerdink acknowledges the shift in perspectives of the colonial past.³⁷ Geerdink aims to display the various narratives about the colonial past aside one another. The Westfries Museum successfully contributed in 2012 to the public debate of contested statues. In reaction to the initiative taken by citizens of Hoorn to remove the heroic statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Hoorn, the Museum established a contemporary exposition in the form of a law case called 'The case Coen' where visitors became judges. The majority wanted to keep the statue, precisely as a reference to the dark side of the colonial past. The museum renewed their VOC-room by adding contemporary art that reacts on the portraits of Jan Pieterszoon Coen and his wife Eva Ment. Frisian artist Tineke Fischer made 140 nutmeg balls of ceramic that are displayed on the floor of the VOC-room. On the background a big projection of the surf of the ocean is displayed. The washed-up nutmeg balls refer to the mass slaughter of the people on the Banda Islands in 1621 under the direction of Coen, to

³⁴ "Pers," WhichMuseum, accessed April 14, 2019, <https://whichmuseum.nl/nederland/den-haag/nationaal-archief>.

³⁵ Caroline Drieënhuizen, "De negentiende-eeuwse wereld van de VOC: tentoonstelling 'De wereld van de VOC' in het Nationaal Archief in Den Haag (nog t/m 7 januari 2018)," accessed April 14, 2019, <https://carolinedrieenhuizen.wordpress.com/2017/04/29/de-negentiende-eeuwse-wereld-van-de-voc-tentoonstelling-de-wereld-van-de-voc-in-het-nationaal-archief-in-den-haag-nog-tm-7-januari-2018/>.

³⁶ "In gesprek over De Wereld van de VOC", Nationaal Archief, accessed April 14, 2019, <http://www.gahetna.nl/actueel/nieuws/2017/gesprek-over-wereld-voc>.

³⁷ Patrick Meershoek, "Westfries Museum werpt nieuw licht op koloniaal verleden," *Het Parool*, April 20, 2018, https://www.parool.nl/kunst-en-media/westfries-museum-werpt-nieuw-licht-op-koloniaal-verleden~a4594583/?utm_source=link&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=shared%20content&utm_content=paid&hash=46e7aa2429f172552ec272e7dc9010f5046512d9.

claim monopoly on the nutmeg trade. Furthermore artist and costume designer Rien Bekkers reflected on the portrait of co-founder of the VOC, Dirk Bas Jacobsz.³⁸ Bekkers copied the costume of the painting, but replaced the material of the costume by material like paper of tree bark and banana leaf from Bali. Bekkers's aim is to show that the wealth displayed in the costumes of the 17th century family portraits are the result of the exploitation of resources in the East by the Dutch. Although the Westfries Museum clearly adds other perspectives to the meta-narrative of their museum, the artists that are chosen to add alternative perspectives are 'white' and Dutch. To make the museum more multiperspective it will do the museum well to add perspectives from for example Indonesian artists or other artists from former Dutch colonies to reflect on the colonial collection of the museum. In that way the colonial experience is exposed through the perspectives of different communities, one of the potential benefits of multiperspectivity, according to Stradling.

Dutch contemporary art museums like TENT are a great example of how artists from all over the world reflect on the colonial past and the on-going impact on contemporary society. The interesting perspectives shown in this museum could be a valuable addition to colonial collections shown in Dutch historic museums. In November 2017 curator Imara Limon received the key of the Mauritsmuseum for one night. Limon organized in collaboration with curator and founder of the 21st Century Museum, Janna El Isa a temporary artist intervention in the Mauritshuis. A group of 'Black' artists like Patricia Kaersenhout, Jörgen Tjon A Fong and many others, responded to the 17th century paintings that portrayed Black figures through dance performances, poetry, music and guided tours.³⁹ These interventions present new narratives together with the meta-narrative of the museum and give the public the ability to reflect on the museum collection from different point of views. Unfortunately these alternative stories were only accessible for the public for one night, the question remains when museums with historic colonial collections implement these interventions in their permanent exhibitions.

The formation of the Dutch historic canon and the debates that followed perfectly represent the struggle of museums in telling the story of their (historic) collection. Globalisation and the strong call of (post-colonial) communities to have a say in the meta-narrative of (colonial) collections led to a growing opinion of historic museums as non-inclusive, Eurocentric, white institutions. Which forced Dutch museums to reflect on their role in present Dutch society. The embedded colonial practices and ideologies that house in the frameworks of Dutch historic museums, makes them insecure and reluctant in changing their narrative. Since the introduction of the 'Code Culturele Diversiteit' (Cultural Diversity Code) by the Dutch government, museums are obligated to create more inclusive exhibitions. For museums to be more inclusive, the methodology of multiperspectivity found its way to museum practices. Adding more perspectives is needed to create awareness in the meaning making of objects and collections, but to what extend do these 'other' perspectives relate to the dominant one? Efforts are made by museums, adjusting labels, altering texts, but are that enough? Although for contemporary art museums it is easier to experiment, historic museums can be much more experimental than that they are now. Dominant narratives cannot only be seen in texts, but likewise in archives, ways of collecting and museum staff. To change these (colonial) embedded systems, interventions should be created. Artists can help in the deconstruction of these systems.

³⁸ Arnoud van Soest, "Discussie rond J.P. Coen leidt tot nieuwe VOC-presentatie Westfries Museum," Oneindig Noord-Holland, accessed April 19, 2019,

<https://onh.nl/verhaal/discussie-rond-j-p-coen-leidt-tot-nieuwe-voc-presentatie-westfries-museum>.

³⁹ "Maurits & Imara – Museumtalent 2017," Art & Theatre, All Events, accessed April 19, 2019, <https://allevents.in/the%20hague/mauritsand-imara-museumtalent-2017/1637285299625024>.

CHAPTER 2 Artists as storytellers

As Itala Vivan rightfully cites “At this point in history, the former temples of European empires - museums invented by imperial hegemonies - have gradually lost their original mission as absolute indicators of a universalising canon.”⁴⁰ So if museums can no longer tell the story of the nation, who does? Vivan exposes here the changing position of the museum in contemporary society. How and by whom stories are being told in museums is a topic for discussion. Nowadays museums can’t negate the fact that their voice is one of many and displays a particular perspective on the world. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the institutional voice still represents a Western point of view that can be traced back to the colonial past. To change this perspective in a more multiperspective one, museums can choose to collaborate with external partners like communities, experts, activists, guest-curators, but also artists. This last group has a special status, because of their autonomous character. Artists don’t have to take their constituency in account or have specific professional rules they have to follow. Another advantage is the ability of artists to think ‘outside the box’, that often results in innovative perspectives. For museums this autonomy often feels risky, because you can never predict the outcome when you give commission to an artist for an intervention. This outcome may result in an inaccessible piece of art that confuses and excludes visitors and thus does not address multiperspectivity. Nonetheless more and more museums see the potential of artists’ interventions as a multiperspective and reflexive approach.

Contemporary artists are increasingly used to tell a counter narrative or a subjective narrative that is put aside or in place of the meta-narrative of the museum. When an artist engages with the existing context of the museum, like a museum’s collection, its architecture, history, curatorial practices, narrative and so on, we speak of an ‘artist intervention’.⁴¹ The ways in which artists intervene differs and rely on the personal signature of the artist, the aim of the artist, the topic of intervention and the frame and role given by the museum. The realization of multiperspectivity in the narrative of colonial collections could mean recontextualizing, adding a counter narrative or replacing the former narrative into a new one. Artists can contribute to these multiperspective approaches by reframing objects from colonial collections, adding objects or changing the narrative of the collection.

2.1 Artist or curator?

During the 1920s and 1930s artists became engaged in the meaning making of art and artefacts by the Western art institutions. The art movements ‘Dadaism’ and ‘Surrealism’ that used interventions to critique the dominant ‘art world’ were at the origins of today’s artists’ interventions.

Dadaist artists like Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst focussed themselves on art museums, its cultural exclusions and taxonomies. While Surrealist artists were concentrated on ethnographic museums, their collections and their position in promoting the nation state, empire and process of naturalising subjugation.⁴² The interventions revealed and critiqued the power structures of institutes and their practices. Duchamp was the first to question the motives and authority in the determination of canonical narratives in art exhibitions. Contesting the authority of the art world became the mutual concern of the Dada collective. Although born in Europe after the First World War and critiquing the European power structures, the Dadaist ideology spread in the direction of the United States of America. Institutional doubt prevailed among Americans too. In their exhibitions for Dadaists the event itself was the main gesture, while the physical art object was often considered as a by-product

⁴⁰ Itala Vivan, “What Museum for Africa?,” in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History*, ed. Ian Chambers et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 205-219, <https://www.boi.com/nl/p/the-postcolonial-museum/9200000056197933/?suggestionType=typedsearch&bltgh=gs4FT7cVfuWSDjocLUxCeQ.1.2.ProductTitle>.

