Ferocious Benevolence:
Institutional Complicity and the Possibility for Meaningful Individual Action in the Art World

Giorgia Cacciatore
RMA Thesis Media, Art and Performance Studies
Department of Media and Culture Studies
Utrecht University, 2021
Student Number: 6759416
Thesis supervisor: Dr. Maaike Bleeker
Second reader: Dr. Rosemarie Buikema

Utrecht University

Abstract

Art institutions have been increasingly under scrutiny for being enmeshed in the systems of oppression that they so often proclaim to stand against. Despite the growing number of thematic exhibitions under the banner of decolonisation, the sector remains overwhelmingly white. This thesis investigates the nexus between efforts at reckoning with colonial legacies and the reproduction of existing inequalities in the arts sector, and explores the possibility for agency that emerges from these contradictions. I do so by honing in on the role of individual art workers who wish to positively contribute to such debates while occupying a privileged social location. In order to do so this study takes into examination the experiences of art workers involved in the exhibition *The Golden Coach* taking place at the Amsterdam Museum from June 2021. An exhibition that aims at engaging critically with a piece of cultural heritage that celebrates the Dutch colonial era, *The Golden Coach* allows to observe both dangers and possibilities of such endeavours. Through qualitative research conducted with members of the team working on the exhibition I examine how the interplay between good intentions and complicity unfolds in their daily working life. I propose the figure of the *well-meaning implicated subject* as a framework that affords a more rigorous understanding of individual enmeshment with power structures, and upon which possibilities for ethical and political agency are premised.

Keywords: complicity; agency; museums; colonialism; whiteness

Table of Contents

Introduction ... 1
Part I ... 20
1. Debates on Complicity ... 21
2. The Golden Coach: Web of Complicities ... 33
3. The Well-Meaning Implicated Subject ... 49
Part II ... 60
4. Debates on Agency ... 61
5. Implication Enacted ... 73
Concluding Remarks ... 83
Acknowledgements ... 89

Assuming one's criticality can be a way of not admitting one's complicity. I think complicity is a *starting point*. We are implicated in the worlds that we critique; being critical does not suspend any such implication.

—Sara Ahmed, "Critical Racism/Critical Sexism"

Introduction

This thesis investigates the nexus between good intentions and complicity in the arts sector. I understand good intentions as the will to promote social justice or not contribute to harmful practices, and consider complicity as participating, albeit indirectly, in the reproduction of existing inequalities. Many[1] have already brought attention to the contradictions at the heart of progressive stances of the art world, denouncing how these have become all the more stark in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recent wave of social media posts and public statements issued by art institutions declaring support for the Black Lives Matter movement and commitment to anti-racism, while the same institutions were cutting or putting on furlough jobs occupied predominantly by workers of colour, is a case in point. These scholars, activists and workers have been demanding for profound and long-term measures that do not stop at statements or one-off projects, but that set in motion a complete overhaul of the museum sector through scrutiny of hiring policies, income distribution across race and gender, possession of colonial artefacts, display practices and more.

---

1. Boston Arts and Cultural Workers, "Open Letter from Boston Arts and Cultural Workers in Demand of Racial Equity and Social Transformation", 12 June 2020, https://www.bostonartsforblacklives.com; Gabrielle de la Puente, "Why Museums Are Bad Vibes", 17 November 2019, *The White Pube*, https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/why-museums-are-bad-vibes; Sarah Demart, "Resisting Extraction Politics: Afro-Belgian Claims, Women's Activism, and the Royal Museum for Central Africa", in *Across Anthropology: Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial*, ed. M. von Oswald and J. Tinius Leuven (University Press: 2020); TJ Demos, "Climate Control: From Emergency to Emergence", November 2019, *e-flux*, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/104/299286/climate-control-from-emergency-to-emergence/; Angela Dimitrakaki, "Feminism, Art, Contradictions", June 2018, *e-flux*, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/92/205536/feminism-art-contradictions/; For the Culture, "An open letter to New York City's Cultural Institutions", 2020, https://fortheculture2020.com;Andrea Montiel de Shuman, "No Longer in Extremis", 15 June 2020, *Medium*, https://medium.com/@andreamontiel23/no-longer-in-extremis-9aa1c5996f35;NYC Art Workers, "Open Letter Calling on Museums to Retain Staff During COVID-19 Crisis", 2020, https://www.change.org/p/new-york-city-art-museums-open-letter-calling-on-museums-to-retain-staff-during-covid-19-crisis?fbclid=IwAR1mECOad9wGkrO7HPQGJgI9iwhpSOndJMUjLIB4xlYVkiB68gRsBm5LSMk; U.S. Latinx Art Workers, "Open Letter from U.S. Latinx Art Workers on Anti-Black Racism and White Supremacy in Visual Art Institutions, 18 June 2020, https://www.decolonizelatinxart.com; Vera List Center for Art and Politics, *ART • WORK • PLACE Emergency Session III,* 17 June 2020, https://veralistcenter.org/events/awp-3/

My intervention in these debates aims at closing in on individual art workers operating in this scenario, moved by the desire to positively contribute to the processes of transformation afoot in their institutions. More precisely, I investigate the role of workers involved in initiatives dealing with themes of systemic injustice while not being directly affected by the issues they engage with, and explore their ability to advance anti-oppressive values while residing in such ethically and politically ambiguous stances. To account for such position I build on Michael Rothberg's notions of 'implication' and 'implicated subject',[2] which describe the condition of indirect participation in injustices initiated in a distant time and/or geographic location, but carrying present consequences. In this thesis I propose the figure of the *well-meaning implicated subject* as a framework that affords a more rigorous understanding of individual enmeshment with power structures, and upon which possibilities for ethical and political agency are premised. By doing so I do not intend to posit individual action as solution to structural inequality, rather I consider everyday lived experience as manifestation of systemic issues, and advocate for cultivating individual responsibility alongside wider processes of reparation.

I enter such complex discussions through the study of the experiences of workers involved in the exhibition *The Golden Coach*, on display at the Amsterdam Museum from 18 June 2021 to 22 February 2022. An exhibition that aims at engaging critically with a piece of cultural heritage that celebrates the Dutch colonial era, *The Golden Coach* offers a suitable case to observe both dangers and possibilities of such endeavours. Qualitative research conducted with members of the team working on the exhibition will allow me to examine how the interplay between institutional complicities and workers' desire to counter inequality unfolds in their daily working life.

I define this incongruity that workers come to inhabit, between institutional efforts at reckoning with colonial legacies and the ineffectual or even harmful outcomes these often carry, as *ferocious benevolence*. This expression draws from the sentence "ferocious standardizing benevolence" used by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her famous text "Can the Subaltern Speak?"[3], to describe the contradiction of attempts by Western intellectuals at

---

2. Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 2019).

3. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. L. Grossberg and C. Nelson, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 1988), 294.

elevating silenced voices, resulting instead in their assimilation. My interest in fact lies precisely in this intimate yet seemingly conflicting relation between a will to 'do good' and the re-enactment of what is critiqued, which I will explore throughout this thesis.

The seed of reflection that would eventually develop in this thesis was planted by the encounter with the following question during a gender studies course on labour politics:[4] "Is there a way to affirm complicity as the basis of political agency, yet insist that political agency may do more than reiterate the conditions of subordination?"[5]. A question that helped me articulate long-standing concerns over the ethical ramifications of day-to-day decision making as a white middle-class art worker committed to anti-racism and anti-sexism. This study therefore originates from personal experience but aims at engaging with a position occupied by many, wanting to remain loyal to anti-oppressive values while working for institutions that are merely beginning to glimpse their ongoing role within regimes of domination. This thesis therefore asks: *How can we understand the role of art workers who strive to redress institutional complicities, while at the same time benefitting (even if only partly and/or indirectly) from them?* And *how can we envisage forms of agency that do not reproduce (individual and institutional) complicity with systems of oppression?*

Can There Be Such a Thing as a Decolonised Museum[6]?

In recent years an increasing number of museums in Europe and elsewhere have started engaging in critical ways with colonialism and slavery. Although these endeavours represent a step forward and have arguably helped shifting public debates, decolonial thinkers and growing numbers of activists have brought attention to the fact that museums are institutions born out of the necessity of colonial regimes to crystallise the Self and Other binary upon which Western civilisation rests. As the activist group Boston Arts and Cultural Workers have recently put it, "[a]s a living relic of empire the museum as we know it exists because of its dependency on and complicity in the workings of settler colonialism and racial

---

4. The course was called Gender and Social Inclusion: Affective Labor, Welfare and Feminist Interventions taught by Berteke Waaldijk in the Gender Studies department of Utrecht University.

5. Butler quoted in Kathi Weeks, "Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics", *Ephemera* 7, (2007): 245.

6. I am paraphrasing sociology doctoral candidate Zoé Samudzi's statement "There is no such thing as a decolonised museum", pronounced during the podcast "Millennials Are Killing Capitalism", episode published 8 May 2021.

capitalism"[7]. Museums in fact have been essential tools in the legitimisation and romanticisation of acts of dispossession, expropriation and brutalisation that have constituted the colonial project. Histories that cast a long shadow on the continued role of museums as gatekeepers of culture.

Researcher and curator Sumaya Kassim has examined how the move towards 'decoloniality' by museums as a way to tackle colonial and imperial ties, is not automatically a positive one. Kassim was invited to take part of a team of women of colour[8] to co-curate *The Past is Now: Birmingham and Empire* at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG), an exhibition that "would use the Museum's collection to confront history in new and challenging ways".[9] Her article reflecting on the process has been critical in highlighting how such well-intended projects sit precariously on top of long-lasting colonial legacies that remain largely unaddressed. Kassim recounts how, despite being given creative freedom, the team was expected to perform a very specific and limited notion of 'decolonisation'. As she relays, "very quickly it became clear that the museum and ourselves went into this project with very different expectations. To me contextualising an object or narrating history from the perspective of the colonised is a surface level of decolonising and the deeper work is considering how museums are complicit until this day".[10] The team of curators were plunged in a context where the nearly entirely white permanent staff were not familiar with terms such as 'white fragility' and 'systemic racism[11]', therefore having to bear the emotional cost of initiating such conversations, as well as the responsibility of being the spokespersons for their respective communities.[12] Furthermore, Kassim and the other curators were excluded from crucial decisions and were not adequately paid, yet their faces were planned to feature in the

---

7. Boston Arts and Cultural Workers, "Open Letter from Boston Arts and Cultural Workers in Demand of Racial Equity and Social Transformation", 12 June 2020, https://www.bostonartsforblacklives.com

8. The team was formed by: Textile designer Shaheen Kasmani, artivist Aliyah Hasinahgraphic, designer Abeera Kamran, writer Mariam Khan, cultural activist Sara Myers, writer and researcher Sumaya Kassim.

9. Sumaya Kassim, "The Museum Will Not Be Decolonised", *Media Diversified,* 15 November 2017, https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/

10. Kassim, "Decolonial Daydreams: Can Museums be Hopeful Places?", Linden-Museum Stuttgart, 7 September 2020, YouTube video, 12:07, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Wy_mTxPJ-A&list=FL4U0Rg2Vl76_u96k6ZdkoWw&index=1&t=639s

11. Ibid.

12. Kassim, 2017.

exhibition, heralded as the museum's success at diversity. As Kassim warns, such an approach is no different from the colonial desire to own, represent and display peoples of colour. As she puts it, "[t]oo often people of colour are rolled in to provide natural resources –our bodies and our 'decolonial' thoughts– which are exploited, and then discarded. The human cost, the emotional labour, are seen as worthy sacrifices in the name of an exhibition which can be celebrated as a successful attempt by the museum at 'inclusion' and 'decolonising', as a marker that it –and, indeed, Britain– is dealing with its past".[13]

In The Netherlands, from where I am writing, art workers have been highlighting similar problems. A recent open letter[14] signed by over six hundred workers has denounced how, when racism and colonialism are addressed, the views foregrounded are exclusively those compatible with the institutions' agendas, while stances that do not conform are cast aside as too critical or counterproductive. Another letter[15] signed by white workers, denounced how people of colour are largely employed as external partners or guest curators on temporary contracts. As the writers note, "[t]hose positions are precarious, with a lack of stability –in career and personal life. Additionally these temporary curators and content-makers mostly enter the museum to tell a specific story on the basis of what is understood to be their (cultural) background and identity".[16] All the while, large funds are spent on highly visible public programmes "rather than, for example, hiring a BPoC in a decision-making position".[17]

Projects presented under the banner of decolonisation then, can become ways of safely relegating colonialism to past wrongdoings that can be fixed, without having to reckon with the ways that such power imbalances are currently being reproduced. The frequency with which 'decolonisation' has come to feature in the art world's vocabulary through panel talks, communication strategies or thematic exhibitions, and the rarity with which these are accompanied by structural measures, reveals how decolonial critique is often treated as yet

---

13. Ibid.

14. "Open Brief van 600+ Kunstprofessionals: Wij Zien Jullie, Witte Kunst- en Cultuursector", 15 June 2020, https://www.theaterkrant.nl/nieuws/open-brief-wij-zien-jullie-witte-kunst-en-cultuursector/, (translated via Google Translate).

15. "Open Letter - No Anti-Racist Museum Without Structural Changes", *Metropolis M*, 19 June 2020, https://www.metropolism.com/nl/news/41218_open_letter_no_anti_racist_museum_without_structural_changes

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

another trend, something that museums need to *add* to their programmes to stay relevant. However as indigenous studies scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have famously stressed, decolonisation "cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/ frameworks".[18] As they state, "[w]hen we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym".[19] Decolonisation is "neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire"[20], but an actual process that might involve actions such as the seizing of land and wealth from the coloniser. Turning 'decolonising' into a metaphor not only is a way of appropriating and neutralising its demands, but acts as a move to innocence that relieves anxiety and guilt "without having to change much at all".[21] Kassim's first-hand experience of these dynamics led her to consider "an important question –one of whether large British institutions like BMAG can and should promote 'decolonial' thinking, or whether, in fact, they are so embedded in the history and power structures that decoloniality challenges, that they will only end up co-opting decoloniality"[22].

The (Non-)Performativity of Criticality

In her analysis of diversity reports within higher education, Sara Ahmed[23] argues that universities' declarations of commitment to anti-racist values are "nonperformatives", that is, speech acts that do not enact what they say. The crafting of documents meant to testify to the measures taken by the university to counter institutional racism, becomes instead an end to itself. The document comes to constitute the commitment. And similarly to what Kassim identifies in the 'decolonial' language adopted by museums, these reports "defin[e] institutional racism in such a way that racism is not seen as an ongoing series of actions that shape institutions",[24] but as something that, once admitted, relegates it to the past and shields

18. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor", *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 3.
19. Ibid.
20. Aimé Césaire quoted in Tuck and Yang, 21.
21. Tuck and Yang, 9-10.
22. Kassim, 2017.
23. Sara Ahmed, "The Nonperformativity of Antiracism", *Meridians* 7, no. 1 (2006).
24. Ahmed, 106.

the institution from further critique. I suggest[25] that the issues extensively examined by Ahmed in relation to the popularity of discourses around diversity in the early 2000s can be seamlessly applied to the current enthusiasm about decolonisation, where the event aimed at reflecting on the colonial legacies of the institution is presented as decolonis*ing,* and "becomes a fetishized object"[26]. So much so that what is judged to assess the degree of commitment of the institution is the convincingness of the event (or document), i.e. the oratory and writing skills of directors and board members. As Ahmed incisively puts it, one has to wonder "whether what is being measured are levels of institutional competence in producing documents rather than what the university is doing in terms of race equality".[27]

This is something also Professor and Head of the Research Center for Material Culture Wayne Modest notes in relation to the art world, when he says "[n]ow we are competing as to who is going to be the person who uses the word 'colonial' the most in a sentence. And who can be the best 'decoloniser'"[28], but "[t]he question is how do we hold on to that and push it to something that is productive, rather than symbolic".[29] As he points out, in discourses in the sector there is not only a false distance between the present and the colonial past, but also an artificial separation between the ethnographic museum, as sole bearer of imperial legacies, and the art museum as "a space for criticality"[30]. This misconception renders the latter a neutral player, or even an 'ally' in the fight against racial oppression, obscuring its more concealed ways of participating in it.[31] In Modest's words, "[t]o follow this logic would require that we demolish one colonial structure, while keeping another"[32]. As also Ahmed warns, when 'criticality' is assumed as identity and attached to either institutions or subjects, it can participate in obscuring complicity. "Critiquing

---

25. I will further develop this argument together with researcher Astrid Kerchman, in the forthcoming publication *Capitalising Experience: Museums and Entrepreneurship,* ed. Eve Kalyva, Pamela Bianchi and Iro Katsaridou, 2022.

26. Ahmed, 109.

27. Ahmed, 116.

28. Wayne Modest, "Museums are Investments in Critical Discomfort", in *Across Anthropology: Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial Book,* ed. Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius (Leuven University Press: 2020), 67.

29. Modest, 69.

30. Modest, 73.

31. The scholars in footnote 1 have denounced amongst other things the role of galleries in matters such as gentrification and displacement of communities, and the heavy presence of toxic philanthropy across contemporary art museums.

32. Ibid.

something 'there' can be a way not only of not critiquing it 'here' but of enacting the very problem you are critiquing there (critique as a way of redoing by appearing to undo, in sum). Indeed, the identification of the problem 'there' becomes part of the performance of the problem 'here'".[33]

Being Lovingly, Knowingly Complicit

In 2006 feminist scholar Mariana Ortega published an essay titled "Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color"[34], which explored the attitudes of white feminists towards women (and feminists) of colour. In this sense it identified a particular type of ignorance, one accompanied by claims of "both knowledge about and loving perception toward"[35] women of colour. As intellectuals and scholars these white women are indeed familiar with the work of feminists of colour, and as feminists they proclaim to want to advance their 'sisters'' cause, but, Ortega observes, they ultimately do not do the work required for decentering their perspective, which leads them to either relegate women of colour to the margins or reproduce monolithic and stereotypical views. Ortega has famously critiqued the imprecision with which Donna Haraway has treated women of colour in her Cyborg Manifesto[36], a seminal work that many saw as challenging precisely ideas of feminism based on sameness. I find the contradiction Ortega speaks of in relation to white feminists like Haraway—who incur complicity with whiteness while attempting to decenter it—to be akin to the one of actors in the art world in their efforts towards plurality of perspectives and inclusion. Although a different context, the vast majority of workers in the sector occupy a similar position: they benefit from a relative amount of privilege, they are knowledgeable in the topics they address and they are motivated by good intentions.[37]

---

33. Ahmed, "Critical racism/Critical Sexism", *feministkilljoys*, 19 December 2013, https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/12/19/critical-racismcritical-sexism/

34. Mariana Ortega, "Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color", *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006).