⁴¹ Robins, *Curious Lessons in the Museum*, 15-27.

⁴² Ibid, 64-79.

of the event. Because Duchamp's conceptual direction and the uncovering of curatorial practices in the meaning making of art, Duchamp is often seen as the first artist-curator. Critique on the power structures of art institutions and in particular the European taxonomy of classification was the main theme of Surrealists Max Ernst and Johannes Theodor Baargeld. The exhibition 'La Vérité sur les Colonies' (the truth about the colonies) in 1931 parodied the ethnographic curatorial practices of the colonial collections of European museums. Through a model of disruption this exhibition contested the official government 'Exposition Coloniale' in Paris.⁴³ The exhibition can be seen as a counter exhibition. Indigenous art from colonised territories was juxtaposed with European Catholic objects. Museum labels and texts were mocked by giving them the title 'Fetishes', referring to the burning of objects that were considered a fetish by the missionaries. Artists Ernst and Baargeld parodied the classification through class, gender and ethnicity by museums. Their art intervention disrupted the system of order and cultivated disorder by provocation.

Where the early 20th century was defined by the question 'who determines what art is?', the mid 20th century became the spectacle of radical art. Inspired by the provocative methods of the Dadaists and Surrealists that did not gain much attention within society, artists in the 1960's and 1970's took a step further. The so-called 'neo-Dadaist' events like the 'happenings' in the 70's changed the perception of art radically.⁴⁴ In the wake of Duchamp's critique of museum systems, artists in the 60's and 70's not only critiqued the art institutions, in the form of curatorial practices, but art as an institution itself. Artists began to reflect their own artwork and art practices. In questioning the construction of art history and the dominant aesthetic norms of the Western art-world, artists started to revalue the aesthetic of the quotidian. The focus of many artists' interventions lied in the construction of ideologies that can be transferred through the display of art. Many artists unmasked and broke with the institutional framework to become more socially and politically relevant. Different from the period in the 20's and 30's, the 60's and 70's managed to create a structural change in the relationship with institutions by artists and not only sporadic events. Where the Dadaist events more acted as counter exhibitions, artists in the 60's and 70's intervened and critiqued the system of existing institutions, which we know as 'institutional critique'. In questioning the site and space of the institution as part of the meaning making of art, artists involved the public through interactive artworks and created awareness in the relationship between the art object and the exhibition space. Artists broadened their own field by borrowing knowledge from other disciplines in the creation of art interventions and institutional critique. They also became more involved in side practices like art criticism, curating, investigative journalism and social science. These practices created space to move away from the former leading institutional frame of knowledge. Artists were no longer autonomous characters, but became interlocutors and inventors of creative concepts that adapted to relevant issues in society. The emergence of social activism, civil rights campaigns, feminism, queer politics and multiculturalism created new layers of critique to the hierarchical roles and power relations in the art-world.

The art genres 'Minimalism' and 'Conceptualism' were the result of a process of 'de-aestheticisation'. Symbols that referred to institutional power were re-contextualized or deconstructed. At the same time minimalistic exhibition spaces also called 'The White Cubes' were critiqued for implying to be 'neutral', but were only accessible for prominent artists. Recognizable visual expressions of galleries and museums became material for artists to re-appropriate. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu incited the term 'symbolic violence' in the 70's.⁴⁵ The term describes a distinction in power between social groups that can be seen in various social domains such as gender, ethnic background and language. The realization that exhibition space impacts the interpretation of the artwork that is

⁴³ Ibid, 72.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 80.

⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (London: Routledge, 2010).

presented, created an experimental process of artists in seeking other sites than museums to exhibit and created in the mid 70's a new genre in art: 'Site-specific Art'. In the 70's institutions started to invite artist's to curate exhibitions. One famous example is the invitation of artist Andy Warhol to curate an exhibition by of The Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design in Long Island in 1970.⁴⁶ Warhol negated the existing narrative and values of the museum, something that wasn't appreciated by the staff and direction of the museum. The total disruption of existent museum practices by Warhol made the director Daniel Robbins decide not to proceed the planned series of exhibitions curated by Warhol.

Before the 1990's artists' interventions were mainly trying to capture utopian futures or disrupt existing formats, after artists became facilitators of dialogues and new narratives. The end of the 20th century until now is characterized by globalisation. The rise of post-colonial critique and multicultural societies influenced the art-world and its practices. Institutions, that told the history of the nation and claimed to represent the past, were contested by historians, scholars and artists. Artists' interventions became concerned with the voicing of hidden histories and the exposing of sexist, racist and elitist practices in the museum.⁴⁷ In their interventions artists articulated institutional power and negated histories to make visitors aware of dominant narratives. From the 1990's on the authority of museums as purveyor of the grand narrative is often questioned through artists' interventions. Aside from an authority that displays historic facts, interventions can give an emotional context to the people that are the subject of display. The idea that art can transform society can likewise be seen in 'Relational Art' and the 'Ethical Turn' in art, where artists became 'community workers'. The individualist artist with single ownership was questioned and participatory art projects in the social field were promoted.⁴⁸ Participation became a trending topic in European policy and also in the art-world. Lately the word seems to be replaced by the term 'inclusive', resulting in artists' interventions that represent excluded minorities.

2.2 The tension between the artist perspective and the museum narrative

As mentioned in the previous chapter historic museums are cautious in inviting artists to reflect on their collection. Museums are aware of losing control when the freedom is given to the artist to reflect on their colonial collections. Clifford might feed the fear of museums to lose control by calling the performing strategy of artist to revise museum narratives 'contact zones for confrontation'.⁴⁹ The impact of the artists voice largely depends on the framework given by the museum. To what extend does the perspective of the artist relate to the museum narrative? Is the artwork a new expression of the original theme or is it a reaction on the museum narrative? Is the artist perspective being placed next to the meta-narrative (equivalent) or is the former meta-narrative of the museum being replaced by a new perspective?

Since the 1960's museums had to deal with socially engaged art, which urged museums to broaden their scope in curating more inclusive and socially relevant exhibitions.

The rising awareness in the impossibility to disconnect the colonial past from the present by post-colonial communities that claimed a voice in history, changed museum narratives and displays. The notion that 'white supremacy' is embedded in societal systems through institutions and languages that control knowledge makes institutions fodder for critique. Not only in the West, but all over the world the gates to power are only accessible through the lingua franca of the scientific community, English.

⁴⁶ Robbins, *Curious Lessons in the Museum*, 96.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 181.

⁴⁸ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London:Verso, 2012), 12.

⁴⁹ Margherita Parati, "Performance in the Museum Space for a Wandering Society," in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History*, ed. Ian Chambers et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 135.

The power of language and storytelling is perfectly explained by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her TED-talk in 2009.⁵⁰ Although already 10 years old, this talk still represents the dominant narratives that still exist and the exclusive accessibility of literature in present society. As Adichie explains, storytelling cannot be separated from power. Single stories divides people through differences instead of creating equality through similarities. Aside from that Adichie notes that single stories create stereotypes that are not untrue, but incomplete and make one story become the only story.

"Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize." Chimamanda Ngozi

Precisely this quote by Adichie during her TED-talk exposes the power of stories and gives an insight why museums struggle to adjust or change their narrative. Used to the power of knowledge, giving control over narratives to for example artists is not in the habit of historic museums. Museums prefer to control the main narrative and even if an artist is consulted for the writing of the texts of his or her artwork, the museum will always claim their ownership of what is being told. In this construction the collaboration between artists and museums remains unequal.

According to Khadija Carroll La interactions between artists and history can be a confronting struggle.⁵¹ Contemporary practices are difficult to include and the exclusivity of the canon forces artists to define their work through the existing power-relations embedded in the canon. The fact that museums embody these (institutional) powers makes them institutions of exclusion instead of inclusion. Exactly this displays the tension between artists' and museums. Museums invite artists to reflect on their collections and fulfil the requirement for inclusive exhibitions. For some museums this will only be a tick off on their list of tasks, other museums seek for a structural change in their museum practices. Artists that act as interlocutors of collective memory articulate and produce collective subjectivity and can cause political struggle through their work.⁵² The counternarratives they create displace museums as a neutral place and often conflicts with the wide target audience museums want to attach themselves to.

According to artist and writer Craig Richardson artists are not critical outsiders in the institutional context, they simply bring new and unknown interpretations of history into the framework of museums. Richardson convinced by the urge to embed artists' interventions in museums even suggest replacing the term 'intervention' in 'embedded reinterpretation'.⁵³ According to Richardson the term 'artists' intervention' claims to be a one-sided way of communicating, negating the collaboration between the museum directors, curators and artists. In his article Richardson researches the artist as historical companions. Artists often refer to historical work and are used to research the context of their subject before making their own 'reinterpretation'.

To Celeste Ianniciello and Michaela Quadraro the role of the artist in existing museum frameworks maintains the museum as a privileged place of national and cultural memory.⁵⁴ In Ianniciello's and

⁵⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The danger of a single story," filmed July 2009 at TEDGlobal, video, 18:42, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en#t-663792.

⁵¹ Khadija Carroll La, "Object to project: artists' interventions in museum collections," in *Sculpture and the Museum*, ed. Christopher Marshall (London: Ashgate Press, 2012), 216-239, https://www.academia.edu/4097066/Object_to_Project_Artist_s_Interventions_in_Museums_in_Christopher_Marshall_Ed._Sculpture_in_the_Museum_London_Ashgate_Press_2012_216-239.

⁵² Mihaela Brebenel, Christopher Collier and Joanna Figiel, "The Artist as Interlocutor and Labour of Memory," in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History*, ed. Ian Chambers et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 121-132.

⁵³ Craig Richardson, "Artists' 'embedded reinterpretation' in museums and sites of heritage," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 17, no.1 (2018): 22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702029.2017.1334984>.

⁵⁴ Celeste Ianniciello and Michaela Quadraro, "Museum Practices and Migrating Modernity: A Perspective from the South," *Stedelijk Studies Journal* Issue #1 (Fall 2014),

Quadraro's opinion precisely these frameworks should be deconstructed and alternative ways to institutionalize memories should be explored. Artists can be of great value in re-designing museum practices and frameworks.

The interdependence of both museums and artists has an effect on the impact of artists interventions in museums. On the one hand museums need artists to create more inclusive exhibitions to make them more relevant in present society and on the other hand artists need museums to assign them in giving them a public platform and assure them of work, although the latter is changing. Because museums are the facilitators that seem to have the final voice when inviting artists to intervene, one might ask if institutional structures can be changed or if an equal collaboration is possible in the first place. Something Professor of Geography and Heritage Studies Divya P. Tolia-Kelly too addresses in wondering if art and aesthetics can produce ways of critique and can overcome and form languages and grammars of expression that genuinely counter colonial and imperial artistic grammars and values.⁵⁵

Nevertheless should the exploration of artists to present their art outside museum context in the 70's be taken in account. Hybrid spaces emerged where artists could present their work on their own terms to the public. The introduction of the Internet and Social Media gave artists the platform they needed, without being connected to a museum. Prominent and wealthy persons, like actors, musicians and athletes, especially in the United States of America became interested in upcoming and mysterious artists that created their own art systems. A famous example is the graffiti and autodidact artist Banksy, who illegally started using walls in the streets of London as an exhibition space in the 90's. His accessible and politically critical art in combination with his mysterious identity made him one of the most popular artists of the last decades. Museums were desperate in collaborating and taking part in Banksy's popularity. However Banksy, who actively disassociates himself from the bourgeoisie artworld and prefers to focus on lower classes and minorities in society, is not interested in museums to exhibit his work. In one of his rare interviews about his anarchistic theme park 'Dismaland' that he created in 2015 he cites: "I think a museum is a bad place to look at art; the worst context for art is other art."⁵⁶

The popularity of Social Media as a platform for art created space for artists from all over the world to mark their perspectives and claim their voice in global society. Communities that are under-represented in museums have their own successful platforms, audiences and buyers, which make it harder for museum curators to bring in emergent artists like these in their museum narratives.

Initiated by Duchamp in the early twentieth century, artists in the mid twentieth century became more affiliated with curatorial practices like scientific research and knowledge and ways of presenting. The last decades the voice of the artist in representing society gained interest, artists became storytellers' interlocutors and presenters of excluded minorities. Artists are successful in telling multiple and diverse stories. Their way of working is less impacted by embedded power structures, which makes them suitable in telling alternative narratives. For artists to have a structural impact on the narrative in historic museums multiple conditions should be taken into account. Artists should be given the freedom and ownership to tell their story, which should be given the same value as the museum narrative. Historic museums should explore the option to open their archives and act as a platform for artists who give (historic) objects different meanings and stories. In addition historic museums might benefit in showing their struggle to the public and add artists interventions that expose the role of

https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/museum-practices-and-migrating-modernity-a-perspective-from-the-south/#_edn1.

⁵⁵ Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, "Ranciere and the re-distribution of the sensible: The artist Rosanna Raymond, dissensus and postcolonial sensibilities within the spaces of the museum," *Progress in Human Geography* 43, Issue 1 (November 2017): 14, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0309132517739141>.

⁵⁶ "Banksy: 'I think a museum is a bad place to look at art'," *Art & Design*, The Guardian, last modified April 25, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/aug/21/banksy-dismaland-art-amusements-and-anarchism>.

the museum in the dominant meta-narrative of their (colonial) collection. The latter takes a lot of courage, but will help historic museums to change from educator to an equal partner.

CHAPTER 3 External Case Studies

In relation to the theme colonial past of this thesis and the two phenomena artists' interventions in museums and multiperspectivity on the meta-narrative of the Dutch colonial past, I discuss two recent artists' interventions shown in two Dutch museums. The first art intervention is "Monuments" by the artist Iswanto Hartono, a perspective on the colonial history of the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam. The second is the spoken word art piece "Ina Kwana Bawa" by Onias Landveld, a perspective on the colonial heritage of language and identity in relation to slavery. In both cases I will give a description of the artists' interventions and their context. Interviews with the curators, museum catalogues and the artists will gain insight in the relation between the museum and its colonial collection and the artist. Both Iswanto and Landveld share a colonial experience. Iswanto as inhabitant from a former colonized country, the Dutch Indies (now Indonesia) and Landveld born in the former Dutch colony Suriname and now lives and works in the Netherlands. Both artists give voice of their colonial background and give their perspective on the meta-narrative of Dutch historic museums.

3.1 Iswanto Hartono "Monuments"



Figure 1. Iswanto Hartono (2017), *Monuments*. Oude Kerk, Amsterdam. Photo credit: Fabian Landewee. Courtesy of Iswanto Hartono.

The Oude Kerk (old church) in Amsterdam became a museum in 2016 that focusses on identity and collective memory in their programming. Their aim is to stimulate society to reflect on the world that surrounds them.⁵⁷ The museum, a Dutch historic monument, curates the work of contemporary artists

⁵⁷ "Oude Kerk," Oude Kerk, accessed June 12, 2019,

whose work shows the relation between the past and the present and contributes to the creation of new perspectives. The collection of the museum consists largely of historic objects (15th till the 20th century) that are part of the monument the Oude Kerk and a dozen contemporary art objects.⁵⁸ For example the depiction of the Munster Treaty (1648) in one of the stained-glass windows of the museum, which tells the story of the Treaty that ended the 80-year War between Spain and the Dutch Republic, but also claimed the free trade of the Dutch with the East- and West Indies. In addition Spain became eliminated from the sail on the Dutch colonies.⁵⁹ Like the stained-glass window many of the museum objects have a direct relation with the Dutch 'Golden Age' and thus the colonial past. In their policy plan 2017-2020, the Oude Kerk claims the word 'vrijplaats' (sanctuary) to be a good reflection of the historic meaning of the museum building as well as the contemporary significance as a museum and the city of Amsterdam.⁶⁰ A meeting point where like-minded people with diverse backgrounds can contribute to the dialogue between history and the present. The confrontation between innovation and historic values in the cultural field are the heart of the museum program. The focus on artists that exhibit in the Oude Kerk lies on what they call 'transhistoricititeit' (transhistoric), crossing the historic borders.