35. Ortega, 56.

36. Ortega points out for example, how Haraway brings in 'Chicanas' as a homogenous identity. Haraway refers to the work of a specific group, presenting it as the general stance in Chicana feminist writings.

37. Reports such as "Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries", David O'Brien, Orian Brook, & Mark Taylor (2018), show how in the UK the workforce in the sector is largely white and middle-class, highly educated and "the most liberal, most pro-welfare and most left wing of any industry".

However be it a feminist or an art worker, slipping into complicity is never only a case of human error. Their actions are situated within well established apparatuses, namely academia, the art world, knowledge production, institutional practices and so on.

Kassim's case reveals precisely how individuals are reproduced by institutions. Although the white curators and members of staff that Kassim worked with were not hostile nor in disagreement with what she and the rest of the curatorial team were attempting to achieve, "it often felt like the price of our honesty was any future chance to work with the museum or, worse, that it might jeopardise further decolonial projects. […] There was always a power struggle at work"[38]. *This thesis takes into examination precisely the role of workers such as Kassim's colleagues, who are in the position of replicating power imbalances despite (or through) their good intentions.* Through in-depth interviewing with art workers, I set to explore their self-understandings of their subject position with respect to the topics addressed in the exhibition, and of how their social location plays into their actions.

The Amsterdam Museum and the Golden Coach

38. Kassim, 2020.

Figure 1. The Golden Coach on display at the Amsterdam Museum. Photograph by Nina Schollaardt, retrieved from https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/gouden-koetsexpositie-voor-zowel-monarchisten-als-activisten~b574c190/

The Golden Coach (Gouden Koets) is a royal carriage donated to Queen Wilhelmina in 1898, year of her investiture. It is said to be a gift from the population of Amsterdam to the newly appointed monarch, and was manufactured thanks to money collected primarily across poor areas of the capital city.[39] The coach is owned by the royal family and has been regularly used in inaugurations and royal weddings, as well as the yearly ceremony of the opening of parliamentary sessions. Although the coach has been at the centre of contestations since its inception by those opposed to the monarchy, it is only more recently that it has entered national debates around the colonial heritage of The Netherlands. In 2009,[40] founder of the Committee of Dutch Debts of Honour (Komite Utang Kehormatan Belanda, KUKB)[41] Jeffry Pondaag has brought attention to the images represented on the side panels of the coach. The coach is decorated by four panels painted by artist Nicolaas van der Waay, with allegories of the kingdom's attributes and values. In the left panel called "Tribute from the Colonies" (Hulde der Koloniën) the figure of the Dutch Maiden, a white woman personifying The Netherlands, sits on a throne at the centre of the scene, surrounded by (white) allegorical figures and peoples from the former colonies bearing gifts and showing deference. As Pondaag and others have denounced, the panel portrays a degrading image of the peoples of those regions, represented as submissive, poor and uncivilised. Requests by activists to stop

---

39. Annemarie de Wildt, *The Golden Coach*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021. Published in conjunction with the exhibition *The Golden Coach* at the Amsterdam Museum, 18 June 2021–27 February 2022. As de Wildt explains, the extent to which the 'donations' were voluntary, and the exact circumstances under which the initiative came about are difficult to establish. The idea seems to have originated in a meeting of the Circle of Friends of the House of Orange, hence supporters of the royal family. However this association was chaired by two former members of the Spyker factory, the manufacturer of the carriage. For this reason it is also speculated that the initiative was ultimately a promotion and source of revenue for the company.

40. Although the issue had already been raised in 1990 by artist Ruben La Cruz.

41. The association campaigns for the rights of the victims of Dutch war crimes in Indonesia.

using the coach or removing the panel went unheard. In 2011, the then president of the National Platform for the History of Slavery (Nationaal instituut Nederlands slavernijverleden en erfenis, NiNsee), Barryl Biekman, wrote a letter to the government asking for the removal of the panel and its replacement with a new painting that celebrates the different cultures of Dutch society. As the letter reads,

> through the painting on the Side Panel of the Carriage, the criminal colonial history of oppression and exploitation is being glorified […] in the time in which we are living now, the half-naked African and Indonesian men, women and children on the Side Panel, whereby they are offering goods to the 'slaveholders', which are produced through 'slave labour' is still inappropriate, insulting and disrespectful to the civilians of African and Indonesian origin in particular. It is offensive and disrespectful to all people of African and Indonesian descent anywhere in the world.[42]

Since then, activist groups in the country have repeatedly asked for the carriage or the individual panel to be placed in a museum with appropriate contextualisation. This exhibition then should also be understood as the result of years of campaigning and calls by communities of colour for a reckoning with what is valued as cultural heritage in the public debate.

The Golden Coach is part of a process initiated by the Amsterdam Museum in recent years to critically reflect on the legacies of colonialism at play within the museum. Notably the Amsterdam Museum was at the centre of debates in 2019 for deciding to remove the term 'Golden Age'[43] from its gallery spaces and communication material, following the

---

42. The National Platform Dutch Slavery Past and the Foundation Committee Honor of Debts, "Official Letter Regarding the Golden Coach to Dutch Politicians", September 11 2012, https://platformslavernijmonument.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Official_letter_regarding_The_Golden_Carriage_to_Dutch_Politicians.pdf

43. 'Golden Age' (Gouden Eeuw) is the name used in Dutch history to refer to the 17th century. The term alludes to the great wealth and growth enjoyed by the country at the time. As the website for tourism Holland.com managed by The Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC) —the organisation responsible for promoting the Netherlands nationally and internationally— reads: "the Dutch Golden Age, laid the foundation for the Netherlands as we know it today. But this period also had a dark side, which is discussed more openly these days. The museums that devote attention to the Netherlands' glorious history often also explore this dark side. There are exhibitions and city walks throughout the Netherlands that revolve around the history of slavery and colonialism". Like this quote shows, the highly problematic connotations of such a definition have only recently entered the national debate, and remain bracketed from the 'general understanding' of the term. Saying that "this period *also* had a dark side" fails to account to the fact that the very reason

programme of events New Narratives, which "invited a range of creators and critics to take a critical look at the way in which we presented our collections".[44] In the press release announcing the decision, the museum states that "its disavowal of the term 'Golden Age' is a step in a wider process aimed at making the institution more diverse and inclusive –one that the museum embarked on a number of years ago together with people in the city".[45] The exhibition *The Golden Coach* then, has been developed as a continuation of this process.

As the preliminary digital material declares, one of the Amsterdam Museum's goal is to "[c]ontribute to the public dialogue about the traces of our colonial past in contemporary society and the decolonisation of the museum and its collection". "In recent years", the document continues, "we have been explicitly involved in the discussion about inclusivity and exclusivity in museums, and the legacy of colonialism. […] Our goal is to be a city museum that an increasing number of people identify with; an inclusive place that does justice to the city's culture".[46] To this end, the museum has approached the exhibition through a long process of research and dialogue with researchers and practitioners, which included research sessions and discussions with activists and members of the public. The Golden Coach Study Room set up in the museum invited the public to enter in dialogue with the museum and learn about the making of the exhibition. Additionally, a sounding board of twenty people between academics and activists met regularly with the exhibition team to add critical insight on the curatorial process. As Artistic Director Margriet Schavemaker recounts of such meetings, "[a]re we on the right course? Are we missing important perspectives and voices? How can we best present the many different perspectives and storylines? The discussions we held were always lively, critical, and constructive".[47]

---

for which this period of wealth came to be *is* its "dark side". In other words, it is not *a side*, a collateral aspect, but a pillar. The term therefore conceals the fact that wealth of a portion of Dutch society, was built on the hardship of others. Activists groups have been campaigning for the removal of the term which is still largely in use and present across history books, monuments and street names.

44. Margriet Schavemaker, "The Golden Coach in the Amsterdam Museum", in de Wildt et al., ed. *The Golden Coach*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021, 25.

45. Amsterdam Museum, "The Amsterdam Museum to Stop Using Term 'Golden Age'", 2019, https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/sites/default/files/press_release_the_amsterdam_museum_to_stop_using_term_golden_age.pdf

46. Amsterdam Museum, "The Golden Coach. An Amsterdam Gift", unpublished, accessed February 2021, 3-4.

47. Schavemaker, 18.

Such a methodology shows a commitment by the museum to devise sets of practices and tools that allow for a more skilful approach to complex themes that have been largely unaddressed thus far —in museums and Dutch society at large, as well as a will to extend such process beyond the scope of individual exhibitions and encompass the entirety of the museum's work. As Schavemaker declares "[m]useums can provide a valuable contribution to promoting social equality and opposing racism. We can create greater awareness about the colonial past by organizing exhibitions about related subjects. In addition, we can take a critical look at our collections; which objects from the past have been preserved, which stories can we tell with them —and which cannot be told? Critical reflection is needed regarding *how* we tell these stories"[48]. The composition of both the core team and the sounding board formed to work on the exhibition, would seem to reflect efforts at also addressing the issue of *who* tells these stories[49].

This exhibition therefore sets itself as a well-intentioned and valuable undertaking. However, as we have seen with the BMAG's exhibition *The Past is Now: Birmingham and Empire* discussed above, good intent, creative freedom and a diverse workforce do not automatically undo the power imbalances that live through the institution. While I do not wish to draw comparisons between the two institutions or initiatives, nor do I set here to assess the outcome of the Amsterdam Museum's exhibition, it is useful to keep Kassim's case in mind as it allows to understand the sheer complexity of such endeavours. Engaging with similar topics and taking place in countries with analogous colonial histories, the two exhibitions share intricacies and risks.

---

48. Schavemaker, 24.

49. Based on information retrieved from the exhibition publication, the team is composed of six white workers (Artistic Director, Head Curator, Curator, Historian and Specialist in Public Mediation, Research and Public Programming, Intern Research and Public Programming) and five workers of colour (Expert on Postcolonial Theory/ Programming, Expert on Indonesia/Programming, Head of Communication and Marketing, Curator, Educational and Participatory Programming).

Theoretical Framework

This thesis inserts itself in a line of work that addresses critically institutions as sites of reproduction of structural inequality. In doing so, I am interested in the role of individuals not only as being at the receiving end of power structures, but also as active participants in their consolidation. By positing the subject as at once product and vehicle of power, post-structuralist understandings of power and discourse formation, form the ground of this study and are fundamental in establishing the relation between institutional complicity and individual agency. Post-structuralist accounts of subject formation are examined mainly through the work of Judith Butler, however these are approached through an intersectional and post-colonial lens. While I do not delve into the critiques advanced to both Foucault and Butler on their insufficient attention to processes of racialisation in their analysis of power, my engagement with these texts is mindful of such dangerous shortcomings. In particular, Spivak and Saba Mahmood's approaches to post-structuralism allow to begin to fill those gaps. Following their work, along with Dutch diasporic scholars Guno Jones, Kwame Nimako, Gloria Wekker and Glenn Willemsen, race, colonialism and imperialism are understood as social constructions and systems rather than self-evident categories and circumscribed events.

As mentioned, in analysing how power is distributed and reproduced my focus is on privileged subjects. To this end, this study heavily reposes on the notion of implication as theorised by Rothberg, which serves as tool to examine "the position of the dominant subject aligned with power who remains outside the direct lines of perpetration".[50] In this respect this research also inserts itself in the tradition of whiteness studies, as it follows the discipline's intent to shift the focus of scrutiny away from the racialised Other, and undo the transparency and racial neutrality assigned to whiteness. Similarly, my preoccupation with agency does not concern forms of resistance 'from below' but instead is aimed at the role of privileged subjects who do not intend to partake —albeit indirectly— in ongoing discriminatory practices.

Feminist theory underpins the reasoning for this thesis. I consider this research to be feminist not purely for referencing feminist authors, but also in that it challenges systems of domination and the conditions under which these are kept in place. Therefore, albeit not engaging with gender per se, this study is premised on an understanding of patriarchy,

50. Rothberg, 41.

colonialism and capitalism as interconnected mechanisms of power. Feminist principles were also followed in conducting the qualitative research. Within such approach, the task of the researcher is no longer that of detached and objective observer uncovering the truth —as conventional ethnography would have it— but rather that of paying attention to how participants make sense of their own lived experience, while acknowledging how the researcher's social location and biography participate in knowledge production. Following scholars Bev Gatenby and Maria Humphries[51] I understand in-depth interviewing as a method akin to the feminist practice of consciousness raising, in that it offers an opportunity to recognise shared issues and the structural elements that underpin them. I hope, by opening a window onto workers' daily dilemmas and self-understanding, to interrupt neoliberal solipsism and disenfranchisement, and gesture towards coalitions and alliances.

The choice of authors for this thesis performs a reflection on the implications of citation politics, understood as technology of production and reproduction of knowledge. In delineating the vastly theorised notions of subject formation and agency, I attempt to follow alternative routes, or approach prevalent thinkers through the readings and uses of feminist and/or diasporic voices. By doing so I hope to centre my reasoning around authors that — although not necessarily under-cited— might still be treated as secondary. Finally, this study is indebted to decolonial thought. While this is not a decolonial project, it reposes on the insights of decolonial scholars in understanding settler colonialism as a founding principle of Western societies and, as such, built into our economic system, legislation, and political and social infrastructure.

Methodology

This study employs a combination of discourse analysis, literature review, case study analysis and qualitative research. Because this thesis is intended as a tool for reflection for both young professionals embarking on their positions with the desire to bring about positive change, and more established well-meaning members of institutions, the choice of methods employed reflects an attempt to move into the realm of practice. To this end, theoretical approaches such as literature review and discourse analysis are accompanied by an engagement with the field of reference through a current case study and interviews with

---

51. Bev Gatenby and Maria Humphries, "Feminist Participatory Action Research: Methodological and Ethical Issues", *Women's Studies International Forum,* (2000): 89-105.

workers. In this way I hope to make such debates readily applicable to lived experience as well as more accessible to those who are not already familiar with the topics and disciplines discussed. Through literature review I build a theoretical framework for the notions of complicity and agency I use throughout the thesis. I also rely on theoretical papers to delineate understandings of colonialism and the underpinning notion of race, as well as to provide historical contextualisation for such discussions. Discourse analysis is applied to the debates surrounding the Golden Coach and the panel taken into examination, as well as the language used by the Amsterdam Museum in public communications. By tracing how such topics are treated in the Dutch national debate I am able to show how ideology is put to use in everyday language, and its repercussions on the daily lives of communities of colour.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research carried out through interviews aims at further connecting discourse to everyday instances as, following post-colonial scholar Sara de Jong, "it employs reflections on individual experiences as material to explore wider structural issues of inequality and power"[52]. In-depth interviews were conducted with members of the team working on the exhibition *The Golden Coach*. Because this study aims at investigating the role of art workers who benefit from the injustices they critique, the sample is constituted of white members of the team. White workers, occupying a dominant position in the sector while not being directly affected by the issues addressed in the exhibition, embody the potential co-existence of complicity and benevolence that I set to investigate. While workers of colour can be equally complicit with systems of oppression and occupy positions of privilege, whiteness presents itself as a more readily available identity marker as opposed to indicators such as class, ability, sexual orientation and so on. It is important to stress that this should not be read as a move that assigns inherent qualities to whiteness. I do not wish to posit whiteness as equivalent to privilege, nor equate non-whiteness to lack of privilege. Rather, by saying that white workers occupy a dominant position I contextualise their condition within the broader makeup of the industry as well as of the institution in which the exhibition is situated.

52. Sara de Jong, *Complicit Sisters: Gender and Women's Issues Across North-South Divides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2017), 5.

Remote interviews were carried out with four members of the team. The exchanges took place through video call and were documented via audio recording. Each interview lasted roughly one hour and was semi-structured with an outline of open ended questions. These were divided into broad areas of interest, namely self-understanding of one's own identity and positionality in respect to the topics of the exhibition; motivations entering the position and familiarity with the issues addressed; experiences with ethical dilemmas and/or disagreements with the institution's direction. Throughout the thesis I do not make the research participants' identity known, as I do not consider such information to be necessary for the purpose of this study. I also do not wish to characterise testimonies therefore I do not assign pseudonyms but refer to participants as 'the interviewee', 'the participant' or 'the worker'. Biographical details or information that could otherwise reveal the identity of the interviewee have been removed from the excerpts, and are only provided in the case that the participant has not requested confidentiality, and such information is considered relevant to the argument. For the same reasons, there is no reference to the job role occupied by the participants. For the purpose of this research, it suffices to know that they span from entry to mid-level of seniority, i.e. roles that grant decision-making power but that also entail varying degrees of supervision. This is particularly relevant when analysing agency, as my interest lies in how this unfolds in circumstances when one does not have control over the overall direction of a given initiative.

In transcribing the interviews I signal change of tone, rhythm and pauses through the use respectively of italic, punctuation and unbracketed ellipses. Elsewhere[53] I have explored the limitations of transcription as a technology that, by turning voice into text, deprives it of its corporal qualities. Here I therefore attempt to convey the materiality of the spoken word and the fragmented nature of speech, by relaying partial sentences, mannerisms and hesitation. While this might make reading somewhat more labour intensive, I hope it renders some of the embodied and affective dimensions of meaning making. Parts of sentences that were not comprehensible outside of body language and tone, or excessively fragmented, have been removed and signalled with bracketed ellipses. Where this has been done, great attention was given not to affect the meaning of the sentence. It is worth noting that the

---

53. Giorgia Cacciatore, "Expanded Interviewing: A Case for Multimodality in Feminist Approaches to Qualitative Research", (Utrecht University, unpublished, 2020); "Encounters Through Sound: Envisaging Sound-based Approaches to Qualitative Research", (University of Amsterdam, unpublished, 2021).

interviewees are not native English speakers and that the testimonies relayed in this research should be read as spoken in the participants' personal capacity and not as representatives of their institution.