Curators Alia Swastika and Jacqueline Grandjean established together with Iswanto Hartono the exhibition 'Europalia Indonesia' that was linked to the arts festival 'Europalia'. Indonesian artist Iswanto Hartono connects the colonial history of the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam with the history of Indonesia through his artwork. Commissioned by the Oude Kerk in 2017, Hartono created several site-specific works that react on the big tombs of famous Dutch seafarers. Out of cement and candle wax Hartono manufactured recognizable heroic sculptures of the seafarers. The bust that is made of candle wax is being lit and slowly melts away. Hartono plays with the transience and ownership of history. Using the museum as a colonial site and the tombs as colonial objects, for Hartono the museum itself becomes the subject of critique. Although some museums wouldn't dare to commission artists who publicly critique the history of the museum, the exhibition of Hartono in the Oude Kerk suggests presenting the museum as a multiperspective and social relevant institute.

*"My work in the Oudekerk is as simple as art and artists, it is only a medium or storyteller. Artists don't create policy, nor solutions."*⁶¹

Hartono was selected to create work for the Oude Kerk because of his artistic reflection on post-colonial issues. The colonial past of the Oude Kerk gave the artist the chance to make the work site-specific. For Hartono the site of the Oude Kerk is a 'living monument' of the past and was given the freedom to interact with the space in the church. He describes this as "Exciting to know such freedom given by such historical museum."⁶² Well aware of the freedom he received in creating his work, Hartono mentions in particular the good work of chief curator and director of the Oude Kerk, Jacqueline Grandjean. In close contact with curators Swastika and Grandjean, Hartono created his work "Monuments". In the writing of the caption texts, catalogues and publishing, Hartono was always asked for approval. The only obstacle for Hartono was time, since the committee of Europhalia was late in connecting Hartono to the Oude Kerk. The exhibition of Christian Bolstanski that was planned after Europhalia Indonesia was already set, which gave Hartono only the short

<https://oudekerk.nl>.

⁵⁸ "Collectie," Oude Kerk, accessed June 12, 2019,

<https://oudekerk.nl/collectie/>.

⁵⁹ "Vrede van Münster (1648) - Einde van de Tachtigjarige Oorlog, Republiek erkend als soevereine staat," Historiek, accessed June 12, 2019,

<https://historiek.net/vrede-van-munster-1648-tachtigjarige-oorlog/79537/>.

⁶⁰ "Oude Kerk Kunstenplan 2017-2020," Stichting de Oude Kerk te Amsterdam, accessed June 12, 2019,

<https://oudekerk.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Meerjaren-beleidsplan-2017-2020.pdf>.

⁶¹ Iswanto Hartono, e-mail exchange with the artist, June 18, 2019.

⁶² Iswanto Hartono, *ibid*.

period of a month to display his work. When asked the question if he received enough financial appreciation for his artwork, Hartono must admit that the only fee received from the Oude Kerk was in accommodation, installations and publications. The rest was funded by the Indonesian Ministry of Culture, but cannot be seen as a significant financial fee.

In questioning the meaning of monuments in relation to contemporary issues within both the Dutch and Indonesian society, Hartono adds another perspective to the site the Oude Kerk and its collection. Hartono's interest in the shared history of both countries is shown through the mimicking of recognizable glorifying monuments of Dutch seafarers but at the same time contesting them by letting them partially disappear. The act of lighting the candle that starts the process of melting can be seen as a call for another narrative or the wish to vanish an existing narrative. Hartono himself cites: "We need to see the many sides of history that exist and show the different meanings of memory and heroes that the Dutch and the Indonesian have. I even contest my own memory of family history in relation to the colonial past".⁶³ The latter exposes the reflective character of the artist, according to Stradler one of the four pillars of multiperspectivity. Stradler's other criteria for multiperspectivity can also be found in the work "Monuments". In the Oude Kerk the perspective of the Indonesian that is visualized through the candle waxed part of for example the statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, can be seen as adding a narrative of 'significant others'. The site of the church now includes the impact of a different group on a shared historic event, a colonial experience. Finally Hartono successfully visualizes the symbiotic relationship between the Dutch and Indonesian in the past they share. Adding the fragile material of candle wax to the strong material of the sculpture, clarifies the two different perspectives on the same object that represents a colonial memory. The choice of fragile versus the solid material implies a hierarchy.

"Monuments" is not only a direct reference to the monuments remembering the colonial past that are situated in the Netherlands, they also refer to the monuments of Dutch rulers in Indonesia. The statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in the Oude Kerk for example is a replica of the statue that was standing on the Waterlooplein in Batavia (now Jakarta) till 1942, when destroyed by the Japanese. In replicating this statue, Hartono chooses to represent the vanishing colonial memories in both Indonesia and the Netherlands. In Indonesia this happens literally, through the loss of colonial monuments and in the Netherlands in the meaning of the monuments and their relation with the colonial past. Taking these monuments as a starting point, Hartono visualizes the contemporary discussions about the colonial narrative in both Indonesia and the Netherlands.

Hartono himself is closely intertwined with both the Eurocentric narrative and the Indonesian narrative, growing up in the former Dutch Indies. By contesting these narratives he also contests his own history. According to Hartono artists can definitely play a role in re-contextualizing historic objects or adding a counter narrative to them. Careful in claiming artists' interventions can change a narrative, Hartono sees it as a valuable contribution to the future, if they do.

The artwork "Monuments" was very well received both by public and the Oude Kerk. Artist Hartono claims he does not care if his work is received positively; he just wants to show a counter-narrative, a paradox, the 'others'. Precisely this notion of Hartono exposes the complexity of multiperspectivity. Where the word 'multi' implies an equal relation between perspectives, but in the case of Hartono's work in the Oude Kerk is not. Hartono deliberately chose to make work that reacts on the monumental site of the Oude Kerk and its meta-narrative. The work of Hartono needs the institutional context of the monument to nuance the dominant perspective. Hartono's "Monuments" exposes the tension and hierarchy between perspectives that make it difficult to create multiperspectivity in an equivalent way.

⁶³ Iswanto Hartono, *ibid.*

3.2 Onias Landveld "Ina Kwana Bawa"

**INA KWANA BAWA
HALLO SLAAF
HELLO SLAVE**

DOOR / BY ONIAS LANDVELD

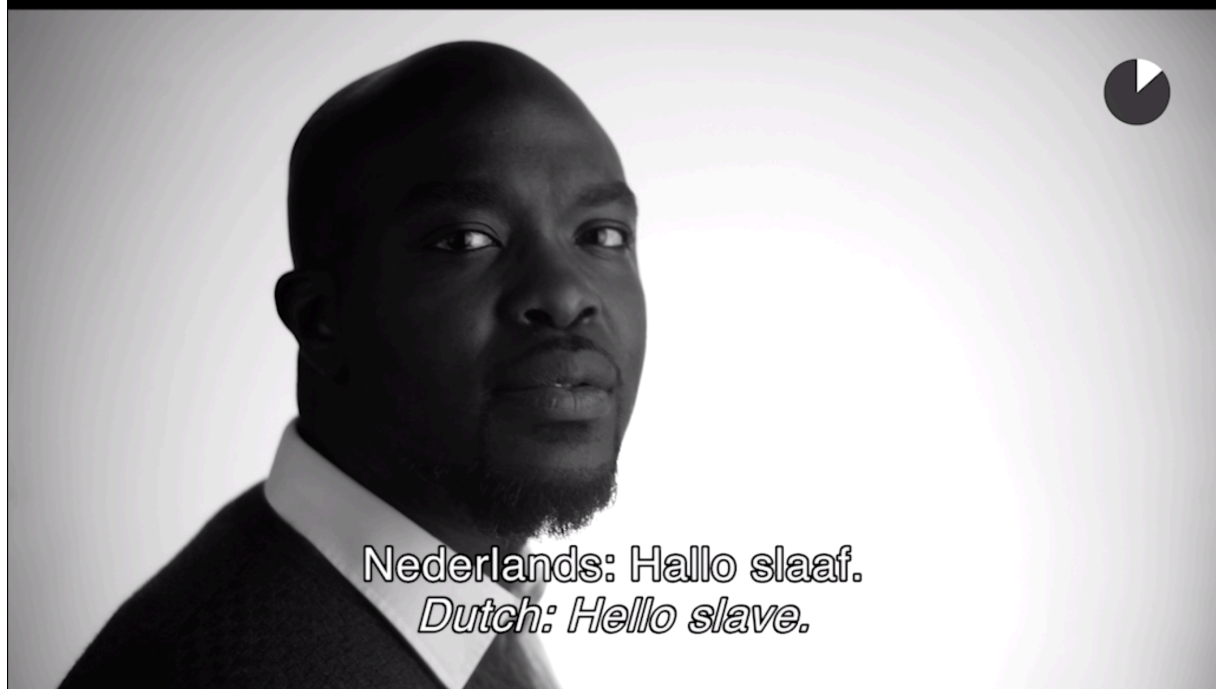




Figure 2. Onias Landveld (2018), *Ina Kwana Bawa*. Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam. Courtesy of Onias Landveld and the National Museum of World Cultures.

The Tropenmuseum is established in 1864 as a colonial institute and is situated in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The focus of the institute was to collect and exhibit objects that represented the overseas colonies of the Netherlands.

Since 2014 the Tropenmuseum merged with the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal and Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden and is now part of the National Museum of World Cultures. (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen). Recently (2017) the Museum van Wereldculturen in Rotterdam joined the fusion. The organization is closely interwoven in contemporary social and political discussions related to culture and identity. Discourses about cultural appropriation, decolonizing the museum, cultural diversity, the Dutch colonial history and education are of great influence in the identity formation of the museum.

At this moment, the National Museum of World Cultures takes a prominent place in representing the voices of people from different backgrounds. The foundation of the 'Research Center for Material Culture' by prof. Wayne Modest contributes to the critical research of museum collections. Collaborations with initiatives like *Decolonize the Museum* in the construction of exhibitions show the will to broaden perspectives and use the participation of the public in the representation of the museum collection. This perspective in combination with the implementation of changes makes the National Museum of World Culture a bird's place for changes in the historic museum culture of the Netherlands.

Exhibition maker Richard Kofi met Onias Landveld a couple of years ago during a spoken word performance in the Afrika Museum, one of the other locations of the National Museum of World Cultures. Years later Kofi met Landveld at another event, where he performed a reading about slavery.⁶⁴ Kofi, touched by his words, didn't hesitate and asked Landveld to collaborate when making the exhibition 'Afterlives of Slavery' in 2017 for the Tropenmuseum, that opened in 2018. As a counter-narrative the project team that collaborated with the activists of *Decolonize the Museum*, decided to choose the perspective of the colonized instead of the former perspective of the colonizer. According to Kofi the exhibition cannot be seen as ground-breaking, "that requires more

⁶⁴ Richard Kofi, Interview on phone, July 1, 2019.

activist changes than the chosen alterations." Still the change in perspective changes the recognizable meta-narrative of the colonial past told by historic museums in the Netherlands. To add a personal note to the otherwise matter-of-fact toned exhibition, Kofi suggested the use of spoken word artists.

"I choose the medium spoken word, because it lies on the cutting edge of hip hop and poetry, which makes it accessible for a wide audience."

Kofi sees artists' interventions as an important tool to add multiperspectivity in museums.

"Artists do research differently from that of museum curators who are often caught in the framework of curational practices." By inviting artists to reflect on contested narratives like slavery, new perspectives occur, which Kofi affirms by stating that Landveld's spoken word is the contemporary voice that represents the past of slavery.

Even though Kofi admits monitoring Landveld in the alteration of his text, Kofi claims that Landveld was given enough freedom and was always involved in the decision making process. Landveld confirms the redaction of his texts, but was still able to keep the control by choosing alternative words or sentences.⁶⁵ In collaboration with Kofi, the filmmaker and Landveld the decision was made to show the film images in black and white, to make it more stately and extract the grandeur of the marble hall. In contrast they chose to use open sound and the voice of Landveld overrules the texts in the exhibition. The latter was done intentionally as a counterweight to the hierarchy of museum texts. Aside from that Kofi and his team wanted to create a situation where the words of Landveld could not be ignored.

When entering the exhibition the words of Landveld can certainly not be overheard. Placed in the first room next to the introduction text of the exhibition, the three minutes long performance starts with a clear statement of the artist. The first image that is shown is the face of Landveld holding up a button with the year '1873' on it. Landveld supports the opinion of the Surinamese community that slavery wasn't over in 1863 with the abolishment of slavery in Suriname by the Dutch. Although Dutch history books note this year as the year that slavery ended, former enslaved still were obliged to work ten years on the plantations in Suriname to compensate the financial loss of their plantation owner. Not only were the plantation owners ensured of laborers that worked under the same conditions as before, they were also given a considerable amount of money (300 Dutch guilders) per enslaved by the Dutch government as compensation. The button itself is exhibited in the exhibition, next to other objects of resistance.

Born in Suriname as a descendant from enslaved ancestors Landveld embodies the colonial memory of slavery.⁶⁶ The poetic lecture of Landveld was filmed in the marble hall of the Tropenmuseum. The fusion of the strong words of Landveld that echo through a space which former goal was to promote Dutch colonialism enhances the relation between the artist and the museum. Not only in de video the echo is heard, also in the exhibition Landveld's words together with the other spoken word piece of poet Dorothy Blokland echo through the space. In a three minute long performance Landveld starts and ends with the words 'Hello Slave' in four languages that represent the transatlantic slave trade. The first language is Hausa originated from West Africa, the second is Lingala (Central West Africa), the third is Portuguese and the last Dutch. The complexity in languages is a direct result of the forced encounters between colonists and people from the African continent that became enslaved. Landveld plays with the meaning and history of words. Language can be a powerful tool and can be used as means of oppression, but also as form of empowerment. The latter is perfectly described in the performance of Landveld in the sentence "So through a maze of strange sounds a voice was

⁶⁵ Onias Landveld, Interview on phone, August 7, 2019.

⁶⁶ Onias Landveld, "Keti Koti en Ik," *Afromagazine*, June 26, 2017, <https://frommagazine.nl/opinie/keti-koti-en-ik>.

fashioned. A voice that urged me not to stop struggling.” In the choice of the word ‘me’, Landveld exposes his roots as the son of a Maroon father. Historically Maroon’s were runaway enslaved from African descent who fought against the colonial oppression in Suriname. The Maroon community in Suriname suffered a great deal of violent encounters. During the colonial period, and more recently during the so-called internal war, a civil war between 1986 and 1992 where all inhabitants of the Maroon village Moiwana were murdered. Maroon people are a minority group in Suriname that live in a disadvantaged area and are still fighting for recognition.

Besides being an artist Landveld sees himself as an educator and narrator.⁶⁷ His words seek the connection to unite people and create awareness in the multiple sides of history.

“I tell the side of history that is not heard and a side that some people don’t want to hear, but does exist.”⁶⁸

Landveld’s background in education makes him aware of his public and how to appeal them. Using humour and a personal and direct way of speaking to his public he successfully opens a dialogue and breaks boundaries. Which he affirms in his spoken word piece “Ina Kwana Bawa” by saying: “People, don’t erase me. This is part of your history too.” Not only shares Landveld a personal story in his performance, he too includes his viewers by giving them ownership in the shared history. He shares another perspective on the Dutch meta-narrative of slavery by including his colonial experience in the meta-narrative of the Dutch and uses his personal identity as a reflection of the multiple perspectives he embodies.

“I’m here to educate my lost generation. I’m the product of African stories, the VOC mentality and Portuguese flogging.”

It is precisely this personal approach that unifies multiple perspectives on the contested part of the colonial past. Addressing sensitive issues like the meaning of colour in relation to racism in a poetic manner, let’s people of all backgrounds think and connects the past to the present. But the personal freedom to make what you want also has a down side; according to Landveld’s it makes you vulnerable as a person.

“I deliberately did not get involved in the ‘Black Pete’ discussion, to keep myself safe from harm. As a museum curator you can make crucial choices that can change dominant narratives and being part of an institute makes you less vulnerable.”⁶⁹

Landveld addresses here an interesting point in problematizing the concept of freedom. For artists their personal view is the basis of their artwork and makes them the direct point of contact for their public. Outspoken artistic expressions can cause resistance, which makes artists a potential target for aggression. For museum curators it is different, they make choices on behalf of the museum where they can always hide behind.

The work “Ina Kwana Bawa” on it’s own acts as a perfect example of multiperspectivity, it includes stories of ‘significant others’, emphasizes with visitors of all kind, includes the impact of resistance in the narrative of slavery and shows a symbiotic relationship that is still present today. The ending sentence “I don’t want to greet you as slave any more,” addresses the colonial view that is still present in contemporary society and acts as a confronting but realistic statement that visitors have to overthink. Contemporary views on the Dutch colonial past are often based upon colonial sources that

⁶⁷ John Geerts, “Stadsdichter Onias Landveld: “Spreken is leven, spreken is alles”,” Tilburgers.nl, October 23, 2017, <https://www.tilburgers.nl/stadsdichter-onias-landveld-spreken-is-leven-spreken-is-alles/>.