I undertake this research from a position of intimate knowledge of the field of reference, having spent several years working in the arts and cultural sector (which comprises paid and unpaid roles, as well as all that is involved in attaining those positions). However, in my decision to research the field, my positionality is better understood as one of contamination between insider and outsider. In engaging with this research, I keep at the forefront my own implication and the risks of my own good intentions. Echoing the quote by Ahmed that opens this thesis, my implication is indeed not suspended by the act of critiquing, on the contrary, it is re-enacted. Throughout this thesis, I therefore strive not to set myself apart from what I critique but rather to use it as source of further self-reflection. Embodying the prototype of the worker making up the cultural sector —white, progressive, (lower) middle class— I too, like the workers interviewed, benefit from the structural inequalities I denounce.

Chapter Overview

The thesis is divided in two parts. Part I aims at answering the following research question: *How can we understand the role of art workers who strive to redress institutional complicities, while at the same time benefitting (even if only partly and/or indirectly) from them?* Chapter 1 "Debates on Complicity" lays the theoretical foundations for my reasoning on the notions of complicity and implication. Beginning from post-structuralism and continuing with post-colonial accounts, the chapter connects the frameworks of complicity and implication with intentionality and benevolence, and questions whether complicity should be understood in opposition to resistance. This chapter will allow me to posit individuals as inevitably enmeshed in power relations, and to argue that complicity cannot be neutralised by benevolence. Chapter 2, "The Golden Coach: Web of Complicities" introduces and examines the object at the centre of the case study through the lens of the theories discussed in the previous chapter. It begins with a close analysis of the Golden Coach panel "Tribute from the Colonies", situating it in the historical context of The Netherlands as well as in its public debate. The chapter aims at dissecting the symbology of the panel by tracing its continuity and evolution in contemporary discourses. The chapter concludes with a

argument for the use of the framework of implication to analyse our relation to colonial objects.

The closing chapter of Part I, "The Well-Meaning Implicated Subject", presents findings of the qualitative research and uses them to further examine the relation between complicity and benevolence. Here I focus on the Amsterdam Museum workers' self-understanding and intentionality in relation to the histories of oppression addressed by the exhibition *The Golden Coach*. I therefore propose the figure of the *well-meaning implicated subject* as a way to account for the role of art workers involved in projects engaging with themes of systemic injustice from a dominant position and motivated by good intentions.

In Part II, I turn my attention toward agency and attempt to answer the research question *how can we envisage forms of agency that do not reproduce (individual and institutional) complicity with systems of oppression?* This part begins with the chapter "Debates on Agency" which presents an overview of the understandings of agency arising from the work of the authors and theoretical frameworks discussed in relation to complicity. This chapter allows me to examine how agency emerges within complicity, and outline a notion of agency that works in tandem with one's awareness of implication. Chapter 5 "Implication Enacted", goes back to the research findings to investigate art workers' experiences of self-determination in order to show how forms of ethical agency that take into account one's own implication unravel in day-to-day decision-making. I bring the thesis to a close by envisaging how these notions can be productively brought into the field and further reflecting on the research process.

Part I

1. Debates on Complicity

Introduction

As explained in the introduction to this thesis, this study reposes on the premise that Western museums and art institutions were an integral part of the consolidation of imperial and colonial ideology, and that these affiliations are traceable in their current makeup. While more and more institutions are beginning to publicly address how such legacies manifest across collections, display methods and curatorial practices, these efforts coexist with —and, as previously mentioned, some have argued —cover up less visible but more structural facets such as unfair hiring practices and working conditions. In this thesis I seek to explore whether and how these ongoing institutional complicities trickle down to individual workers, regardless of their personal beliefs and intentions. Thus, I begin my study by dissecting the notion of complicity and in particular, what it means to be complicit to injustices initiated in a different temporal dimension. This chapter will allow me to show how, on the one hand that individuals, even if benevolent, are never neutral actors within the power relations they address, and on the other that complicity should not be thought of as in opposition to resistance. In order to do so, I follow the notion of complicity threaded through the fields of feminist theory, postcolonial studies, memory studies and critical whiteness studies. Complicity, as put to use by the authors I set to explore, is situated within discourses of oppression, responsibility and solidarity; themes that are dear to this research and that inform my reasoning around this notion.

Because this study centres individual experiences, I heavily repose on poststructuralist accounts of power which place the subject as primary tool for the (re)production of power relations. In particular Butler's work, drawing from Foucault, offers a view of complicity as a fundamental type of relation between subject and power, an insight that also warns against myths of pure subject positions untouched by power. Butler's work therefore constitutes a fundamental premise to explore how institutional complicity transfers onto individuals, producing subjects that inevitably become indirect agents, carrying on injustices and inequities already in place before their arrival. The figure of the implicated subject theorised by Rothberg[1] accounts precisely for how subjects are diachronically and synchronically folded in power relations, and therefore indirectly contributing to and benefitting from them.

1. Rothberg, 2019.

Although as Rothberg points out, implicated subjects are not necessarily white, I place the notion of implication in relation to critical whiteness studies' treatment of complicity. While my research, like Rothberg's, does not equate privilege exclusively with whiteness, I will show how the discipline offers important insight into implication within systemic racism. As Rothberg maintains in fact, the theoretical tool of the implicated subject lends itself particularly well to the analysis of racial oppression, in which the categories of victim, perpetrator and bystander prove insufficient to account for the complex roles through which power is declined in such contexts. Critical whiteness studies then help further understand one's own position as intersubjective and transtemporal, regardless of active participation or obliviousness.

The second part of the chapter will move into the realms of intentionality and benevolence. Germane to this research is the perhaps unsettling coupling of complicity with good intentions. As we will see, just as implication does not depend on awareness, complicity does not require bad motive in order to occur. On the contrary, Spivak[2] has famously warned about the dangers of benevolent intentions. Her work on the role of the progressive Western intellectual 'giving voice' to the subaltern subject while re-enacting the very conditions of her silence, will allow me to draw the nexus between solidarity and complicity, showing how complicity exceeds and at the same time infiltrates intentionality.

Significantly and partially both[3]

In her book *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection,* philosopher and gender theorist Butler draws from Michel Foucault to reflect on "the specific mechanisms of how the subject is formed in submission".[4] Butler is interested in expanding Foucault's account of *assujetissement*, the process through which the subject is both subjugated and shaped into being, to dissect the psychological workings of such ambivalence. According to Butler in fact, Foucault fails to account for precisely how it is that "[p]ower not only *acts on* a subject but, in a transitive sense, *enacts* the subject into being"[5]. While the book deals with a psychological analysis of these processes, Butler's investigation of oppositional relations to

---

2. Spivak, 1988.
3. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 1997), 17.
4. Butler, 2.
5. Butler, 13.

power offers a useful foundation to begin to think about complicity. Butler explains that "[p]ower acts on the subject in at least two ways: first, as what makes the subject possible, the condition of its possibility and its formative occasion, and second, as what is taken up and reiterated in the subject's 'own' acting"[6]. That is, power while always preceding the subject, is never only external to it, but infuses the subject's very existence. And because power (norms, codes of conduct) only exists through subjects, the subject becomes the vessel of power. As Butler puts it, "[i]f conditions of power are to persist, they must be reiterated; the subject is precisely the site of such reiteration, a repetition that is never merely mechanical".[7] It is precisely in this repetition and, according to Butler, *voluntary* —albeit unaware— reproduction of power, that a "primary complicity with subordination"[8] appears. As critical whiteness scholar Barbara Applebaum notes, "[w]hile Foucault's work has been critiqued for presuming 'docile' subjects, what is distinctive about Butler's account is that the subject is not inert but *actively* complicit in these exclusionary tactics of power through its constitution as a subject and through the way it is *compelled* to performatively reiterate these norms to maintain subject status"[9].

What is significant in such an understanding of power and subject formation, is that it does not postulate the possibility for an original subject pre-existent to power, "the 'doer' comes into being as a subject only through 'doing' and by 'doing' *sustains the very norms* that construct the subject as one who can 'do'"[10]. In other words, complicity is an inescapable but instrumental condition. Butler's interest aligns with Foucault's in that it lies beyond subject formation per se, but rather departs from these insights to look at how to effectively enact opposition to power while being "implicated in the very power one opposes"[11]. As she declares in fact, violence "cannot simply be opposed in the name of nonviolence, for when and where it is opposed, it is opposed from a position that presupposes this very violence … *The subject who would oppose violence, even violence to itself, is itself the effect of a prior violence* without which the subject could not have emerged"[12]. Importantly, in her argument

---

6. Butler, 14.
7. Butler, 16.
8. Butler, 17.
9. Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books: 2010), chap. 3.
10. Ibid.
11. Butler, 17.
12. Butler quoted in Applebaum, chap. 3.

Butler also takes aim at her own arena, the domain of critique and feminist theory in particular. As Applebaum observes, "[t]he insight that 'power pervades the very conceptual apparatus that seeks to negotiate its terms' is the 'very precondition of a politically engaged critique.' If the subject is constituted all the way down, then so are critical capacities. This does not imply that critique is impossible but rather that uncertainty and humility must be an inherent part of critique"[13]. I will focus on the means available within the aporia posed by subject formation in the second part of this thesis, but for now let us bear in mind that Butler's contribution is not intended to lead towards inaction, but rather to open up the register of subject positions able to wield power. Butler advocates that instead of seeking enclosed political subjectivities (i.e. always and exclusively within or without power) we should embrace that we are "*neither* fully determined by power *nor* fully determining of power (but significantly and partially both)"[14]. In fact, as Foucault maintains, power is "never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is exercised through a net-like organization"[15] in which the individual constitutes one of power's effects. This idea of power as running through a net-like organization is particularly relevant to my thinking of complicity and the role of the individual, as it posits the subject as *a junction*. A junction can be understood as the point in which the lines of the net meet, but also as a crossroads, something that requires choosing and acting upon. In this sense the subject becomes vehicle of power as through her choices she allows it to flow in one or the other direction, or to act as blockage.

Beyond Victims and Perpetrators

Power as something distributed (unevenly) across subjects and contexts, is also what memories studies scholar Rothberg conceptualises. As Rothberg declares, "structures of power produce implicated subjects as a necessary effect".[16] Rothberg takes as one of his starting points Primo Levi's notion of the gray zone in relation to concentration camps in Nazi Germany. As he explains, "the process of victimization in the camps does not only produce victims who are clearly set against perpetrators, but, in addition, creates a whole cast

13. Ibid.
14. Butler, 17.
15. Foucault quoted in Applebaum, chap. 3.
16. Rothberg, 2019, 35.

of characters marked by shades or degrees of complicity who are not easy to place on either moral or juridical maps".[17] Levi's insight referred to prisoners who were made to 'collaborate' with guards in the running of the camps, thereby being "incorporated into and contaminated by the construction of a concentrationary universe".[18] More relevantly (both to Rothberg's project and mine), while Levi's focus is on victims, philosopher Hannah Arendt "inverts the angle of vision: she allows us to see how a dictatorship draws privileged subjects into forms of implication that differ from perpetration and criminal guilt but are nevertheless essential to the catastrophe of absolute power".[19] To account for these nuanced and fluid positions, Rothberg theorises the figure of the implicated subject.

> Derived from the Latin stem *implicāre*, meaning to entangle, involve, or connect closely, "implication," like the proximate but not identical term "complicity," draws attention to how we are "folded into" (im-pli-cated in) events that at first seem beyond our agency as individual subjects. Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator […] Less "actively" involved than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mold of the "passive" bystander, either. Although indirect or belated, their actions and inactions help produce and reproduce the positions of victims and perpetrators.[20]

According to Rothberg, a vocabulary only made of victims and perpetrators is not sufficient to address the dynamic and blurred positions that we come to inhabit within contexts of systemic injustice, and especially racial oppression. While he does not suggest the elimination of these categories —there are indeed *also* victims and perpetrators— he proposes to look at implication as a condition situated on a continuum between those poles, in ever-changing proximity to power structures. In this sense implication is not to be considered as a fixed identity, but rather as a position that we occupy contingently, and possibly *along with* other subject positions. Defined as "an umbrella term that gathers a range of subject positions that sit uncomfortably in our familiar conceptual space of victims,

17. Rothberg, 39.
18. Rothberg, 46.
19. Ibid.
20. Rothberg, 1.

perpetrators, and bystanders",[21] the term is by definition intersectional. The notion of implication in fact, reposes on Black feminist understandings of oppressions and power relations as interlocking. Introduced by the Combahee River Collective and further developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to account for the overlapping oppressions undergone by Black women, intersectional thinking allows to see not only how systems of oppression are interconnected, and therefore cannot be tackled individually (i.e. either sexism or racism), but also how we are never *only* victims or perpetrators, but always necessarily both. As feminist scholar bell hooks, a central figure in the development of intersectional feminism, argues, moving beyond the binary victim/perpetrator and expanding one's own understanding of how power structures intersect and reinforce each other, allows to "locate where my responsibility lies. In some circumstances I am more likely to be victimized by an aspect of that system, in other circumstances I am in a position to be a victimizer".[22]

It is important to stress, however, that acknowledging the "coexistence of different relations to past and present injustices",[23] should not lead to collapse different oppressions and dilute responsibility. Nor, as Rothberg points out, should it steer towards relativism. Rather implication, on the grounds of intersectionality, serves "as a relational methodology"[24] in which our role is defined in relation to others'. This is true also for complicity. As observed by feminist critical race scholar Fiona Probyn-Rapsey in relation to the context of colonialism and reconciliation in Australia, complicity "draws on the inter-subjective nature of being in relation to Others".[25] Similarly to what Rothberg maintains, Probyn-Rapsey declares that "[c]olonialism is a structure that reproduces complicity".[26] In a settler colonial state like Australia, where colonialism is not a one-off event concluded in the past, complicity becomes the ongoing condition inhabited by Australians, albeit not in equivalent ways. As Probyn-Rapsey puts it, complicity is "a structural relationship that cannot be expiated fully because it exists in multiple, networked forms".[27] In this sense complicity, like implication, sets itself as

---

21. Rothberg, 13.
22. bell hooks, "Moving Past Blame: Embracing Diversity", in *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge: 2012), 30-31.
23. Rothberg, 8.
24. Rothberg, 22.
25. Fiona Probyn-Rapsey,"Complicity, Critique, and Methodology", *ARIEL* 38, no. 2-3 (2007): 70.
26. Probyn-Rapsey, 68.
27. Ibid.

"a relationship to the past that connects with the present", it "takes on a spectral presence reminding us of links with the past and the present and responsibility to the future".[28]

Similarly, Rothberg declares that thinking through implication, allows for "an approach attuned both to the urgencies of the present and the way that the present preserves and reproduces injustices past".[29] Rothberg speaks of this temporal nexus in terms of synchronic and diachronic implication, that is, forms of implication tied respectively to contemporary and historical wrongdoings. As he puts it, "there is neither strict continuity between past and present nor a clean break between the two temporal dimensions. Rather, implication emerges from the ongoing, uneven, and destabilizing intrusion of irrevocable pasts into an unredeemed present".[30] Rothberg identifies in the figure of the beneficiary a compelling way of thinking about diachronic implication. While largely left out of humanitarian discourses, thinking in terms of beneficiaries "fosters recognition that our well-being is contingent on others' suffering and impoverishment and that the world is connected by 'causal and therefore moral relationships'".[31] Implication then makes a useful framework to think of colonialism and systemic racism from dominant positions, in which temporal and spatial distances might discourage critical thinking towards one's own responsibility. As Rothberg explains in fact, in contexts of racial oppression power is not only distributed genealogically but also structurally. That is, while one *can* occupy the condition of implication as a result of being biologically related to 'slave' owners or 'traders', Rothberg argues that implication is not limited to blood ties but encompasses also structural ones. Structural implication concerns "those of us with a nongenealogical relation to slavery who nevertheless find ourselves entwined in its aftermath, either because of our racial privilege, our financial interests, our migration into a postslavery situation, or because we too, as scholars, trade in the archives of slavery".[32] In other words, "occupy[ing] the position of the latecomer to histories of perpetration",[33] does not exempt from responsibility towards those histories. As Rothberg stresses, the position of implication, while not requiring either awareness nor ideological agreement with injustices, does demand for "conscious and

---

28. Probyn-Rapsey, 78.
29. Rothberg, 11.
30. Rothberg, 9.
31. Rothberg, 16.
32. Rothberg, 78-79.
33. Rothberg, 14.

unconscious consent, a place where privileges are enjoyed and historical legacies shunted aside, whether through deliberate denial or through what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls 'the privilege of unknowing'".[34]

Rothberg privileges the term 'implication' over 'complicity' as, he maintains, the first allows for a more nuanced approach to issues of responsibility that do not necessarily translate in legal liability but that take place at a political level. As he puts it, "complicity works best as a term linked to unfolding processes and completed actions (such as the perpetration of a crime), but it works less well for describing the relationship of the past to the present. We are implicated in the past, I argue throughout this book, but we cannot be complicit in crimes that took place before our birth".[35] While implication does offer an effective framework to sharpen our understanding of subject positions and responsibility within contexts of systemic injustice, I do not fully align with Rothberg's statement, and argue that although we cannot be complicit in crimes committed before our birth, we can be complicit in maintaining and/or carrying forward the effects of those crimes. Rothberg himself seems to suggest this when he states, "[c]omplicity presupposes implication, but implication does not always involve complicity".[36] In understanding implication as *a condition*, throughout this thesis I also pay attention to the notion of complicity in that it presupposes action. I argue that we are all implicated subjects, but whether we are complicit or not depends on how we *act upon* our implication. Hence, I maintain that both terms, and the respective modes of thinking they afford, are to be taken into consideration. Implication offers an essential premise to contextualise our actions, but complicity is also necessary if we are to assess the ways we exercise power from such position. Doing away with complicity stops our reflections short. The examples used by Rothberg to demonstrate what counts as implicated subject, prove this point. In his book, Rothberg introduces his theory by recounting how reflections on the notion of implication originated from his personal "position as a white Ashkenazi Jewish descendant of early twentieth-century immigrants to the US",[37] whose ancestors were not in the country at the time that colonialism, slavery and segregation were taking place, and yet has benefited from pre-existent power structures that harm peoples of colour. As he explains, such a subject position perfectly illustrates the figure

34. Rothberg, 42.
35. Rothberg, 14.
36. Rothberg, 13.
37. Rothberg, 17.

of the implicated subject. During his participation to an online talk[38], touching on recent events, Rothberg brings in another figure that would exemplify the condition of implication, Amy Cooper. Cooper is a white woman that during the summer of 2020 called the police denouncing harassment from a Black man who had asked her to put her dog on the leash (as per Central Park regulations).[39] I maintain that only using the framework of implication to examine Cooper's role in histories of oppression is insufficient and potentially misleading. Identifying Cooper as *merely* implicated in a long-lasting apparatus that 'protects' white women at the cost of Black lives,[40] is incomplete. Amy Cooper, as any white woman in America is indeed implicated in histories of brutalisation of Black people, but she is also complicit in that she weaponised her implication in an act that, while this has not been the case, might have too easily resolved with serious harm. Hence Cooper appears to be substantially closer to what we might understand as a perpetrator than a beneficiary.