⁶⁸ Landveld, interview on phone.

⁶⁹ Landveld, Interview on phone.

the Tropenmuseum stores and displays. The spoken word pieces by Landveld and Blokland seem to only address personal voices of 'others' in the exhibition and therefore only re-contextualize the meta-narrative of the Dutch colonial past. Even though the makers of 'Afterlives of Slavery' chose to tell the narrative from a 'Black' perspective in a thematic non-chronological way, it is a counter-perspective to the 'original' and dominant narrative, not a replacement. The loud voices of Landveld and Blokland cannot transcend the dominant institutional narrative that is being critiqued.

The artworks of both Iswanto Hartono and Onias Landveld add a counter-perspective to a historic museum context that embodies the meta-narrative of the Dutch colonial past.

"Monuments" reacts on the meta-narrative of the Dutch colonial monuments by copying a monument that symbolizes that narrative and modifies it. The spoken artwork "Ina Kwana Bawa" reacts on the meta-narrative of slavery and Dutch colonialism in Suriname. But in doing so, both artworks get outvoted by the existing colonial collection and museum framework that represents the dominant narrative of the Dutch colonial past. The artists' interventions remain 'personal notes' of the artist that react on the dominant narrative of colonial collections in Dutch historic museums.

CHAPTER 4 Self-reflection

Due to the relation of multiperspectivity and artists' interventions that I research in this thesis I cannot negate my perspective as an artist. Which is why I will add this self-reflection part, where I approach my research process as an artist. During the process of writing this thesis I gained insight in the various ways artists and institutes approach multiperspectivity in relation to contested colonial collections in Dutch museums. Before I started to do research for this thesis I thought about my personal interest in the Dutch colonial past and the way this interest inspires my artwork. This led to the idea to keep track of my thoughts, way of researching and my creative process in the realization of a concept for an artist intervention.

4.1 Object of choice



Figure 3. Burning iron. 1877. Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.

I chose to select an object from the exhibition 'Afterlives of Slavery' in the Tropenmuseum, because I was part of this exhibition during my internship in 2018. The object of my choice is a burning iron. This historical object from Suriname, that is dated around 1877 and has the initials 'E' and 'W' on it, is a contested object that refers to the violent encounter between the enslaved and their owners.⁷⁰ The burning iron also embodies the dehumanization of the people that were enslaved. The burning mark stole the freedom of people that became the possession of slave owners. Aside from being marked for life, the enslaved were given certain clothing that confirmed their status.

In the realization process of the exhibition 'Afterlives of Slavery', the Tropenmuseum collaborated with the activists of *Decolonize the Museum*. In her publication Guinevere Ras affirms the importance of adding perspectives from the public, community's, social influencers or scientists in the meaning making of objects in museum collections. To confirm this perspective Ras mentions the input of *Decolonize the Museum* in presenting the burning iron object. Decolonize the Museum was interested in the perspective of the plantation owner who used the object to mark the enslaved. What was the feeling of the plantation owner that took humanity from a person and did this action not take humanity from the plantation owner himself?⁷¹

In the translated version of Franz Fanon's book 'Black Skin, White Masks', Ziauddin Sardar points out Fanon's assertion that 'Whiteness' has become a symbol of purity, of justice, truth and virginity. It

⁷⁰ "Stempel, waarmee tot slaaf gemaakten gebrandmerkt werden met de initialen van hun meester," Collectie Wereldculturen, accessed May 22, 2019,

<https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/#/query/ea8e9294-55ff-4093-bcde-c3ee132b9251>

⁷¹ Guinevere Ras, *Tussen museale- en communityexpertise. Een handreiking voor de implementatie van meerstemmigheid in de museale sector.* (Guinevere Ras, 2018), 13.

defines what it means to be civilized, modern and human.⁷² This argument precisely reflects my research findings and the inspiration for my art intervention.

4.2 Research process

To start my research process I took a close look to the object, its material, its function and its history. You might say that I collect the basic information that is given by the museum that is displaying 'their' collection piece. Besides the basic information given by the institute I dig deeper in historical sources that give more insight in the history of the burning iron and the overall theme of slavery related to the Netherlands. At the same time I stimulate my creative process by writing down words and connotations that came forward from my research. The latter is not only a research in writings but also in visuals. By collecting images and inspiring artworks that relate to the words and connotations I wrote down, my brain gets inspired and tries to connect them together in making a concept for a new artwork.⁷³ It might seem like a structured process, but it is definitely not. Along the way various side paths are taken and often result in disorientated and frustrating moments. Still these paths are very important to be open to, because they facilitate accidental findings. Precisely these findings create innovative ideas or can suddenly connect the dots in your research. I will illustrate this importance by a salvage that I found during my historic research, when I combed through the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) glossary of textile names.

Creative process

My associations with the burning iron led me to counter associations: white versus black, dehumanizing versus empowerment, cruelty versus innocence. After I made connections with materials or activities related to the slave trade and my associations, for example cotton that was cultivated on the plantations by enslaved people, but also the clothing of the enslaved that were distributed by the plantation owners once a year. Where the color black in most cultures stands for the dark and evil side, white mostly refers to purity and innocence. The enslaved on the plantations in the Dutch colony Suriname brought their spiritual beliefs from West Africa in the form of the Winti religion. For practitioners of Winti, the color white represents the spirits of their ancestors. To become one with their ancestors spirits, the enslaved performed Winti ceremonies dressed in white clothing and smeared their skin with white clay in combination with music and dance. The practice of burning initials on a person's skin to claim ownership, can be seen as a ritual where not only the freedom of the person is taken from them but a ritual where the person gets dehumanized, buried so to say. For some reason I saw the image of white cotton cloth with burning marks in them, for me a first visual expression of taking away the innocence and purity of the enslaved by their owner through a burning mark. Interested in the concept of white cotton I started to research the trade in textiles by the Dutch and the cloths enslaved wore on the plantations. During this research I accidentally found the name 'negroskleed' (negro's clothing) in the glossary of textile names of the VOC. Instinctively I choose to found out what the story was behind this particular cloth.

Historic research

The Dutch East India Company (VOC) is particularly known for their monopoly in spices in the East Indies between the years 1600 and 1800. The West Indian Company (West-Indische Compagnie or WIC) was mainly occupied with the transatlantic slave trade. However without the VOC trade the slave trade of the WIC could never be as profitable for the Dutch company as it was. Besides the trade in spices the VOC bought textiles from India. In West-Africa Indian cotton was very popular and

⁷² Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), xiii, http://abahlali.org/files/_Black_Skin__White_Masks__Pluto_Classics_.pdf.

⁷³ "Thesis: The Museum that is A'life and A'woke," Pinterest, accessed July 1, 2019, <https://nl.pinterest.com/mariekemeijer/thesis-the-museum-that-is-alife-and-awoke/>.

long worn due to the Trans-Sahara trade. The Dutch traders found out that the Indian textiles were a good piece of merchandise in exchange for African enslaved. The Dutch slave trade also known as the transatlantic slave trade used, like other European empires (Portuguese, British, French and the Spanish), the triangular trade route. The Dutch ships left their harbours fully loaded with European commodities like guns and ammunition together with huge packages of Indian textiles to the West coast of Africa. In West Africa the textiles were exchanged for gold, ivory, pepper and enslaved Africans. The enslaved Africans that were bought were then shipped to the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean to work on plantations. From the Caribbean the Dutch ships packed with resources from the plantations like sugar, coffee and cotton returned home.

The cargo list of the Dutch ship 'D'Eenigheid', whose main goal was to buy and bring enslaved Africans to the colonies, illustrates the importance of textile in the transatlantic slave trade. No less than 47 per cent of the cargo destined for West Africa was textile.⁷⁴ A much-traded textile was 'guinea cloth' (Guinees Lijwaat) named after the coast of Guinea where the textiles were exchanged for enslaved Africans; also known as the 'Guinea Trade'. The cloth that was woven in India was plain white, loom-patterned, or piece-dyed cotton and was shipped to Europe to be re-exported by slave traders to the Guinea Coast of Africa or to the West Indies.⁷⁵ The amount of different Dutch names that represent the 'guinea cloth' like 'corroots', 'guinestuffs' and 'cambaay', demonstrates its popularity. But the most eye-catching synonym for 'guinea cloth' is 'negroskleed' (negro's clothing).⁷⁶ According to several sources the name 'negroskleed' referred to the black African customers that bought them. Others claim that the name refers to the purpose of the cloth: clothing for the enslaved.