While Rothberg, as we have seen, does formulate implication as a term that encompasses a spectrum of positions in relation to power, I argue that the distance between these two subject positions used as example, shows the necessity for employing such notion in tandem with complicity. The condition of the second or third generation immigrant in relation to the histories of her country of adoption, and that of a white woman who purposefully channels existing power relations to damage a Black man, might be both premised on implication but unfold on different ethical planes; assessing them equally bears the danger of collapsing rather different degrees of responsibility and the accountability processes that go with them. I therefore maintain that complicity and implication should not be thought of as competing, as Rothberg appears to do, but as complementing each other.

---

38. Rothberg, "Thinking With", Research Center for Material Culture, 27 October 2020, YouTube video, 1:42:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29Bc2JHAbX8&list=FL4U0Rg2Vl76_u96k6ZdkoWw&index=20&t=54s

39. Amir Vera and Laura Ly, "White woman who called police on a black man bird-watching in Central Park has been fired", CNN, 26 May 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/26/us/central-park-video-dog-video-african-american-trnd/

40. Angela Y. Davis, "Rape, Racism and the Capitalist Setting", *The Black Scholar* 9, no. 7 (1978). Activist and scholar Angela Davis, amongst others, has extensively analysed how the myth of the Black rapist provided a socially acceptable justification to continue exercising control over the Black population in post-slavery America. Instances of public violence and wrongful sentences against Black men motivated by false accusations of inappropriate behaviour towards white women have persisted since, the homicide of Emmett Till and the so-called Central Park Five case, being arguably the most notable.

Only by using them together can we account for nuances within such broad notions. The figure of the implicated subject is a necessary premise when dealing with complicity: By saying that complicity presupposes and reposes on implication, I am establishing complicit stances and acts as arising from a position of implication within systems of racial oppression. In sum, I argue that without reckoning with our condition of implication we run the risk of being oblivious to the dangers of *becoming* complicit.

Ferocious Benevolence

Although both Butler and Rothberg's accounts prove extremely useful to think of our enmeshment with power, neither of them offers an extensive exploration of the specific role of benevolent intentions. In what follows I turn to the work of Spivak who has addressed precisely the intimate relation between complicity and benevolence. In her seminal text "Can the Subaltern Speak?",[41] Spivak, one of the leading members of the Subaltern Studies Group, has famously called into question the role of the Western intellectual in conveying accounts of disenfranchised subjects in the context of postcolonial India. In the text she argues that "representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent".[42] Meaning, the well-intentioned mission of 'giving voice' to those who wouldn't otherwise be heard, taken upon by progressive intellectuals in the aftermath of Indian independence, implies a posture of neutrality towards what is conveyed. As Spivak denounces, the subaltern's voice that filters through such texts is necessarily muffled by interpretation, an added layer that can never be fully transparent. As de Jong and Jamila M. H. Mascat effectively put it in their essay "Relocating Subalternity: Scattered Speculations on the Conundrum of a Concept", instead of making the subaltern's voice heard, the intellectual inevitably ends up "'ventriloquizing' and speaking for the subalterns".[43] De Jong and Mascat address the theoretical deadlock that such an argument poses, when they state "benevolence […] might be at the root of the silencing; to the point that 'In fact, well-meaning liberals are implicated even deeper than mean-spirited conservatives in this silencing of the subaltern'".[44] A

---

41. Spivak, 1988.
42. Spivak, 275.
43. Sara de Jong and Jamila M.H. Mascat, "Relocating Subalternity: Scattered Speculations on the Conundrum of a Concept", *Cultural Studies* 30, no. 5 (2016): 720.
44. Spivak quoted in de Jong and Mascat, 719.

complicity motivated by good intentions is what Spivak's important intervention urges us to examine.

Much like the authors discussed thus far, Spivak's conclusions are not meant to discourage acts of solidarity, but rather as an invitation to engage in profound reckoning. As she stresses, "I think it is important to acknowledge our complicity in the muting, … [T]he intellectual's responsibility is to the history of the subaltern's silencing, a silence that cannot be 'filled' without repeating the original act of erasure".[45] Spivak's critiques are aimed mainly at European radical philosophers such as Foucault and Deleuze who, inconsistently with their work, fail to acknowledge the "contradiction within a position that valorizes the concrete experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual".[46] This leads her to argue that their stances hide a positivist and essentialist outlook on what counts as 'authentic' oppressed subject. That is, respectively, claiming to represent what is 'actually' there, and positing the Other as a monolithic third-world subject. Representations of the subaltern therefore do not merely represent but *construct* her, a contribution to discourse that these intellectuals paradoxically fail to recognise as their own.

De Jong's study of women from the global North involved in humanitarian projects to help women from the global South, arguably puts Spivak's insights to work in the field of humanitarianism. As she puts it,

> I understand these women as 'complicit sisters,' whose normative engagement with other women across North–South divides is itself embedded in the inequalities and power relations they seek to address. For example, women from the global North whose work is to support women in the global South displaced by war have benefited in their careers from the global dominance of English, which is rooted in the same colonialism that also lies at the source of much ethnic conflict.[47]

In her book, de Jong examines the will to 'do good' of these women who, much like herself and her own work in the field, were moved by laudable motives. By using an intersectional framework, de Jong makes visible "the relational aspect of identity with reference to how the women understand themselves vis-à-vis their target group"[48] and

45. Spivak quoted in de Jong and Mascat, 720.
46. Spivak, 275.
47. de Jong, 2017, 1.
48. de Jong, 6.

questions the sameness of the category of womanhood that functions as grounds for solidarity. De Jong notes in fact how, when asked about their identity, the women interviewed privileged aspects of their subject position that situate them in a position of subordination, therefore underscoring their oppression in what she defines as a race to innocence. Such gesture is comparable to second-wave white feminists' postures in relation to women of colour. As academic Patricia Hill Collins explains, "the foregrounding of gender oppression through an emphasis on 'sisterhood' came at the expense of recognizing the ways in which patriarchy is 'interlocking' with other forms of oppression, such as racism, homophobia, and classism"[49]. White feminists, in their effort to liberate 'women' while, on the one hand erasing Black women's experience from what counts as womanhood, and on the other perpetuating racist stereotypes against Black men,[50] could be said to embody this fusion of good intentions and complicity.

Both the Western radical intellectual addressed by Spivak, and the NGO workers in de Jong's study are implicated subjects. However, I suggest that such figures —i.e. subjects belonging to dominant groups wanting to 'do good'— be understood substantially through their benevolence. Throughout this thesis I argue that benevolence shapes the condition of implication in ways that deserve further attention if we are to account for how well-meaning subjects differ from both unaware and/or disinterested, and willingly complicit individuals (like Amy Cooper). To be sure, by setting well-meaning subjects apart, I do not also set the effects of their actions apart. As we have seen, benevolence does not prevent complicity and harm from occurring. Rather, I am interested in this subject position as, if genuine, it can harbour the potentiality for self-critique and transformation. To this end, I find useful to build on Rothberg's notion of implication to, on the one hand, close in on the specificities of implicated subjects moved by good intentions, and on the other examine our relation to colonial objects. In the next chapter I look closely at the Golden Coach and the panel "Tribute from the Colonies" as material manifestation of the condition of implication.

---

49. de Jong, 2.

50. Amongst others Davis has critiqued second-wave white feminists such as Susan Brownmiller, Jean MacKellar and Diana Russell for advancing theories framing interracial rape committed by Black men as a form of retaliation towards whites and an attempt to reclaim male supremacy.

2. The Golden Coach: Web of Complicities[1]

Figure 2. The Golden Coach during a royal ceremony. Photograph by Patrick van Katwijk, retrieved from https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/race-colonialism-and-the-netherlands-golden-coach

Introduction

In the previous chapter I have examined how regimes of domination implicate subjects across spatial and temporal divides. In this chapter, I apply the framework of implication to analyse the object at the centre of my case study, namely the Golden Coach. For the scope of this study I engage with the Golden Coach as artefact of the colonial era, hence I focus in particular on the panel "Tribute from the Colonies". By situating the panel in the historical and social context of the country, I will look at the processes through which the tropes identifiable in its iconography reverberate in present-day debates, therefore implicating

1. I am drawing from the classroom activity "The Slave Ship Sally: Web of Complicity" designed by The Rhode Island Historical Society, https://www.rihs.org/lesson_plan/the-slave-ship-sally-web-of-complicity/

contemporary subjects. I will argue that colonial objects materialise the condition of implication, allowing to engage more concretely with the notion as a theoretical framework to reckon with the present effects of past injustices.

In what follows, I begin by offering a description of "Tribute from the Colonies" and continue by examining its symbology through the contributions of diasporic Dutch scholars who have engaged with the imperial and colonial history of The Netherlands. In particular, I repose on the extensive work of sociology scholar Kwame Nimako; first director of the National Institute for the History and Heritage of Dutch Slavery (NiNsee) Glenn Willemsen; and post-colonial scholar Guno Jones, to sketch an historical overview of the Dutch presence in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, and how this has been framed in national discourse. To this end, I also draw from the essays written by historian Karwan Fatah-Black; curator Ghanima Kowsoleea; and curator and researcher Maria Rey-Lamslag, for the Amsterdam Museum publication *The Golden Coach*,[2] issued to accompany the exhibition of the same name. Additionally, the work of cultural anthropologist Gloria Wekker will allow me to show how the colonial ideology traceable in the panel has persisted and evolved through time, defining dominant ideas of 'Dutchness'.

I will conclude by moving from the analysis of the panel to the current debates around the use of the coach. And show how the tropes identified in the panel also form the grounds for the treatment of the very grievances raised by communities of colour against the carriage. I will therefore make an argument for considering the Golden Coach as an *object of implication*, that is, an object that evokes past wrongdoings while reproducing current inequalities, and that as such generates an array of distinctly implicated subject positions. I suggest that the notion of implication applied to the Golden Coach and its panel, can help those who are not directly affected by these histories to think about the impact that the object currently has on Dutch communities migrated from former colonies.

---

2. Annemarie de Wildt, Dutton R. Hauhart (Reitz Ink), Pepijn Reeser, Margriet Schavemaker and Esmee Schoutens, ed. *The Golden Coach*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021.

Tribute from the Colonies

Figure 3. The painting “Tribute from the Colonies” featured on the Golden Coach left side.

The royal horse carriage owned by the Dutch royal family and known as Golden Coach, is decorated by four panels painted by artist Nicolaas van der Waay around 1898. Two small panels are placed on the front and back of the carriage, while the two larger panels, titled “Tribute from the Netherlands” (Hulde van Nederland) and “Tribute from the Colonies” (Hulde der Koloniën), decorate the sides. As the Amsterdam Museum explains,[3] the paintings on these panels are allegorical representations of the Dutch Kingdom, with personifications of its values and attributes, and royal symbolism honouring Queen Wilhelmina’s dynasty. “Tribute from the Netherlands”, placed on the right side of the carriage, centres around the royal family and the mainland,[4] while the left panel “Tribute from the Colonies” celebrates the international prestige of the empire. The two paintings feature a similar composition, with scenes unfurling around a central white female figure sitting on a throne, personifying respectively the royal family (the House of Orange) and The Netherlands.

Current campaigns and contestations around the Golden Coach take issue at the panel “Tribute from the Colonies”, and more specifically at it featuring on the coach, while this is showcased in yearly royal ceremonies. As explained more in detail in the introduction to this thesis, activists have been demanding for either the removal of the panel (and/or replacement

3. Ibid.

4. The painting depicts a harmonious and peaceful scenario populated by white figures (mainly women and children) covered in airy and light coloured drapery. These are portrayed bearing flowers, musical instruments and other symbolic objects standing for virtues and arts such as Peace, Justice, Poetry, Music.

with a new painting), or for stopping using the carriage altogether. Let us take a first look at the scene represented in the panel. At the centre of the painting, we find a white woman sitting on a throne and holding the coats of arms of Suriname and Batavia (the capital city of the 'Dutch East Indies', present-day Jakarta). This figure has been identified as the Dutch Maiden, a female personification of The Netherlands. As the Amsterdam Museum's publication details, this figure was based on similar allegorical representations in use across Europe, which served to "symboliz[e] the presumed civilization, development, and virtues of the nation's own city and country".[5] Framing the Dutch Maiden, are the representations of the territories of Suriname and the Caribbean (on the viewer's left), and of the Indonesian archipelago (on the right), the two areas colonised by the Dutch empire and renamed respectively 'West' and 'East Indies'.

As the title of the panel suggests, The Netherlands are represented as being honoured and paid homage with offerings. The peoples of the so-called 'West Indies' are depicted as covered in cloths, carrying local produce and heavy loads, and prostrating at the feet of the maiden. The so-called 'East Indies' are represented through a court of noblemen bearing gifts and paying respect to The Netherlands. White figures dressed in drapery are portrayed in symbolic poses that evoke the ideas of civilisation and economic protection. On the background, a maritime scenery alludes to the navy and the army.

Such a representation is viewed by some[6] as mere historical document of how the nation saw itself or wanted to be perceived at the time and, as such, as referring to a distant and concluded past to which one looks, with more or less criticality, as part of the country's history. However, such a stance, while seemingly acknowledging the painting as discriminatory, overlooks both the ongoingness of the events represented, and the meaning of the appearance of the panel during large-scale national events. In what follows I offer a close reading of the panel to show precisely how, on the one hand, the painting is steeped in colonial ideology and therefore is not a transparent representation of the reality of the time, and on the other, how such ideology cannot be relegated to a distant and concluded past, but continues to permeate contemporary debate and affect the lives of communities of colour in

---

5. de Wildt et al., 35.

6. Amongst others, historian Han Van der Horst who has declared "The Golden Coach shows how we viewed the world at that time", https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/na-zwarte-piet-racistische-gouden-koets-in-opspraak~a0f181b0/?referrer=https://nl.wikipedia.org/, (translated via Google Translate)

the country. A complete close reading of such a detailed painting would require much more space than I have, hence for the sake of my argument I focus here on what I have identified as three key and interweaving themes: representations of slavery, colonialism as civilising mission, the notion of race.

Representations of Slavery

As discussed above, the two groups of people framing the figure of the Dutch Maiden act as representations of the colonised territories of the 'West' and 'East Indies'. Looking at the panel, we can notice that the peoples from these two regions are portrayed in rather different ways. The inhabitants of Suriname and the Caribbeans are depicted as enslaved, while the peoples from the Indonesian archipelago as noblemen. In order to understand what these differences refer to, it is necessary to take a brief[7] —and by no means complete— look at the histories that are immortalised in the panel, as well as the dominant narratives circulating at the time of the making of the painting. As I will show, far from being an accurate representation, such difference reflects discriminatory views about the two areas, while supporting ideological and propagandistic narratives around the colonial enterprise that work to conceal the horror of such endeavour. I will argue that, even when represented, slavery is really obliterated in the story told by the panel. Let us begin with the figures on the left side of the panel. Fatah-Black[8] and Kowsoleea[9] both bring attention to the fact that at the time of the making of the panel, slavery in the areas of Suriname and the Caribbean islands had been abolished for decades. However, these figures are purposefully depicted as still enslaved. Kowsoleea points out how the appearance of the subjects, the loincloths and hoop earrings, "imply that [they were] still the property of a slave owner".[10] Fatah-Black also notes how "[i]n the meantime there had […] been large-scale migration to Suriname from China,

---

7. For the scope of this research I do not delve in depth with The Netherlands' history of colonialism and slavery. For detailed accounts on this see: Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic: Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation* (London: Pluto Press: 2011); Alicia Schrikker and Nira Wickramasinghe, *Being a Slave: Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean,* ed. (Leiden University Press: 2020).

8. Karwan Fatah-Black, "The Emancipating Subject in the Global Empire of Oranje-Nassau", in de Wildt et al., ed. *The Golden Coach*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021.

9. Ghanima Kowsoleea, "A Personal Look at the Nation's Most Disputed Panel", in de Wildt et al., ed. *The Golden Coach*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021.

10. Kowsoleea, 144.

Java, and what was then British India, now India. Nevertheless, it was decided to depict Africans on this part of the panel".[11] Additionally, these subjects are represented in the act of bearing sugarcane and cacao beans, goods cultivated for the Dutch Empire for trade and consumption in the European market.

Such an anachronistic representation then would seem to refer to a pre-abolition era, and encapsulate the colonial rule held by The Netherlands over these regions through plantation economies and enslaved labour. One could speculate that the time immortalised could be the early nineteenth century, when "[t]he productivity of slavery-based plantations in the Dutch Caribbean was at its height"[12]. As Nimako and Willemsen explain in fact, The Netherlands had a dominant role in sugar and salt production, with "[a]round 1820, no fewer than 416 plantations in Suriname producing coffee, sugar, cotton, and mixed crops"[13]. As Fatah-Black argues[14], the decision to represent these figures as such is testament to the persistency of the image assigned to this territories. Regardless of the actual state of those areas and their inhabitants at the time of the making of the painting, the preferred view, the one chosen to be featured on an object meant to elicit admiration nationally and beyond, is one in which the peoples from these regions cannot escape their condition of enslaved working on plantations, handing over produce to their masters. In such an essentialist gesture, what is an enforced condition becomes the very identity of these subjects, who appear frozen in a state of poverty, primitiveness and submission.

Fatah-Black explains how the figure of the Black subject carrying goods is a recurrent one in colonial imagery. Black men, in particular, represented in the act of "cheerfully performing their duties and loading the boat" (as a 1742 poem goes),[15] embody what Fatah-Black refers to as the notion of the emancipating subject. That is, the idea that through labour in the service of white masters, Black subjects can exit their sub-human condition. As Fatah-Black puts it, "[t]he side panel depiction of the 'West Indies' on the Golden Coach, showing hard-working and grateful Africans moving from their position as enslaved people towards a

---

11. Fatah-Black, 128.

12. Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic: Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation* (London: Pluto Press: 2011), 67.

13. Nimako and Willemsen, 68.

14. Fatah-Black, 128.

15. Ibid.

better future, is part of the racist image that has been propagated by colonial powers for centuries".[16]

This same racist image however, simultaneously posits the peoples from these regions as being inherently uneducated and fundamentally lazy,[17] and therefore ultimately unable to produce profit for the empire. As Wekker explains,[18] dominant views of the time speak of the colonised territories of the Caribbean as financial burden rather than asset. Conversely, the Indonesian region was held as the true bearer of wealth and prestige for the empire. This is reflected in the rather different scene unfolding at the other end of the panel. Here peoples from the Indonesian archipelago are rendered in the guise of a ruler and his retinue paying visit and bearing gifts to the Dutch Maiden. The subjects represented here are portrayed as standing in more dignified postures and wearing precious fabrics. As Rey-Lamslag explains, Indonesians rulers "were seen and presented as Dutch allies"[19] supporting Dutch presence in the territory. Hence, these figures are depicted as revering the maiden, yet enjoying a more equal relation to The Netherlands than their counterparts in the Atlantic.

This was far from the case. While the Dutch 'expansion' in the archipelago, started at the end of the sixteenth century, did involve agreements with the local nobility, as Rey-Lamslag puts it, "[i]n reality these alliances were more like unequal vassalages",[20] in which the local rulers were co-opted into binding contracts with the VOC (Dutch East India Company, the company set up to lead international trade in the area). In Rey-Lamslag's words,

> [w]ith each new monarch, pressure was exerted and negotiated regarding the conditions and the degree of autonomy. The indigenous rulers retained some authority and privileges, but their actual power was restricted. The local rulers were kept in check by means of an extensive system of economic, fiscal, administrative, and legal measures, and they were incorporated into the colonial system. In this way, the Dutch were able to maintain their authority and at the same time conceal it.[21]

---

16. Fatah-Black, 135.
17. Nimako and Willemsen, 2011.
18. Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, London: Duke University Press: 2016), 161-162.
19. Maria Rey-Lamslag, "Tribute from the Colonies? Indonesian Nobility at Queen Wilhelmina's Coronation", in de Wildt et al., ed. *The Golden Coach*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021, 83.
20. Rey-Lamslag, 90.
21. Ibid.

After the country gained back control over the area, following the VOC going bankrupt and the British briefly acquiring domination (1811–1816), "the Dutch introduced direct territorial rule [and] extended their rule over the entire Indonesian archipelago, incorporating the peoples of Indonesia in a series of colonial wars. Simultaneously, they introduced forced labour and large-scale exploitation of natural resources"[22]. As Rey-Lamslag points out, in the national narrative these violent occupations have always been presented as alliances. Jones has also denounced how in the national debate there is a "bifurcation of Dutch slavery"[23] whereby slavery in the 'East Indies' is wiped out in favour of celebrations of "the great 'Dutch entrepreneurial spirit'".[24] As Jones stresses however, Indian Ocean slavery was not "'less serious', as seems to be the general perception. The epistemological divide between slavery in the 'East Indies' and 'West Indies' is not dictated by some inherent difference between the two […] Both slaveries were dehumanizing tragedies characterized by the commodification of enslaved bodies, which implied an absolute negation of legal personhood"[25]. "Tribute from the Colonies" then, by upholding such dominant views, works to erase the violent presence of the Dutch empire in the Indonesian archipelago, and the forms of slavery implemented in those regions.

I argue that, albeit in a different manner, both slaveries are denied in the panel. Although representing certain subjects as enslaved, the panel effaces the brutalisation and utter negation of human life that slavery entails. By essentialising the enslaved condition, therefore positing the African subject as naturally inclined to serve the white, and happy to do so, slavery as a set of actions forcibly performed onto others —*to enslave*, is replaced by an quality of the self that was already there, waiting to be put to use —*to be a slave*.

Although transatlantic slavery has been receiving increasing recognition in the Dutch national debate thanks to the incessant work of Afro-Dutch activists, as Nimako and Willemsen explain, "until the end of the twentieth century, Dutch involvement in the Atlantic

---

22. Nimako and Willemsen, 39.

23. Guno Jones, "The Shadows of (Public) Recognition: Transatlantic Slavery and Indian Ocean Slavery in Dutch Historiography and Public Culture", in *Being a Slave: Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean,* ed. A. Schrikker, & N. Wickramasinghe (Leiden University Press: 2020), 270.

24. Ibid.

25. Jones, 276-277.

slavery system remained a non-issue in the public domain and in the collective memory of Dutch public institutions and Dutch society generally, except in the work of a handful of historians and anthropologists".[26] Jones warns that the arduous processes through which, over the last two decades, slavery has been pushed out of its confinement in the domain of ethnic studies and into the nation's history, is not an irreversible one. On the contrary, "the visibility of slavery is fragile and contingent upon power dynamics in the Netherlands".[27] In these dynamics, a central role is played by practices of memory and commemoration. As he remarks, it is no coincidence that calls for public recognition of slavery have also entailed denouncing Dutch traditions such as Zwarte Piet[28] and the Golden Coach[29]. In this sense the use of the Golden Coach facilitates the repetition in the public sphere of images and discourses that undo the work of de-invisibilising slavery.

Colonialism as Civilising Mission

Figure 4. Particular of the panel "Tribute from the Colonies"

In the left corner of the central part of the painting, a barely clothed child is handed a book by a white man dressed in Roman style drapery, while a man by his side encourages

26. Nimako and Willemsen, 149.
27. Jones, 283.
28. The character of Zwarte Piet is part of the Christmas festivities in The Netherlands, and precisely of the Sinterklaas celebrations occurring on the 5th of December. The festivity entails masquerading as Santa Claus' assistant Zwarte Piet, a figure based on colonial portraits of Black servants.
29. Jones, 281.

him to accept the gift, and a woman looks with gratitude at the gesture. As Kowsoleea suggests,[30] the book depicted in this vignette could stand for either the Bible or the 'Book of Knowledge', hinting at the two moral justifications for the colonial enterprise, namely religion and modernity. I argue that this scene can be seen as encapsulating the image of the Dutch as 'gentle coloniser', that is, a discourse that frames colonialism as fundamentally based on benevolence and altruism. Nimako, Abdou and Willemsen[31] have noted how in the Dutch context ideological stances around colonialism were defined by benevolence since its inception. Dutch 'slave traders' in the seventeenth century prided themselves on treating the African captives more humanely, therefore claiming moral superiority over other settler colonial countries. At the end of the nineteenth century these discourses became more predominant and entered the administrative language with the so-called 'Ethical Policy', an "'enlightened' mode of colonial rule"[32] that was introduced in the Indonesian region. As also historian Gert Oostindie explains, at this time the rhetoric around the occupation of the Indonesian archipelago shifted from that of alliance to that of "an enormous modernization project to complete before [The Netherlands] could leave the East Indies".[33] The occupation of the area in this framework becomes an ethical duty, as reflected by a famous speech delivered in 1949 by cabinet member J.H. van Maarseveen, who looking back at that time stated "[t]he East Indies were our pride. We governed the Dutch East Indies in a way that provoked admiration everywhere […] [w]e had a job to do in Indonesia and we are ethically bound not to abandon this task[34]". This philanthropic argument is also reflected in the right side of the panel, where a white woman holds back an old man, a scene that would represent "the Protection Against Mistreatment and Arbitrary Acts (represented here by the old man), which the Netherlands allegedly brought to the East Indies".[35]

---

30. Kowsoleea, 2021.

31. Kwame Nimako, Amy Abdou and Glenn Willemsen, "Chattel Slavery and Racism: A Reflection on the Dutch Experience", in *Dutch Racism*, ed. Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving (Leiden: Brill: 2014).

32. Nimako and Willemsen, 39.

33. Quoted in Gert Oostindie, *Postcolonial Netherlands: Sixty-five Years of Forgetting, Commemorating, Silencing* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 2011), 136.

34. Ibid.

35. de Wildt et al., 31.

This self-proclaimed moral superiority and the narrative of the 'we were there to help' still permeate national debates, in particular around cultural heritage[36]. Wekker has famously identified the latter as being defining sentiments of Dutch identity, constituting what she has labeled as "white innocence". As Wekker puts it, "'[w]e are a small nation, innocent; we are inherently antiracist; moreover, we do not have bad intentions' is a shorthand to sum up this white sense of self'".[37] Wekker argues that innocence is at the heart of the image the country has carefully constructed of itself "as free, emancipated, tolerant, a beacon of civilization".[38] An image in which the Dutch were only reluctant colonisers, almost unwillingly going along an agenda set by other countries, and doing so with compassion[39]. Wekker has examined how this sense of self based around innocence unravels in discussions around public memory and tradition. An exemplary case of this is the character of Zwarte Piet which, similarly to the Golden Coach, has been at the centre of decades of campaigns. The claim that "Zwarte Piet is harmless and innocent"[40] is articulated through the figure of the innocent (white) child who 'does not see colour', but also by negating the racist connotation of such figure, meaning, its colonial origin. As professor Teun van Dijk's analysis of common arguments against the grievances of Afro-Dutch communities in this context has revealed, one of the most frequently used is "[h]istorical denial: Zwarte Piet was not a slave"[41]. The negation of slavery previously discussed, is therefore central to sustain the innocent and benevolent sense of self Wekker theorises. Ultimately, Zwarte Piet is not racist because "'[w]e do not mean it to be racist'".[42] We can see then how the narrative of the gentle coloniser has evolved through time providing justifications for current discriminatory practices. In the following section I show how the negation of slavery, fundamental to preserve moral superiority, is ultimately achieved through the negation of racism.

---

36. Markus Balkenhol and Wayne Modest, "Caring for Some and not Others: Museums and the Politics of Care in Post-Colonial Europe", in *European Memory in Populism: Representations of Self and Other,* ed. C. De Cesari & A. Kaya (Routledge: 2019).
37. Wekker, 166.
38. Wekker, 108.
39. Wekker, 161.
40. Wekker, 147.
41. Wekker, 158.
42. Wekker, 147.

The Notion of Race

Nimako and Willemsen explain that the organising principle at the core of colonialism and slavery is the concept of race. As they put it, slavery "became part of a social and cultural system that was taken for granted by those who dominated it. A fundamental social component of this system was racism".[43] I suggest that race is also that through which bodies in the panel "Tribute from the Colonies" are arranged. In the painting race acts as divider between the civilised and the uncivilised, the virtuous and enlightened from the flesh and bones. I maintain that such division is also reflected in the use of allegorical figures. It is only the white figures in the painting who are not meant as portrayals of actual people, but as allegorical representations of higher values and disciplines such as Education, Justice, Law and Order and so on.[44] In other words, whiteness in the panel acts as at once synonymous of these qualities, and as that which allows to transcend personhood and achieve knowledge and virtue. Conversely the people of colour do not stand in for anything else but themselves or stereotypes of themselves, anonymous and interchangeable.

Such seemingly natural distinctions conjured by race, according to Nimako and Willemsen continue to "fuel the patterns of inequality and institutional discrimination entrenched during slavery, and thus continue to prevent full emancipation for the descendants of the enslaved. Their effects are experienced in the world of citizenship, work, politics and education".[45] As Wekker argues, "[h]owever much it is disavowed and denied in a Dutch context, I take race to be a fundamental organizing grammar in Dutch society, as it is in societies structured by racial dominance".[46] Both Wekker and Jones maintain that race is

43. Nimako and Willemsen, 4.

44. de Wildt et al., ed. *The Golden Coach*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021. The publication identifies the figures in the panel "Tribute from the Colonies" as portraying "(from left to right):

1. The colonies of the West Indies (Suriname and the Dutch Antilles); 2. Development; 3. Civilization; 4. Coat of arms of Suriname; 5. The ('combative,' according to Van der Waay) Dutch Maiden; 6. Coat of arms of the House of Orange-Nassau; 7. Coat of arms of Batavia (capital of the Dutch East Indies); 8. The colony of the Dutch East Indies; 9. Javanese ruler with his retinue; 10. Instruction; 11. Protection Against Mistreatment and Arbitrary Acts; 12. The Navy and the Army; 13. Symbolic 'treasures and produce' from the colonies".

45. Nimako and Willemsen, 171.

46. Wekker, 23.

hidden in plain sight in national discourses around citizenship, informing ideas and politics around "the imagined Dutch community"[47]. Wekker explains that by shifting towards terms such as 'ethnicity', 'multiculturalism', and the autochthone/allochthone binary, "the work that race used to do, ordering reality on the basis of supposed biological difference (although the term was banished), is still being accomplished".[48] In this new vocabulary then "race is firmly present […] Within the category of autochtoon there are many […] whose ancestors came from elsewhere, but who manage, through a white appearance, to make a successful claim to Dutchness. Allochtonen are the ones who do not manage this, through their skin color or their deviant religion or culture"[49]. Similarly Jones points out that the idea of 'the real Dutch' implies specific physical features, and "Dutch citizens from the former colonies and their offspring, […] are still designated as 'people with foreign looks.' (Dutch: 'mensen met een buitenlands uiterlijk') That is, 'whiteness' still is represented as one of the essential conditions of 'real' Dutchness"[50].

By examining the panel through the three tropes identified above, I have attempted to show how what could be perceived as an accurate representation of a perhaps unjust yet concluded past, is not only a constructed interpretation of 'reality', but also one that keeps shaping Dutch public memory and identity. The story told by "Tribute from the Colonies", is re-told, normalised and presented as part of Dutch culture with each ride of the carriage in events that mark key moments in Dutch national identity. Every such ceremony can be understood as staging what Nimako, Abdou and Willmsen define the Dutch master narrative:

> A master narrative is a script we use when telling and retelling a story. It has an influence on the way we tell the story and it influences the way we think about that story. […] That is to say that the master narrative defines our terminology, the language we use when discussing the past […] the essence of the Dutch master narrative is that it would rather not address slavery; but that, if the issue of slavery has to be addressed, it is preferable that it is done without reference to real people. […] At the same time, the master narrative suggests that, when discussing slavery, "reason should prevail over emotion", that slavery cannot be viewed through the lens of our

47. Jones, "Biology, Culture, 'Postcolonial Citizenship' and the Dutch Nation, 1945–2007" in *Dutch Racism*, ed. Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving (Leiden: Brill: 2014), 315.

48. Wekker, 23.

49. Ibid.

50. Jones, 2014, 332.

> twenty-first century morality, and that slavery and the slave trade were initiated and perpetuated a long time ago.[51]

Nimako and Willemsen stresses that these dominant narratives are consolidated in the public realm through education, the media, government as well as museums and art institutions. These collective processes have all contributed to “the institutionalised practice of the social forgetting of slavery in the Netherlands. […] Social forgetting is achieved largely through the elimination of discussion of slavery from historical analysis; or through distortions, marginalization or trivialization of slavery and its importance for the growth of empire in the nation”[52]. I suggest that adopting a framework of implication would counter a master narrative that fuels social forgetting. Where social forgetting fosters erasure of wrongdoings and feeds sentiments of innocence, implication invites to confront the continued effects of systemic injustices and one’s individual role in them. Acknowledging to be still immersed in long-lived discourses, means reckoning with the fact that each one of us is differently implicated in the power imbalances that these have generated, notwithstanding our temporal separation from the original events. As stated by Biekman, who has campaigned at length against the use of the coach, “it is wrong to continue riding this Carriage which concerns crimes against humanity. Otherwise it is a *continuation* of the crime”[53].

The Golden Coach as Object of Implication

> It is through material objects, buildings and statues that we can begin to reckon with the material weight of colonialism.

—Sumaya Kassim, “Here to Make Trouble: Alice Procter’s *The Whole Picture: The Colonial Story of the Art in Our Museums and Why we Need to Talk About it*”

Similarly to what the scholars discussed above argue, social anthropology scholar Markus Balkenhol and Modest maintain that the social imaginary is made of complex relations between people, objects, institutions and discourses. “Within this social imaginary

---

51. Nimako, Abdou and Willmsen, 33-37.
52. Nimako and Willemsen, 172-173.
53. Barryl Biekman, “The Golden Carriage in the Context of Afrophobia”, 8 September 2014, YouTube video, 1:05:15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAHjLUf126E, (emphasis added).

colonial objects, like the colonial museum, form part of discussions about what role we give to the colonial past in shaping who we think we are as nation".[54] The way these objects are treated therefore at once reflects and reproduces ideas that define the nation and the lives of people within it. Balkenhol and Modest talk of "economies of care" around such objects, where care is distributed unevenly to benefit certain discourses (and communities) over others. As they explain drawing from Pierre Bourdieu, "objects have the power to implicitly condition human actors as they acquire a particular habitus. In other words, the way we furnish the material world is central to our socialization and to the normalization of possible social relations".[55]

Following such reflections, we can say that not only the Golden Coach and its use, but also the responses (or lack thereof) to the calls of communities of colour, form the social imaginary and come constitute the "cultural archive"[56] of the nation. The tone-deaf and dismissive positions assumed by government members and political actors in this context, reflect Wekker and Jones' argument that race informs ideas of the imagined Dutch community, and therefore who belongs and has their interests protected, and who has to adjust to 'how things are'. As also Ahmed has noted "[c]itizenship provides a technology for deciding whose happiness comes first"[57]. As touched upon above, Wekker has analysed in detail the negative sentiments triggered by the contestations against the tradition of Zwarte Piet. As Wekker argues, these reactions can be summed up through the stance "we are being questioned in our own home by ungrateful guests, whom we have received as gracious hosts. The guests have overstayed their welcome and are pointing out everything that is wrong with us".[58] The arguments analysed in the context of Zwarte Piet can be easily transposed to discussions around the Golden Coach. Decades of campaigning against the use of the carriage have been equally "met with dismissal and ridicule" or by "treating racist oppression as a feeling of hurt [which] avoids addressing it as a structural problem"[59]. Persevering to use the coach despite the calls of parts of society therefore establishes and reinforces a hierarchy between peoples. If, as discussed above, descendants of colonised peoples continue to be

---

54. Balkenhol and Modest, 183.
55. Ibid.
56. Wekker, 2016.
57. Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press: 2010), 133.
58. Wekker, 149-150.
59. Wekker, 145.

framed as not-yet citizens, the perspective assumed by the nation on the panel is one that poses the subject position of 'real Dutch' over the other.