Enslaved people as textiles were seen as commodities to be bought, sold and traded. In her book *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Simone Brown sees branding as a practice through which enslaved people were signified as commodities. The relationship between branding and the black body, she calls 'our biometric past' is according to Brown still present in biometric technology today.⁷⁷ This insight led me to the concept of my artistic intervention.

Side paths

From October 2018 till March 2019 I was part of an experimental project called the 'AmbachtenLab' (CraftmanshipLab) of the Openluchtmuseum in Arnhem, Holland.⁷⁸ Together with a papercut art craftsman, an artist and a student we were invited to experiment with the traditional craft of papercut art. I mention this project, because the subject of this thesis influenced it. The Openluchtmuseum in Arnhem houses since 2017 the visualization of the Dutch historic canon in the wake of the committee van Oostrom. Although the displays that represent the Dutch colonial past do show some counter perspectives, the dominant perspective remains an Eurocentric one. In a small screen the trailer of the film 'Tula: The Revolt' (2013) can be seen and tells the story of Tula, the leader of the slave rebellion of 1795 in the Dutch colony Curacao. On the background a large life-sized screen is showing a re-enactment of the slave market of Willemstad in Curacao (1777), where enslaved people

⁷⁴ "Textiel in de slavenhandel," Trajecten van de reis, MCC Slavenreis d'Eenigheid 1761-1763, last modified June 2, 2019, <https://eenigheid.slavenhandelmcc.nl/trajecten-van-de-reis/afrika/samenstelling-cargazoen/textiel-slavenhandel/>.

⁷⁵ Colleen E. Kriger, "Guinea Cloth': Production and Consumption of Cotton Textiles in West Africa before and during the Atlantic Slave Trade," in *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200-1850*, ed. by Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarathi (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105-26. https://www.joycerain.com/uploads/2/3/2/0/23207256/guinea_cloth.pdf.

⁷⁶ "VOC Glossarium," Historici, accessed April 14, 2019, <https://www.historici.nl/pdf/vocglossarium/VOCGlossarium.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), p.91, <https://doubleoperative.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/dark-matters-reading.pdf>.

⁷⁸ "Ambachtenlab Papierknipkunst," Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, accessed July 26, 2019, <https://www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/nl/Ambachtenlabpapierknipkunst>.

from the African continent were brought by the WIC to be sold. Four submissive and passive enslaved are inspected by an interested buyer and potential new owner. The installation that tells the story of slavery affirms the dominant image of the enslaved as submissive and passive. Even though the story of resistance is told in the display of Tula, the big slave market scene overshadows it. It marks the unequal relation in storytelling and the remaining dominant narrative of, although cruel, still powerful, assertive and strong Dutch and the weak, dependent and submissive enslaved. The story of the VOC mentions seafarer Jan Pieterszoon Coen as conqueror of Jakarta and founder of Batavia, but does not mention the mass murder on the Banda-islands under Coen's rule. Just like the canon-frame of slavery, the frame of the VOC adds nuance by addressing the total domination of the people of the Dutch Indies by the Dutch, but it does not give agency to them in for example telling the story of resistance.



Figure 4. Marieke Meijer (2019), *Ambachtenlab*. Openluchtmuseum, Arnhem. Courtesy of Marieke Meijer.

Inspired by the traditional black and white papercut art I made artwork that combines two perspectives on the colonial experience that is addressed in the Dutch historic canon. One work that shows enslaved people as submissive, round cutted out of white paper together with a scene where enslaved people fight against the Dutch colonists, sharply cutted out of black paper. In daylight, the scene of resistance is reflected by shadow on the dominant narrative that is cut out in the white paper scene. The shadow refers to the dark side, the story that is mostly been hidden in Dutch history. The second piece shows the portrait of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in white paper and Indonesian Prince Diponegoro in black paper. In Dutch history Pieterszoon Coen was long portrayed as a Dutch hero, lately this image is being adjusted and is his role in the mass murder of the people of Banda appointed. Perspectives on history from the Indonesian point of view are not addressed. In Indonesia, Prince Diponegoro is seen as a local hero, who fought against the Dutch colonial domination. The white paper that is cut out with scissors in more round forms represent the Eurocentric, dominant, glorifying soft version of the Dutch colonial past. The black paper represents the dark side, the narrative of the colonized, the hidden story and is cut out with a knife in sharp edges. The two paper

pages of colonial history come together in the shadow they reflect when the light shines on them. With this work I want to address that there is no such thing as one history, there are perspectives on history and the time has come that these perspectives should be shown in the same light.

In appointing the artwork I created for 'het AmbachtenLab', I address the influence of surrounding factors and interests that affect the creative process. The formation of the concept for an art intervention in relation to the burning iron object was influenced by the project in the Openluchtmuseum. The creative process of both 'het AmbachtenLab' and the concept of an artistic intervention for this thesis are thus intertwined. The associations to the colour 'white' and the following research resulted in the use of white paper for the paper art works and white cotton for the artist intervention, both referring to the symbolic meanings of 'truth', 'civilized and 'pure' as noted by Ziauddin Sardar in the book of Franz Fanon. In modelling the creative process Mary-Anne Mace and Tony Ward explain this as the recurring phase of "Ongoing and developing art-making knowledge", citing:

*"Throughout the making of the current work, new ideas for additional work arise, which serve to further explore areas of the artist's art-making interests or to extend that interest into new realms. In this regard, rather than being a linear production process, making artwork is dynamically interactive, in so far as the making of an individual artwork is influenced by multiple factors, including the development of other artworks."*⁷⁹

The concept is only the first of four phases in the creative process model of Mace and Ward. Which is followed by the three phases: idea development, making artwork & idea development and finishing the artwork. The four phases start and end with the ongoing and developing art-making knowledge.

4.3 Concept artistic intervention

The first phase in their creative process model entitled by Mace and Ward as 'Art work conception' consists of three main sources that create the conception of ideas. The first is the artist's ongoing art-making enterprise followed by the interplay of life experience and external influences. All three sources can be easily recognized in my own research process. Which led to the concept and title for an artwork yet to be realised 'Ellen voor koppen'. 'Ellen' refers to the name of the size in the measurements of fabric during the WIC and VOC period. 1 el was approximately 69 centimeters. 'Koppen' (heads) refers to the counting of enslaved people that were described by the amount of enslaved heads (koppen).

A surrounding installation where multiple layers of white cotton with the contour lines of human faces give a feeling of being looked at. In the middle the burning iron object. The contour lines, are lines that are used in modern surveillance technology today. Facial features are measured with lines to categorize the person that is registered on camera. The dots and connecting lines are burned in the cotton fabric. The installation displays the hierarchy of power, the racial patterns in claiming this power and the process of dehumanization which relate to the marking of enslaved. All of them are still used in the world we know now by the established order. The aim of this artwork is to place the historic context of the burning iron into the present. Although the installation does not need a description text to create an impact, I would add the historic narrative of the trade in textile that explains the choice of materials used in the installation. I would prefer not to use written text panels but audio, where a personal voice makes the story more intimate.

⁷⁹ Mary-Anne Mace and Tony Ward, "Modeling the Creative Process: A Grounded Theory Analysis of Creativity in the Domain of Art Making," *Creativity Research Journal* 14, no. 2 (2002): 179-192, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326934CRJ1402_5.

The following phase will be to experiment with the material and technique I have chosen: white cotton and burning marks. The results of these experiments determine if the detailed description of the concept of this artistic intervention will stay the same or will change. The best and most frustrating advice I was given as an art student and still obey is 'Kill your darlings'. Which forces me to stay open for new experiments and ideas and sometimes means letting go of the concept that was formed in the first phase of my creative process.