I argue that views that consider the panel as mere historical artefact are not impartial positions, rather this perspective on the panel is only available to subjects that are not directly affected by the unfolding of the histories represented, and as such may fail to understand its images as the building block of present inequalities. In this sense, the Golden Coach can be seen as an object in which the intersection of past and present is negotiated. Its sight immediately positions the viewer along the spectrum of proximity to power that Rothberg refers to. We might be descendants of colonised peoples who see their distorted image paraded under the smiling faces of members of the royal family. Or we might have the luxury of not knowing or 'not understanding' its damaging symbolism and the debates around it. Either of these stances are enmeshed in the traces and wounds left by colonialism, and the ways these continue carrying through current daily life. In other words, the degree of detachment we are afforded towards these issues is proportional to our proximity to power. I therefore propose that we consider the Golden Coach as an object of implication, in that it inescapably marks our position with respect to the histories it summons. I argue that examining our relation towards colonial objects through the notion of object of implication, makes visible what the framework of implication developed by Rothberg theorises. Cultural heritage, as durable manifestation of past histories, materialises the 'invisible' web of power relations, apparatuses and norms through which injustices are reproduced. Considering our interaction with colonial objects in such a way, also makes abstract formulations such as diachronic implication —used by Rothberg to explain how temporalities intersect and protrude— more immediately understandable, as the colonial object physically embodies the present manifestation of those past temporalities. Engaging with the Golden Coach today in any capacity —be it as an activist, as a politician or merely as a viewer— necessarily re-evokes, re-positions and reproduces implications and complicities. I too, as a non-Dutch white researcher intervening in these matters, am automatically assuming a subject position towards the carriage and its panel, therefore taking part in the shaping of the narratives around it. In the next chapter I move away from the object to look more closely at the subject positions that this generates, and examine more concretely how implication manifests for the art workers involved in the making of the exhibition *The Golden Coach*.

3. The Well-Meaning Implicated Subject

Introduction

> We live enmeshed in structures, institutions and webs of ideas which are the product of history, formed by acts of imagination, courage, generosity, greed and brutality performed by previous generations. […] Though we may not be responsible for such acts of aggression in the sense of having caused them, we are 'implicated' in them, in the sense that *they* cause *us*.
>
> —Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us: Media, Memory, History*

I began this thesis by foregrounding the experience of researcher Kassim in co-curating the exhibition *The Past is Now: Birmingham and Empire* at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, a well-meaning project that however made evident the extent to which colonial legacies are embedded in the current make-up of institutions. And a case that exemplifies the contradictions characterising the art world attempts at tackling persisting ties with the colonial enterprise. Despite the critical intent of the initiative, Kassim recounts how ultimately this only further disguised the lack of long-term measures, all the while capitalising on the expertise of people of colour. In the last two chapters I have attempted to offer theoretical tools to make sense of the aporia posed by such complex issues. If, as Butler argues, positions of opposition to power always presuppose it, then efforts to counter colonial ideology by museums cannot be uncoupled from their ongoing implication with regimes of racial domination. In the same way, as we have seen, individual subjects cannot prescind from the power relations from which *they* have arisen and that continuously reproduce them. Whilst individual workers cannot be said to share the same degree of implication that the museum as institution occupies in relation to imperialism and colonialism, I am arguing that by acting on behalf of institutions, art workers inherit and potentially re-enact such complicities. As Kassim declares about how institutions are reproduced by people, "when we come into the room we often like to think of ourselves as individuals, but it's much more complicated than that".[1] Which is to say that by operating in the context of the institution our actions exceed the personal dimension.

---

1. Kassim, 2020.

As declared, here I am interested specifically in the role of those workers who, like Kassim's colleagues, occupy a position of solidarity towards issues of racial inequality. In this chapter I therefore set to further investigate and theorise the role of those defined by Rothberg as "'caring' but detached bystanders"[2] to histories of oppression. In what follows, I present findings of the qualitative research conducted with Amsterdam Museum workers, analysing them through the authors and frameworks discussed thus far. In particular, I look at how the notion of implication can help understand the subject position of art workers in relation to both the institutional apparatus of which the museum is part, and the debates surrounding the Golden Coach in broader society. By examining how the workers interviewed relay their motivation behind the choice to take part to this exhibition and reflect on their identity, I am able to look closely at the interplay between implication and benevolence. The interviews will show how the role occupied by workers is always already situated in power relations and cannot be considered in isolation from the colonial histories they engage with. I will therefore propose the figure of the *well-meaning implicated subject* as a way to account for the role of art workers wanting to 'do good' while not being directly touched by the issues they critique.

Self-Narrations of Intentionality

Between May and June 2021 I conducted in-depth interviews with four members of the team put together by the Amsterdam Museum to set up the exhibition *The Golden Coach*. For reasons detailed in the introduction to this thesis, the sample includes white workers occupying different job levels. In this section I am interested in examining how these workers convey what drove them to this line of work, as well as their involvement (both professional and personal) with the topics addressed in the exhibition. In this sense I do not aim at assessing the genuineness of their intentions, nor do I wish to establish to what degree they are committed to these causes, but rather I follow de Jong in her intent to "critically investigate *under which conditions* altruism[3] takes place"[4].

---

2. Rothberg, 33.

3. I am not necessarily arguing that white workers' engagement with issues of inequality is premised on altruism —de Jong's quote refers to women working in humanitarian NGOs. I do however consider the type of work I take into examination in this thesis as a form of solidarity.

4. de Jong, 2017, 59.

Although critical towards the panel "Tribute from the Colonies", the official stance of the Amsterdam Museum in respect to the use of the Golden Coach has been that of not taking sides in the debate, stressing how the role of the museum is merely that of opening up a discussion, and "[w]hen the exhibition concludes, at the beginning of 2022, the official owner of the Golden Coach will decide on the future of this heritage".[5] All workers interviewed, however, when replying in a personal capacity, took a more clear-cut position, sharing the opinion that the Golden Coach in its current form should no longer be used in public ceremonies, due to the discriminatory portrayal of communities from former colonies depicted on the left side panel. The participants also all expressed interest and/or engagement with debates around Dutch colonial history and issues of inequality in Dutch society, albeit to different degrees and approaching such debates from different perspectives. Some of the interviewees declared to have previously engaged with such topics in a professional capacity, others expressed more of a personal commitment. One interviewee when asked about their involvement with these issues replied, "I think I'm personally, sort of, invested in the topic and I read quite a lot about it, go to other exhibitions that address either colonial heritage or the colonial period, or slavery. And so it's also personal, sort of, interest and I think [inaudible] I even have, like, a duty to, sort of, find out about it".[6] Similarly, another interviewee stated that although they had not previously engaged with the history of the Golden Coach, they were familiar with the social debate around it, and that it was this aspect of the exhibition that interested them the most. As they state about taking up the role, "the way [the exhibition] was already framed at the beginning, sort of, relating to this broader discussion relating to the Dutch reckoning with its own colonial past, and how that works into the present, that, sort of, was something that was of interest to me and that made me, sort of, excited about it".[7] Conversely, another participant declared to have a large experience working with Dutch colonial history but less of a personal engagement:

> […] almost ten years I've been interested in this kind of topics and I do believe that there are more stories to tell […] I also believe that there's a disbalance in the kind of stories we tell, the heritage that we have, the way it is shared, so I really see it as that I, as a professional, can add something, that I can —nah, not make a difference— but that there's a mission to fulfil and that I can help with that. That's the way I look at it.

5. Schavemaker, 25
6. Interview with the author No. 3, from minute 06:12.
7. Interview No. 4, from minute 05:33.

> There's some urgency, I think these things should be done, better today than tomorrow, but I don't feel very emotionally connected. It's not my ancestors, you know.[8]

With respect to the desired outcome of the exhibition, the interviewees seemed to be aligned with the stance of the museum that the initiative should serve as a tool for reflection and generate dialogue between people holding different opinions, rather than necessarily as a process that leads to the coach no longer being used. One interviewee expressed that for them a good result would be that people going to the exhibition not holding a radical stance or without a formed opinion, leave with "a shred of understanding"[9] on these matters. Another participant stated,

> I think the couch really is a symbol of so many bigger questions and in that sense I'm grateful that it exists because I hope that it really allows people to, sort of, see other issues in different light too, because of the panel and because of how it is made and depicted… that if you realise that that is racism and that is, sort of… that's not ok, that might also lead you to realise that other things in our current society are also not ok and should be addressed.[10]

We can see then in the workers' statements presented above, that they understand themselves on the one hand as being knowledgeable about different aspects surrounding the Golden Coach as colonial object —be it social debates, colonial history, colonial heritage or decolonial theory— and, on the other, as being moved by the desire to contribute meaningfully to such discussions. Albeit in different ways, these stances all repose on a degree of benevolence. To the point that some even expressed a sense of responsibility towards promoting dialogue around these issues and helping advance the stances of under-represented voices within the Dutch public debate.

Self-Understandings of Identity

Where I found that participants' views differed the most amongst each other was in the self-understanding of their positioning in respect to the topics addressed, and the role their identity plays when approaching them. When asked about this, all interviewees framed their

---

8. Interview No. 1, from minute 10:09.
9. Interview No. 2, from minute 47:08.
10. Interview No. 3, from minute 09:38.

position in terms of ‘distance’, however the term comes to assume quite different meanings within their testimonies. I have detected three main connotations that the notion seems to acquire in the statements of the interviewees, and that, I argue, afford different degrees of self-reflection and criticality: *distance as unawareness*, *distance as comfort*, and *distance as neutrality*. In what follows, I go through what I identify as manifestations of these declinations of the notion of distance, and I show how these have different repercussions on the understanding of one’s role in the histories summoned by the Golden Coach.

Distance as unawareness

One participant recounted how, although they are well versed in the Dutch history of the time, they were not familiar with the particular subject of the Golden Coach panel “Tribute from the Colonies”. As they state,

> well for me personally, I think, starting to do this research, for instance on the nineteenth century and on the coach itself, on, you know, all the different elements of the coach, I was also pretty… I wasn't aware of it. I mean, I knew it, and I knew where it came from and who built it and… but I really didn't have a very good, *thorough* look at it, so to say… Or what these types of panels meant. So for me it was also a learning curve of how do you… what is really represented on that panel and how it is done[11].

When asked why they thought that was the case, the interviewee answered that “in general it has to do with education or whether or not it's a topic on the news, you see it on the media. If it's not addressed then you don't know it, so to say. Or if you're not really directly involved, so to say, then you don't come across it”.[12] Similarly, another interviewee stated referring to colonial history, “I didn't really think about it that much, even when I was studying history at the university for six years. I had different interests and different… the people around me, all my… all my professors, they were also not so much interested in this kind…these types of history”.[13]

In these quotes, we see how distance takes up the meaning of lack of knowledge. One interviewee pinpoints not being “directly involved” as something that shaped their relation to

11. Interview No. 2, from minute 50:33.
12. Interview No. 2, from minute 59:38.
13. Interview No. 1, from minute 04:57.

the panel and afforded them to reside in a space of ‘not knowing’. As I have argued in the previous chapter, colonial objects such as the Golden Coach materialise the intersection of past and present injustices, while demanding responsibility towards the future. This testimony then shows how the encounter of different temporalities embodied by colonial objects also works to ‘activate’ and mark our condition of implication. While I do not equate ‘not being interested’ in histories of racial oppression with proof of occupying a dominant position, I align with Rothberg in maintaining that being unaware is not a condition that resides outside of the realm of implication, but is in itself a manifestation of implication. Wekker makes a similar argument when, following philosopher Charles W. Mills, she posits her notion of white innocence as premised on a form of wilful ignorance. Innocence “contains not-knowing, but also not wanting to know”.[14] As formulated by Mills, white ignorance is a lack of knowledge that presents itself as knowledge, that is, it “generates specific types of delusions or wrong ways of perceiving the world that are socially validated by the dominant norms”[15]. In this sense, this form of active not-knowing is not a matter of individual cognitive flaws, but rather “a product of an *epistemology* of ignorance”[16] which produces “the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made”.[17] The excerpts above seem to show in fact how such unawareness originates in and is maintained through broader narratives and apparatuses such as education, media, public opinion and surrounding communities.

Distance as comfort

When asked what role their identity played in approaching the topic, one worker stated “I do think for sure that I was able to have a, sort of, distance to the object because, like, the panel doesn't display white people as inferior in the way it does Black people and people of colour. And though I definitely feel emotional response to the panel, I think it's, it’s, like… I cannot avoid confronting that it won't affect me as much as some others”.[18] The

---

14. Wekker, 17.

15. Applebaum, “White Ignorance and Denials of Complicity: On the Possibility of Doing Philosophy in Good Faith”, in *The Center Must Not Hold: White Women Philosophers on the Whiteness of Philosophy*, ed. George Yancy (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books: 2010), chap. 1.

16. Ibid.

17. Mills quoted in Applebaum, 2010, chap. 1.

18. Interview No. 4, from minute 50:33.

participant went on to stress how this distance is something that, while must be acknowledged, can also be put to use in that it affords a degree of protection against emotional and physical harm.

> [T]hat's where I placed myself and my own identity within, like, the work to be done […] for example, like, some of the conversations that we now need to have with the mobile installation[19] where we need to just talk to random people on the street about their opinions on the coach, I think that is much less confrontational for me because many of, just, general white Dutch people will be willing to have a conversation […] and not attack me for it basically. I think there's work to be done in, like, the conversations I can have with these people to, maybe, make them think about this topic and their, sort of, role in it. So, yeah, just sort of using, I guess, my own whiteness to hopefully have some of the difficult conversations. […] I guess in a way I see it as a responsibility to do, yeah, to have those conversations as well, in the same way that having conversations with my own family members is part of my responsibility in trying to address these issues.[20]

These reflections on their identity, arguably brought this interviewee to also consider the repercussions that the different subject positions in relation to the Golden Coach, might have had in the working environment. As they reflect later on in the interview,

> I do think more could have been done to address the issues that follow from not just having the people present, but also having the sort of safe environment for it. I think maybe in some conversations… I don't know how it would have been done, but I don't think there was enough acknowledgement of, maybe, for example what I was saying of, of just the comfort of white people in facing the coach and the panels. I don't think we really talked about that sort of base level comfort or base level distance that there was, and that maybe some topics would be way more confrontational for some other people on the team […] so that, I think, requires more work to really, yeah, reflect on that. We're not just having conversations and we have different people there, and the problem is solved.[21]

The above quote reveals a deep reckoning with one's own role in power imbalances. The line of thought traceable in this statement —although prompted by the interview questions— shows how acknowledging our own implication can ignite reflection and vigilance towards potentially harmful practices that surround us, and in which we may or

19. As part of the exhibition, a mobile installation will travel through the country to have conversations with local people about the Golden Coach.

20. Interview No. 4, from minute 50:33.

21. Interview No. 4, from minute 56:30.

may not take part. While also beginning to delineate modes of taking action that repose on this reckoning.

Distance as neutrality

One participant, when asked to elaborate on their sentence “it's not my ancestors, you know” and how they understood their subject position in relation to these histories, replied:[22]

> Interviewee: It's partly what I discussed already, I see myself as a professional.
>
> Author: I’ll reformulate the question. So, do you think your identity conditions the way that you approach these topics?
>
> Interviewee: No, I know what you mean but for me, I can't really… when I go to sit behind my computer and I try to work on this topic I can't see it apart from my trying to be a professional. I mean, I've been drilled for fifteen years, longer, as historian and it's part of me so, it's really… my identity *is* trying to look at all sides, and these kinds of things, so that's how I do it, and makes it also a bit distancing, […] it makes it hard for me to actually *feel* the pain of other people. I know it and I'm aware of this, and because I am aware of this I know that we have to ask people in this project who do have an emotional attachment to these kinds of topics so that we can integrate it. And for instance part of this project, I think it's thirteen, artists and a lot of them do have, like, a migration background and sometimes from the Caribbean, so a lot of those artists actually *feel* something at an emotional level when talking about the Golden Coach and I think it's my job to connect them with an audience. Because what I see happening, all these people are sometimes so much talking from their emotion, and rightfully so but, that doesn't really necessarily create good text, readable text. It's quite… when you're angry at something it's not the easiest way to communicate what you actually think, how you are actually feeling. You have to step out of that emotion a bit. I see that's my task, that's what I try to do. That's also my role in this project, everything passes through me and I try to look at it from ‘ok, I understand what your point of view is and how can we help this broad audience that we're going to have here in this exhibition’, also a lot of people, elder people who are not so aware of these discussions, who don't know anything about, like, what's actually painted on the Golden Coach. […] so it's my task to actually bring those worlds together and that's what I'm doing, so it's not really my identity that's playing a role there.

Although the interviewee, when asked whether they thought that being a good historian would also involve being neutral and not ‘taking sides’, decisively replied “I wouldn’t argue that because I don't believe neutrality exists”,[23] I argue that the above excerpt

22. Interview No. 1, from minute 17:50.
23. Interview No. 1, from minute 16:10.

contradicts that. The notion of distance that emerges here in fact equates 'not being directly affected' with not being affected at all, and therefore being untouched by the power dynamics generated by colonial regimes altogether. In the final sentence, "it's not really my identity that's playing a role there", the underlying claim would appear to be that being white in the context of giving a platform to those who are oppressed by the legacies of colonialism, affords to reside outside of them. The statement also seems to suggest that whiteness would have nothing to do with one's professional role, or that not bringing one's own identity into the job is a skill that can be acquired through learning and practice. Distance here becomes also synonym of rationality. Where people of colour, because of their proximity to the topic, speak from their emotion, 'the professional' engages with the topic through logic and skill. This view could lead to the conclusion that 'professional', as framed here, really stands for 'white professional'. As, one could deduce, professionals of colour seem not to be able to act according to what is defined as professional behaviour here —i.e. stepping out of emotion, therefore needing guidance.