The institutional context and my personal background cannot be negated in the process of making the concept for this artists' intervention. Choosing an object from the collection of the Tropenmuseum, using the museum system (TMS) and Eurocentric sources to gain content, exposes the dominant but also easiest paths to explore. The phase of associating equally clarifies the Eurocentric frameworks that influenced my personal experiences and view on the topic of slavery. My creative process uncovers the difficulty becoming detached from the institutional context. It makes me question if I am the designated person to tell hidden stories that I did not experience myself? But is that not just what most museums do? I agree with Craig Richardson in calling the concept for my artwork a 're-interpretation' instead of an intervention. Like my 'intervention' most artists' interventions in historic museums above all act as re-interpretations, not interventions. 'Multi-interpretations' might better reflect the 'multiperspectivity' checkmark in using artist's interventions to add multiperspectivity historic museums.

CHAPTER 5 Conclusion

This thesis started with the need for Dutch museums with colonial collections to reflect and act on their own role in the contested part of the Dutch colonial history. The call of scholars, artists and activists to decolonize museums together with the contemporary debates about diversity and inclusivity affirm this necessity. Especially historic museums seem to struggle with shifting perspectives on museum practices. The term multiperspectivity gained terrain in the museum world. Progressive modern art museums like TENT, have no trouble in giving space to artists from all backgrounds to reflect on the colonial past. Historic museums whose collection for a big part represents the Eurocentric perspective on history are searching for methods to be inclusive. Multiperspectivity finds its way into the museum walls, but how is multiperspectivity achieved in the meta-narrative of the Dutch colonial collections in historic museums and how can artists' interventions help adding multiperspectivity? This was the central question that led me to research two phenomena in relation to the theme of colonial history. The first, a research in the history of artists' interventions in museums, gave a good impression of the voice artists represent. The second, researching the way in which multiperspectivity can be used in the meta-narrative of the Dutch colonial past, gave me three museal methods. One is nuancing the meta-narrative through alterations in the meaning making of museum collections. Another method is the setting up of a counter-narrative that is positioned next to the meta-narrative, but is still seen as 'the original'. And as a final option change the meta-narrative into a new one. Where the first two methods still present or refer to the 'original' meta-narrative of the museum, the third loses the connection with the former dominant narrative.

The outcome of this thesis is that the replacing of a meta-narrative in historic museums is rarely done. Due to the embedded historic museum framework that still is modelled on colonial archiving systems and meta-narratives written through a western gaze, re-contextualizing or adding a counter-narrative already is a big step for historic museums. Although artists are excellent storytellers, their voice positioned in a historic museum context cannot be disconnected from the dominant Eurocentric narrative.

The analysis of the artists' interventions of artists Iswanto Hartono and Onias Landveld affirms this complexity. Both Landveld and Hartono intervened the meta-narrative of the historic museums that displayed their work by adding a counter-narrative and giving another context to the experience of the Dutch colonial past. The difference between contemporary art museums and historic museums is that historic museums have to deal with their own historic collections, where contemporary art museums have more freedom in purchasing loans. Although historic museums do seek multiperspectivity in adding artists' interventions, they do not choose for interventions that change the meta-narrative. An additional fact is that Dutch historic museums that address contested parts of history like colonialism are still caught up in museum systems and practices that hold back critical reflections. The latter creates a hierarchy in collaborations between historic museums and artists, where institutional frameworks hold back an equal partnership.

The self-reflection into my 'artistic brain' together with the thesis research and the case studies gives an insight in the role artists can fulfil in historic museums with colonial collections. It is just as exhibition maker Richard Kofi of the National Museum of World Cultures addresses; artists have different ways in doing research, one that is not bound by the framework of museum practices. Which makes them perfectly suitable in adding diverse colonial experiences that were not told by historic museums before, but are closely linked to the colonial collections of these museums. However, the influence of the artist is no more than an additional perspective and largely depends on the freedom given by the museum. Contemporary artists' interventions thus do not add multiperspectivity, when they react on the meta-narrative of the museum. Like my own concept for an artist intervention, the contemporary artworks in historic museums do not tell a new story, they re-interpret, re-contextualize

or nuance the story that was always told. Choosing the concept of multiperspectivity mostly shows the struggle of historic museums in creating inclusive exhibitions. The dominant perspective stays present in the institutional framework of these museums and will act as the main story to which is referred to. In this way multiperspectivity is not a real solution in changing museums to inclusive institutions.

A real change might only be a radical one: the creation of a new inclusive meta-narrative that does not refer to the former one. Which can only be achieved to the establishment in the form of a new 'institute' that uses new frames of archiving, curating and doing research. It might be an idea to collaborate with historic museum collections in the form of loans and create a whole new narrative in exhibiting these historic objects, released from the dominant museum framework.

Or commission artists to re-design the museum framework in a more inclusive one, where multiple perspectives have an equal say in museum practices. Dutch historic museums need a wake-up call to become a lively reflection of contemporary society and as history teaches us, artists can perfectly act as alarm clocks!

CHAPTER 6 Discussion

This research contains a theoretical study, a case study and a creative self-reflection part. Together they give insight in how artists' interventions add multiperspectivity to the meta-narrative of Dutch colonial collections in Dutch historic museums. Due to the actuality and museum developments that are happening today, the outcome of this thesis can be of great value for Dutch historic museums that seek inclusive methods in the display of their colonial collections.

The result that the method of multiperspectivity in creating inclusive exhibitions in Dutch historic museums does not address equality exposes its complexity. Although inequality in the perspectives that artists' interventions represent was expected, the dominant role of the embedded Eurocentric narrative was estimated lower. Susan Legêne, who claims that the only way to create a multiperspective historical awareness on the colonial past is to get rid of existing museum frameworks, gives a possible explanation for this outcome.⁸⁰ In addition Legêne addresses the extensive effect of the institutional context in the meaning making of an object in museum displays. The result potentially entails a larger problem that holds artists' from being an equal partner in adding multiperspectivity. In my own reflection of my creative process as an artist, the Eurocentric perspective is dominant. Even in the artworks of Iswanto Hartono and Onias Landveld, both artists reflect on this dominant narrative. Which exposes the significant impact of the embedded Dutch colonial meta-narrative and the trouble to break free from this narrative.

The limitations of this research lie in the amount of case studies. Preferably I would have liked to include more cases and interviews with artists and curators from different backgrounds. The case studies I have researched only give a small piece of insight in contemporary artists' interventions in Dutch historic museums with colonial collections.

Further research in the way artists' interventions can add multiperspectivity to Dutch colonial collections should explore these without the context and framework of a museum to find out if that creates more equality between multiple perspectives. This would be help to find out how hidden stories can become more visible and become equally important as the one history we already know.

⁸⁰ Susan Legêne, *Nu of nooit*, 25.

APPENDICES

Onias Landveld "Ina Kwana Bawa"

Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam (2018)

When my ancestors arrived at the plantation, all they had in common with those around them was their colour.

They could not understand the different languages.

You could hear:

Hausa: Ina kwana bawa; Lingala: Mbote, Mowumbu; Portuguese: Bom dia Escravo;

Dutch: Hello, slave...

These are languages that still cling to my DNA.

Like the black tar to which my ancestors were compared.

Pigment that was allocated a dark place on the scale of humanities.

But don't be afraid, I do not come as an enemy, I'm here to educate, for my lost generation.

I'm the product of African stories, the VOC mentality, and Portuguese flogging.

In a strange irony, I come blessed with a love of Dutch rhyme schemes, which serve as a framework for Afro-American languages.

So forgive me if I let my soul roam wide across thoughts that, for most people, derive from myths and legends.

But this, this is a helping hand, one from a very distant past. When my kind were still classified as part of nature.

My blood is the proof that I do not belong to the plant world. But I was not human, since my colour counted against me.

So I became a kind of livestock. We people became a kind of natural species, in between flora and fauna.

So through a maze of strange sounds, a voice was fashioned.

A voice that urged me not to stop struggling.

And to the pulse of a heavy drumbeat,

my feet were marked for escape through the backwoods,

but though the smells were so familiar, the moon and stars were out of kilter.

The savannah was not right.

How long did I travel?

How long did it last, the punishing of a body?

Since a tongue refused to curl into the words of a foreign language?

But the sound they chose to identify me was not the sound of my personality.

For the spirit that lives within me is the same spirit that inhabits those who fight.

In men like Baron, Boni, and Jolicoeur, Tula and his men on Korsou.

People, don't erase me. This is part of your history too.

This is our face.

Because my origins were subjected to economic choices.

So look on me as the result of a perfect investment.

A one-time coloured person who serves a warning.

Don't fixate on colour. You're not so different from me.

Ina kana bawa,

Mbote, mowumbu

Bom dia Escravo,

But let it stop here, I don't want to greet you as a slave any more...

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