I argue that the above statements sit in dangerous proximity to discourses that have characterised Western knowledge production, and in particular desires to study colonial subjects. Many disciplines have contested the myth of the (male) detached and objective observer central to Western anthropology, and how this is directly linked to the invention of notions of whiteness and otherness predicated on the binaries of reason/emotion or knowledge/experience. For example, such views have been at the heart of long-lived characterisations of Blackness as associated with being irrational and overly emotional[24]. In Chapter 1, I have discussed how Spivak[25] addresses precisely the risk of reproducing positivist tendencies for radical Western intellectuals wanting to 'give voice' to subaltern subjects. According to Spivak, in such endeavour the positioning of the intellectual in respect to the geo-political relations causing the oppression of the subjects represented, is omitted, hence reproducing the artifice of neutrality. As Spivak denounces, "the first-world intellectual masquerad[es] as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves"[26]. In this way, albeit aiming at making subjugated knowledge heard, the intellectuals critiqued by Spivak are oblivious to the ways in which they rise to the role of "the one[s] who

24. Wekker, 150.
25. Spivak, 1988.
26. Spivak, 292.

diagnos[e] the episteme",[27] therefore reconstituting a hierarchy between them and those who they stand in solidarity with.

Kassim has recounted how these very issues materialised in her experience co-curating the afore-mentioned exhibition *The Past is Now: Birmingham and Empire*. As she remarks, although the team of women of colour co-curating the exhibition, brought in their professional expertise as curators, researchers, writers, designers and so on, they were not treated as such. Rather, it was their personal experience and emotional connection to the topics addressed, to be foregrounded.[28] While I am not arguing that this also took place within the Amsterdam Museum team, this example shows how implicated subjects in critical contexts are not immune to the influence of dominant narratives, and that these may indeed bear consequences on the power relations amongst workers. I also do not wish to place on the same plane the views expressed by the interviewee and overtly discriminatory stances. On the contrary, I maintain that the above testimony demonstrates the necessity for a distinction premised on intentionality. It is because the intentions behind the participant's views differ from willingly harmful ones, that further engagement with how such tropes circulate in progressive environments, is needed.

I argue that the interviews discussed in this chapter reveal how slipping into potentially damaging views reposes on a lack of reckoning with one's own condition of implication. It is because one is unable of situating one's own ideas in a broader network of power relations, that one does not see them as reproductions of such framework. Here the interviewee, by removing themselves altogether from power dynamics, albeit being highly knowledgeable and motivated by good intentions, fails to recognise their statements as echoes of long-standing tropes. Although the stance I have labeled as *distance as comfort*, is also premised on the lack of emotional responsiveness, I argue that in that case distance is not framed as that which affords rationality. Nor is it understood as absence of emotion and therefore heightened objectivity, but rather seems to be framed as *different* emotion ("I definitely feel emotional response to the panel [but] I cannot avoid confronting that it won't affect me as much as some others"). An emotion that might also lead to feel empathy for family members, or other white people holding different ideas from one's own. In the same way, in that statement, whiteness is not posited as an unmarked stance but, on the contrary, it

27. Spivak, 275.
28. Kassim, 2020.

is precisely because whiteness' central role in these histories that the participant considers proximity to it as affording to inhabit a safer space and perform a more persuasive role.

Well-Meaning Implicated Workers

In this chapter I have shown how the role of the Amsterdam Museum workers interviewed is characterised by both implication and benevolence. Building on Rothberg's notion of the implicated subject, I propose to understand the subject positions identified above through the figure of the well-meaning implicated subject. I argue that such framing affords to take into account the role played by good intentions in potential slippages into complicity, and consequently allows for more nuanced analysis of individuals situated in environments characterised by criticality. To say that art workers engaging with social issues from a position of privilege should be considered as well-meaning implicated subjects, means keeping in sight both the potentialities and the risks of this valuable position. In the self-narrations explored above, we can detect different degrees of awareness and self-criticality in respect to one's own implication. The three categories identified to analyse the participants' accounts can be understood as affording distinct types of reflection. While the stances that I have called *distance as unawareness* and *distance as comfort* can function as 'bridge positions' towards further reckoning, the stances I have assigned to the category of *distance as neutrality*, while seemingly acknowledging one's own positionality, actually potentially deny it, hence foreclosing further reflection. I argue that the knowledge and benevolence that characterise well-meaning implicated subjects can be 'unlocked' through deeper awareness, and put in the service of preventing further harm to take place. In absence of such reflections however, these can still potentially contribute to existing damaging practices, regardless of intentionality. In the following part of the thesis, I investigate the ways in which well-meaning implicated subjects can have a positive impact in contexts of systemic oppression.

Part II

4. Debates on Agency

Introduction

In Part I of this thesis I have introduced the complementary notions of complicity and implication to argue that art workers involved in socially engaged projects should be considered as well-meaning implicated subjects, who may or may not be complicit with the injustices they aim to oppose. This thesis builds on this acknowledgement to make sense of the forms of political agency that subjects occupying such position can exercise. In this part, I therefore shift my focus towards agency. My aim in this chapter is not to resolve long-standing debates and provide a definitive theory of agency, but merely that of situating my reasoning in such a highly contested territory. In doing so, I will define the forms of agency that I will be considering going forward to examine how art workers understand and exercise their power in their day-to-day working life.

As we have seen, the formulations of subject formation presented thus far seem to face us with a deadlock whereby, one inevitably becomes what Rothberg describes as an indirect agent[1], that is, one who reproduces the conditions of possibility of systemic injustices. In what follows, I engage with how Butler and Spivak resolve the impasse of subjection, and introduce the work of anthropology scholar Saba Mahmood, to show how dualistic conceptualisations of autonomy and submission taint our understanding of agency. Together with these authors I do not advocate for inaction in the face of the immensely complex issues explored in this study, but argue for a formulation of agency rooted at once in complicity and scrutiny. I begin by analysing Butler's framing of agency through the work of Applebaum. I have already introduced Applebaum's uses of Butler's work in the context of critical whiteness studies. Applebaum engages with agency in the context of her notion of white complicity. While I do not intend to overlap white complicity with the broader understanding of complicity that I am studying here, her framework proves useful as it dovetails with the context of racial oppression I address in my research. Mahmood on the other hand offers a more critical account of Butler's argument. By decentering what she identifies as an inherently Western centric foundation to notions of sovereignty and freedom, she breaks open normative notions of agency, locating it in actions (and subjects) that do not necessarily stand in opposition to power. I will show how, while in the scope of this research

1. Rothberg, 2019.

I do understand political agency as fundamentally opposed to structures of racial oppression, Mahmood's critiques are key to remain critical and vigilant to what is made transparent in theorising resistance to power. I conclude by examining the work of Spivak analysed through post-colonial scholar Ilan Kapoor and de Jong. De Jong's insights on Spivak's notion of constructive complicity are helpful to identify Spivak's implicit treatment of agency and understand her intervention as an invitation to act reflectively rather than falling into paralysis.

A significant and potentially enabling reversal[2]

As previously discussed, subjection for Butler (and Foucault) consists of both being subjected and coming into being. That is to say that in the process of subject formation power is both exercised *over* and *by* the subject. Butler's conceptualisation of agency resides precisely in this paradox, as she puts it, "one inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power".[3] Hence the ability to wield power is directly dependent on one's state of submission. Butler refers to the binding relation between subject and discourse as a "fundamental dependency" that "initiates and sustains our agency".[4] However, as we have seen, such dependency is mutual, as power in turn relies on the subject to come into being; only by being reiterated does power exist. As Butler notes, such formulation would seem to create a vicious circle in which "[a]ny effort to oppose that subordination will necessarily presuppose and reinvoke it".[5] Her interest lies precisely in unravelling this apparent contradiction, as Applebaum notes in fact, "[u]nderstanding agency under complicity forms the crux of Judith Butler's work".[6]

"How can it be", Butler asks, "that the subject, taken to be the condition for and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the deprivation of agency? If subordination is the condition of possibility for agency, how might agency be thought in opposition to the forces of subordination?"[7] While this seems to constitute an impasse, Butler finds in this ambivalence the source for "a radically conditioned

2. Butler, 12.
3. Butler, 83.
4. Butler, 2.
5. Butler, 12.
6. Applebaum, 2010, chap. 3.
7. Butler, 10.

form of agency"[8] of which the subject becomes the main site. The key distinction here is between *presupposing* and *reinstating* subordination. According to Butler in fact, there is a discontinuity between the power exerted on the subject and the power assumed by the subject. As she explains, "[t]he power that initiates the subject fails to remain continuous with the power that is the subject's agency. A significant and potentially enabling reversal occurs when power shifts from its status as a condition of agency to the subject's 'own' agency".[9] That is, the moment of reenactment of norms, not only reproduces the subject's conditions of subordination but, crucially, lays said norms open to failure. It is in this instance and in the vulnerability of power that agency arises, as it opens up the possibility for power to be "'re'- articulated in the sense of already done and 're'-articulated in the sense of done over, done again, done anew"[10]. Therefore saying that agency presupposes the conditions of its own subordination does not necessarily equate to saying that it reinstates such subordination. Acknowledging the ambivalence at the heart of agency means understanding that, while this "remains tied to those conditions", it "may at once retain and resist that subordination".[11]

As Applebaum explains, the fact that Butler rejects the idea of a pre-discursive self, entails that also agency sits inside power relations. This is consistent with Foucault's formulation which posits that "resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power"[12]. So complicity does not preclude the possibility for agency and, in fact, for Butler agency should not attempt to avoid complicity. Butler's theory of agency calls for a rethinking of political subjectivities "especially for those who believe that complicity and ambivalence could be rooted out once and for all".[13] As she explains, "[t]hat agency is implicated in subordination is not the sign of a fatal self-contradiction at the core of the subject [...] But neither does it restore a pristine notion of the subject, derived from some classical liberal-humanist formulation, whose agency is always and only opposed to power".[14]

---

8. Butler, 14-15.
9. Butler, 12.
10. Butler, 18.
11. Butler, 13.
12. Foucault quoted in Applebaum, 2010, chap. 3.
13. Butler, 17.
14. Ibid.

Crucially, intention and choice are not relevant to Butler's argument, as they would imply the existence of a sovereign agent untouched by discursive sedimentations. As Applebaum observes, Butler moves away from humanist conceptions of agency that repose on free will, outlining an understanding of agency that presupposes responsibility and "acknowledges the way in which the subject is constituted in language, [and] what it creates is also what it derives from elsewhere"[15]. The fact that the subject is partially controlled by power but also partially in control of power, means that said subject is able to exceed the conditions of its emergence but critically, Butler reminds us, "*[e]xceeding is not escaping*"[16]. Hence the loss of a wilful subject does not result in the loss of agency, but this agency remains intrinsically tied to discourse.

This point is fundamental when dealing with the agency of implicated subjects. As previously discussed, implication cannot be escaped or refuted through will. In the same way, while we may choose not to be complicit, complicity transcends both intentionality and awareness: Because complicity reposes on the inescapable condition of implication, we can be complicit even when we do not intend to. Applebaum's thinking about agency is particularly salient here, as she is interested in its declinations in the context of white complicity, a condition inherently attached to and inevitably reiterated by white subjects. For Applebaum therefore, "[o]ne of Butler's insights is that *a performance can enact something other than what the subject intends it to do*"[17]. Great part of Butler's work on agency is preoccupied with language as element of reenactment of norms. Although I won't delve here with Butler's treatment of speech within her formulation, what is relevant for my argument is how she draws from Jacques Derrida to posit the possibility for subversion as not being "attributed *to words themselves* or *to the intentions of the speaker*, but rather *to the historicity upon which speech is authorized and its future effects of which the speaker has no control*"[18]. This notion of historicity can serve to further explain the gap between exceeding and escaping introduced above. Historicity as a framework in which actions are performed, also resonates with Rothberg's implication as network of power relations within which forms of collective and indirect agency arise. Such an understanding works to decenter power both from the hands of individual subjects, and temporally from one moment in time, locating it

15. Butler quoted in Applebaum, chap. 3.
16. Butler, 17, (emphasis added).
17. Applebaum, chap. 3, (emphasis added).
18. Applebaum, chap. 3.

instead in “a condensed historicity ‘that exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance’”[19]. The implicated subject in fact, is not a direct agent of harm but her actions can be thought of precisely as “an effect of prior and future invocations”. Applebaum aptly concludes that “what Butler’s theory of subject formation and agency provide the critical whiteness scholar is the caution that even when white people act against the norm of whiteness, one does not become innocent and removed from power matrices because privilege is reproduced regardless of intent. Even when whiteness is disavowed, whiteness is reiterated”.[20]

As Applebaum points out, Butler’s account of agency and/or resistance seems to be aimed primarily at oppressed subjects, as she does not take into examination the role of those who benefit from hegemonic norms in subverting them. Nonetheless I agree with Applebaum that such formulation proves useful when transferred onto dominant subjects. As she puts it, “the types of ethical and critical concerns underlying Butler’s work can help to illuminate the type of vigilance that is required for agency under complicity”.[21] By eliminating the pretension of stepping out of systems of power, we are forced to acknowledge that, “[a]s we cannot escape our social location, we must *continually interrogate* our political practices for exclusions and omissions *even when, and especially when, we think we are doing good*”[22].

Agency as Ethical Self-Formation

It is important to note that Butler’s work has received numerous critiques.[23] For reasons of space here I only engage with one, however it has to be stressed that post-structuralism has been critiqued for reposing on a notion of human that is racially unmarked, hence failing to account for how racialisation intervenes in the way subjects are shaped by power.[24] These critiques are vital, not only because they reveal how claims of universality

19. Derrida in Applebaum, chap. 3.
20. Applebaum, chap. 3.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. See Applebaum (2010) for detailed counterarguments to Butler’s formulations of subject formation and agency. See Margaret Homans, “‘Women of Color’ Writers and Feminist Theory Author(s)”, *New Literary History* 25, no. 1 (1994): 73-94, for critiques to Butler’s treatment of the work of Black and Brown feminists.
24. Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, (Durham: Duke University Press: 2019); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, (Durham: Duke University Press: 2014). Amongst others,

seep through even attempts to theorise against them, but most importantly because such negligence inserts itself in histories of invisibilisation of the experiences of peoples of colour, as well as contributing to the segregation of their works from what counts as knowledge on the category of human. In approaching Butler's work then, I follow Applebaum's suggestion to use it "as *a cautionary tool"*[25] that "can help bring to light the ways in which complicity conceals its own working through discursive practices that naturalize its effects[26]". Within this research I therefore use Butler's insights on subject formation and agency as stepping stones and points of dialogue with other authors, attempting to remain mindful of its shortcomings. To this end, in what follows I focus on a critical account of Butler's work which, I find, operates a necessary shift of perspective in that it calls into question the universality of notions of agency intended as synonym for resistance.

Mahmood has importantly critiqued feminist stances vis-à-vis women's participation in practices of Islam. Mahmood was interested in exposing how feminists were applying Western notions of empowerment to assess the lives of women from different cultural and geographical contexts. As Mahmood explains, the preoccupation of the feminist movement from the 1970's onwards shifted towards agency under structures of subordination. However Mahmood has urged to "examine the assumptions and elisions that attend this focus on agency"[27], especially when this is applied to study the lives of women participating in patriarchal religious traditions such as Islam. At the core of Mahmood's argument is the claim that the Western feminist project has been founded on an understanding of empowerment premised on the liberal notion of positive freedom. Such views establish a direct correlation between individual autonomy and self-realisation and posit freedom as attainable only via the fulfilment of the 'true will' of the subject, intended as existing outside of "custom, tradition, or social coercion"[28]. According to Mahmood, "these liberal presuppositions have become naturalized in the scholarship on gender"[29], causing it to

---

philosopher Achille Mbembe and Black studies scholar Alexander G. Weheliye have urgently addressed the eurocentrism of Foucault's oeuvre —upon which Butler's work is premised. In particular, Mbembe has brought attention to the absence of slavery as central process to the development of modern governmental techniques theorised by Foucault.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press: 2004), 7.

28. Mahmood, 11.

29. Mahmood, 13.

"elid[e] dimensions of human action whose ethical and political status does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance".[30]

Although, as we have seen, post-structuralist accounts critique precisely humanist understandings of agency, Mahmood maintains that they nonetheless locate agency in the realm of resistance to power, hence relying on and reproducing a "binary model of subordination and subversion".[31] Post-structuralist accounts, and Butler's work in particular, are central to Mahmood's own project, however she moves away from them to propose a more fluid notion of agency understood as "a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create"[32]. Mahmood argues that while Butler opposes an emancipatory model of agency, she contradicts or fails to fully develop her premise that "norms are not simply a social imposition on the subject but constitute the very substance of her intimate, valorized interiority",[33] along with the effects of discourse on desire that this would bring. Agency for Butler ultimately equates to the ability to act against, and as such, Mahmood argues, "her analysis of the power of norms remains grounded in an agonistic framework, one in which norms suppress and/or are subverted, are reiterated and/or resignified —so that one gets little sense of the work norms perform beyond this register of suppression and subversion within the constitution of the subject. Norms are not only consolidated and/or subverted", Mahmood suggests, "but performed, inhabited, and experienced in a variety of ways".[34]

In sum, Butler's arguments, much like more traditional accounts of agency, presume a specific idea of freedom to be a universal aspiration, against which the degree of empowerment is measured. According to Mahmood, using a post-structuralist framework should instead lead us to "recognize that the desire for freedom from, or subversion of, norms is not an innate desire that motivates all beings at all times, but is also profoundly mediated by cultural and historical conditions" and, in the same way, "the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific (both in terms of what constitutes 'change' and the means by which it is effected)".[35] Agentival capacity then

---

30. Mahmood, 14.
31. Ibid.
32. Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival", *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 33-34.
33. Mahmood, 2001, 48.
34. Mahmood, 2004, 22.
35. Mahmood, 2004, 14.

exceeds a model of doing and undoing, and what counts as agency cannot be established a priori, but emerges from the specificities of a context. Mahmood therefore concludes that "to the extent that feminist scholarship emphasizes this politically subversive form of agency, it has ignored other modalities of agency whose meaning and effect are not captured within the logic of subversion and resignification of hegemonic terms of discourse".[36] As she explains, such modalities of agency can only be accounted for by decoupling agency and resistance from the agenda of progressive politics, which steers feminist analysis of power. Because feminism poses itself "as both an *analytical* and a *politically prescriptive* project"[37], it becomes susceptible to a teleology that narrows the scope of what counts as empowerment. "[T]o analyze people's actions in terms of realized or frustrated attempts at social transformation is necessarily to reduce the heterogeneity of life to the rather flat narrative of succumbing to or resisting relations of domination".[38]

Drawing from Foucault's late work on ethics, Mahmood advocates for an understanding of *agency as ethical self-formation*. In his late work, Foucault moves from a focus on agency as minimal freedom under disciplinary power, to a conceptualisation based around a series of self-techniques aimed at developing ethical ways of being[39]. As Mahmood explains, practices of ethical self-formations entail "the careful scrutiny one applies to one's daily actions in order to shape oneself to live in accordance with a particular model of behavior"[40]. For Foucault, the purpose of such transformative practices would be that of establishing relationships that involve "as little domination as possible"[41]. Mahmood stresses that this framework does away with prescribed sets of universal values and moral codes, in favour of an understanding of ethics as an historically and socially specific modality of power[42]. In Mahmood's words, "[i]nstead of limiting agency to those acts that disrupt existing power relations, Foucault's work encourages us to think of agency: (a) in terms of the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions; and (b) as

---

36. Mahmood, 2004, 40.
37. Mahmood, 2004, 10.
38. Mahmood, 2004, 174.
39. Karen Vintges, "Muslim Women in the Western Media: Foucault, Agency, Governmentality and Ethics", *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19, no. 3 (2012): 283-298.
40. Mahmood, 2004, 187.
41. Foucault quoted in Vintges, 5.
42. Mahmood, 2004, 28.

ineluctably bound up with the historically and culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed".[43] Such a framework is not aimed at assessing compliance to moral norms, but rather opens up what counts as agency, allowing to consider the "many different ways of forming a relationship with a moral code, each of which establishes a particular relationship between capacities of the self (will, reason, desire, action, and so on) and a particular norm".[44] I suggest that Mahmood's intervention proves especially useful to think of agency in a context of implication, as both frameworks repose on the rejection of fixed and universal subject positions and emphasise the contingent nature of power. Mahmood's articulation of agency constitutes an important reminder to remain vigilant about the risks of naturalising ideas of self-determination and resistance, concepts that remain central to projects such as Rothberg's and mine.

Our complicity, which we must acknowledge in order to act[45]

In concluding, let us turn to Spivak's work. While her engagement with complicity cannot be said to constitute a theory of agency, it nonetheless provides us with indications as to what constitutes agency in the face of complicity within the context of colonialism. The treatment of agency in Spivak's work seems to be in line with post-structuralist accounts that establish power as all-encompassing and yet unstable, and agency as necessarily enmeshed with subordination. As Kapoor declares speaking of Spivak's work, "agency is emergent only from within the master discourse, a situation that Spivak describes as saying an 'impossible "no" to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately'. It also means that the agent cannot harken back to pre-colonial, pre-orientalist discourse in search of an 'authentic' identity".[46] Kapoor explains that for Spivak agency is not precluded in these contexts and it arises from the hybridity of discourse within colonial regimes, which causes it to be susceptible to interference. Importantly, Kapoor notes that while Spivak's preoccupation in analysing "everyday coloniser–colonised encounters" resides in subaltern subjection, she also urges to take into account "the other side", namely "colonial agents, who 'are not only great

43. Mahmood, 2004, 29.
44. Ibid.
45. Spivak, *A critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press: 1999), 370.
46. Ilan Kapoor, "Capitalism, Culture, Agency: Dependency Versus Postcolonial Theory", *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2002): 652.

names ... but also small unimportant folk ... as well as policymakers'".[47] And as we have seen in the previous chapter, Spivak's interest is also directed at the role of intellectuals. In what follows I focus on how Spivak resolves the conundrum of the radical intellectual sympathetic with the subaltern cause, as this figure appears especially akin to the socially engaged art worker I take into examination.

In her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak makes clear that she does not advocate for Western intellectuals to refrain from writing about subalterns. As she in fact declares "the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation".[48] Hence it can be discerned that, similarly to the other authors discussed, Spivak does not argue for a pure form of agency that steers clear from complicity. On the contrary, Spivak crucially declares "I keep hoping that some readers may then discover a constructive rather than a disabling complicity"[49]. De Jong departs from this statement in her attempt "to find ways to operate productively and responsibly within unequal power structures".[50] In her essay "Constructive Complicity Enacted? The Reflections of Women NGO and IGO Workers on their Practices", she expands this notion of constructive complicity by coupling it with the feminist tool of reflexivity. De Jong aims at looking at how these theoretical notions translate into practice within the context of development organisations, and whether being 'in the belly of the beast' allows for vigilant and meaningful action.

As discussed previously in regard to her book *Complicit Sisters: Gender and Women's Issues across North-South Divides*, de Jong explains how these humanitarian organisations are the product of the unequal power structures that they aim to tackle, therefore also acting to preserve interests beyond the immediate benefit of the populations that they support. Consequently she asks, "[i]s it really possible, to guide against complacency in [one's] work and be vigilant for cooptation, this other danger of an acknowledgment of complicity? Kapoor, in his reading of Spivak replies in the affirmative […]: 'It is possible to work within the belly of the beast and still engage in a persistent critique of hegemonic representations'".[51] The two main obstacles identified by de Jong in the face of an

47. Kapoor, 656.
48. Spivak, 1999, 272.
49. Spivak, 1999, 3-4.
50. de Jong, "Constructive Complicity Enacted? The Reflections of Women NGO and IGO Workers on their Practices", *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 30, no. 4 (2009): 388.
51. de Jong, 2009, 398.

acknowledgement of complicity are in fact paralysis and cooptation, which Spivak's statement of a constructive rather than disabling complicity would seem to neutralise. According to de Jong, Spivak would not suggest to avoid working for such organisations, despite the possibility that these are structured in a way that would not allow for the persistent critique required for complicity to be constructive. To this Spivak would respond: "let us become vigilant about our own practice and use it as much as we can rather than make the totally counter-productive gesture of repudiating it"[52].

Spivak's invocation of vigilance frames her acknowledgement of complicity as a practice of responsibility, an acknowledgement however that can never be complete.[53] In fact, Spivak's emphasis is on the necessity of sustaining the uncertainty and open-endedness of such a process, which should not result in mere prescription nor moral complacency. As de Jong observes, relevantly, the word 'complicity' in Dutch "is composed of 'with' and 'duty'/ 'responsibility'", which establishes a causal relation between "the rendering explicit of an activism's complicities" and the "responsibilities an activism carries forth; indeed as if it were its duty to do so"[54]. In this sense de Jong finds that the notion of constructive complicity resonates with the practice of self-reflexivity and that the two can be productively coupled. Self-reflexivity is a feminist methodology introduced to counter positivist approaches to knowledge production that posit the researcher as he who discovers and gathers pre-existing data. On the contrary, practicing self-reflexivity means critically examining the researcher's social location in relation to the context studied (identity markers, geographical location, biography), and how this participates in the construction of the findings. According to de Jong both constructive complicity and reflexivity are about considering "one's own position as a responsible and political practice [and] striving to make power relations explicit";[55] "[b]oth are developed in response to the realisation that knowledge production cannot operate in a moral vacuum and is therefore inescapably fraught due to the existing power inequalities in the world".[56] The two however, also share the same risks of transparency and moral certainty. Acknowledging one's complicity or positioning one's identity do not automatically resolve the tensions that these gestures evoke. However for de Jong, the two notions can

52. Spivak quoted in de Jong, 2009, 399.
53. Keenan quoted in de Jong, 2009, 390.
54. Hoofd quoted in de Jong, 2009, 390.
55. de Jong, 2009, 399.
56. de Jong, 2009, 391.

inform one another. Where reflexivity might presuppose a clear conscience, “the term complicity allows no escape to a safe moral haven. […] [P]roductive complicity is precisely the acknowledgement that there cannot be a stable foundation other than the repeated acknowledgment of complicity”.[57] Ultimately for de Jong then, constructive complicity calls for rigorous reflexivity, or in Kapoor’s words, “we need […] to be unscrupulously vigilant (i.e. hyper-self-reflexive) about our complicities”[58].

In attempting to draft an understanding of instances of agency under complicity, de Jong’s insights are of great significance. Her reflections on the importance of an ongoing vigilance resonate with both Applebaum’s takeaway from Butler’s work, namely “her insistence of the fallibility and humility that are required even for, and especially for, moral and political agency”[59], and Mahmood’s understanding of agency as continued practice and careful scrutiny into daily actions. Agency from these stances acknowledges the impossibility of purity while relying on ongoing self-reflection and vigilance. Affirming agency while recognising to be, as Rothberg has it, folded into events that are beyond our agency, means keeping in sight one’s own position as junction in extended circuits of power, and how these circuits of power work. We might not be the site of origin of that power but, by acquainting ourselves with its workings and reflecting on our place within them, we can affect its trajectory. “The ultimate point […] is not to dwell on or in implication but to transfigure it: to acknowledge and map implication in order to reopen political struggles beyond the defensive purity of self-contained identities”[60]. In what follows I continue my analysis of the workers’ testimonies to engage with the manifestations of agency traceable in their narrations.

---

57. Ibid.
58. Kapoor quoted in de Jong, 2009, 399.
59. Applebaum, 2010, chap. 3.
60. Rothberg, 201.

5. Implication Enacted

Introduction

In the previous chapter we have seen how agency arises from the paradox of subject formation, existing in the necessity of power to be reproduced by the subject. Like subject formation then, agency is also inextricably bound to the violent conditions of its emergence, conditions that are always partially re-enacted in its exercise. In this final chapter, I offer insight into how these rather abstract notions manifest in the working life of the participants interviewed. In what follows I therefore take into examination what I have identified as accounts of forms of agency in the narrations of the workers involved in the Amsterdam Museum exhibition *The Golden Coach*. Here I am specifically interested in *political* agency, intended as intervention that takes place in the realm of social and power relations. In my analysis I therefore heavily repose on Mahmood's formulation of agency as ethical self-formation, namely a series of practices aimed at developing a mode of being that limits one's domination onto others. I also draw from her contribution in understanding agency not exclusively as synonym of overt and clear-cut opposition to norms, but rather as assemblage of desire, attempts, negotiations, prodding and withdrawal. That is to say, the manifestations of agency taken into account here comprise a range of attitudes that may or may not result in meaningful impact, or that exceed the realm of doing and undoing altogether. Consequently, I do not measure workers' agency in terms of successful or unsuccessful interventions, or complicit and non-complicit behaviour. But rather, following post-structuralist frameworks, I posit agency as arising *within* complicity to power.

In the context of this research, this ambivalence of agency is all the more evident as I take into examination subjects who are situated in closer proximity to power. Because decisional power is available to the workers interviewed as a result of existing power imbalances,[1] attempts at redress by these workers will necessarily encompass a degree of complicity with what they contest. In other words, while committed to create space for under-represented perspectives in the field, these workers benefit to a certain extent precisely from the exclusion of those voices. My intent here is not to provide solutions to these conundrums,

1. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the European arts sector, is characterised by extreme lack of diversity, with majority of workers of colour occupying precarious and/or junior positions.

nor to point at 'good' or 'bad' behaviour, but rather to investigate how this tension unravels in day-to-day decision-making, and how workers inhabit the blurry line along which complicity and political agency move. In doing so, I hope to offer a vocabulary that helps thinking more clearly of such complex yet ordinary circumstances.

In what follows I take as point of departure the observations made in Chapter 3, to demonstrate how agency unfolds in relation to our understanding of the subject position we occupy in a given context. The testimonies will show how, on the one hand, training an attitude of continued self-reflection towards one's own implication, and on the other, acknowledging the limitations of one's knowledge, form the grounds for modalities of meaningiful intervention. I will therefore conclude by arguing that the theoretical tool of the well-meaning implicated subject, coupled with an understanding of agency premised on Mahmood's notion of ethical self-formation, can help devise responsible and vigilant modes of acting upon our implication.

Implicated Agents

In Chapter 3 I have argued that the distinct types of understanding conveyed by the interviewees in relation to their identity, result in different degrees of awareness of their role with respect to the topics addressed in the exhibition *The Golden Coach*. Here I build on this insight by taking a closer look at the nexus between reckoning with implication and exercise of agency, which already began to surface in the testimonies previously analysed. I will show how the participants' degree of awareness of their role in power dynamics, in turn gives way to different forms of agency.

In approaching the findings, I singled out cases of non-alignment with either the direction of the museum or individual co-workers, instances in which the interviewees were faced with the potential reproduction of power imbalances, and ethical dilemmas encountered during the developing of the exhibition.[2] I identify such circumstances as sites of agency (or lack thereof) in that they set in motion a process that demands a degree of self-determination,

2. It is important to note that by focusing on these topics I am selectively presenting instances where the workers bring up difficulties or perplexities, which might create a misleading impression about their overall experience. All workers interviewed also expressed great pride and satisfaction in the work done and the resulting exhibition. The findings presented here are therefore not to be considered as a comprehensive representation of their accounts.

either through forming an opinion on the issue at hand or by actively intervening. How workers self-theorise and understand their position within these contexts therefore reveals their perceptions about their agentival capacity. In these accounts, three main modes of thinking about holding and exercising power can be traced, namely *Agency in the practice of responsibility*, *Agency in moral certainty*, *Agency in self-doubt*.

Agency in the practice of responsibility

One interviewee when asked about the qualitative balance between roles occupied by white people and people of colour in the exhibition team, replied that it depended on the person rather than the role, and observed how some white workers seemed to "overrule"[3] workers of colour, even if the latter occupied prominent roles. The interviewee recounted noticing how one white colleague "has been working on slavery and colonial heritage for, like, a really long time but in [their] actual practice, I don't know, sometimes it feels like [they're] not super aware of [their] position as, like, a white [person] in The Netherlands".[4]

> Author: Is this something that ever preoccupied you as well, as a white [person] engaging with these topics?
>
> Interviewee: Yeah… and sometimes, yeah, I also feel quite bad having this position because I sort of ended up here through, like, my connections that I previously had, like, I didn't have to apply for this position so I really try to at least pay people that we work with quite generously and also select as many people of colour for everything that we do. But just the network of the museum and also me personally in the arts, it's just very white so I find that quite hard sometimes, yeah. And I'm not in such a powerful position yet in the museum so I don't think it makes a lot of sense to give up my position to let it be filled by a person of colour, but I think if I get to another position in the future I might consider that at some point […] and that's why it was such a shame that the translations[5] didn't work out, because I found actually this, sort of, editors and translators, [name of agency], of people of colour but then I've just never been able to reach them and they never replied to my emails, and I didn't have a phone number so, yeah, that was just really a shame because I really wanted it to work and then it didn't.[6]

---

3. Interview No. 3, from minute 35:06 .
4. Ibid.
5. Here the participant refers to their attempt "to find a person of colour to do the editing and translating for the book", interview No. 3, from minute 31:30.
6. Interview No. 3, from minute 37:12.

When asked whether they felt that the museum was also preoccupied with this when hiring external partners, the participant replied

> Uhm… no. To be honest, no. I think everybody working in the museum sort of has their own networks of people that they've worked with before and which, sort of, was positive and yielded good results, so, like, very easily it's just, 'oh yeah, let's do that' , 'oh yeah, then we can work with these and these people to make it happen'. And I brought it up with [name of colleague] that I wanted to look for a person of colour for the translation and then [they were] like 'oh yeah, that's a very good idea' and [they] also contacted one person in [their] network to ask if [they] knew someone […] but then when… during work I also never heard [them] about it again and I don't recall other colleagues really explicitly also mentioning it, at least. […] Also, I haven't really brought it up in the team meetings […], but that's, again, just because of time. I also just continued and found someone else, like, very quickly and, yeah, I don't think I made it explicit to the other team members. Which maybe if I would have they would have had it in mind too when they had to select people to work with.[7]

In the above testimony we can detect a causal relation between the subject position one occupies in a given context, and the degree of responsibility towards the power one holds and exercises in that context. It is the acknowledgement of the benefits that come with one's social location ("I didn't have to apply for this position"), that triggers a sense of responsibility towards one's exercise of agency ("so I really try to at least pay people that we work with quite generously and also select as many people of colour"). On the contrary, the interviewee seems to observe how lack of awareness of one's own positionality ("[they're] not super aware of [their] position as, like, a white [person] in The Netherlands"), results in behaviours that may reproduce existing racial hierarchies. In this excerpt therefore agency appears to be located in a practice of responsibility aimed at limiting one's participation in systemic injustices, or at actively taking action against them. The interviewee in fact makes a conscious decision on how to put their decisional power to use in ways that counter the museum's routinised procedure for hiring external partners, which results in reproducing lack of diversity.

The type of causality traceable in this testimony, also emerged in the interview examined in Chapter 3 under the category of *distance as comfort*. There, the participant expressed the intention of putting the comfort provided by whiteness to use to generate a positive impact. As they stated, "I think there's work to be done in, like, the conversations I

7. Interview No. 3. from minute 42:25.

can have with these people to, maybe, make them think about this topic and their, sort of, role in it. So, yeah, just sort of using, I guess, my own whiteness to hopefully have some of the difficult conversations".[8] Also in this case then, we see how self-reflection brings about a sense of responsibility towards one's exercise of power. Both interviewees also posit this in terms of responsibility towards other white people, be it members of the team or members of the family.

Agency in moral certainty

In the testimony presented below, the interviewee refers to an episode in which a Black worker was in strong disagreement with some members of the team on the display of historical documents using the n-word, in the exhibition.

> Interviewee: […] there was a booklet on the coach and how it was built, and also the description on the panel, and then, in the nineteenth century, people used the n-word. And there was someone […] who really didn't want that to be repeated, at that time. Which I can understand… but it's an interesting one because it's… for me, it's, at the same time, I think it's a different… it's always a matter of connotation or context, in what capacity these kinds of lines are spoken about [inaudible], so in this case I thought, ok, you're right, but then again, we are in a very secure environment and you know nobody will take offense and all the rest of it, so I think then it was, for me personally, I thought it was almost too… too sensitive? So to say? But then again, I understand it fully, but then again […] it's very important to… who says it, in what context, and to what purpose. But that was, not a clash, but really [they were], like, 'no I'm very offended by…', which I can understand, but then we said 'ok, but how do we …?'… That's an interesting point, I'm not sure exactly how they came around that. I think in the end we didn't use the quote in the text in the museum and in the exhibition[9].
>
> Author: It's a very interesting example because it shows how, were [this person] not there, you would have gone on and used it.
>
> Interviewee: I don't think it has to do with… of course because you are more sensitive to it, as a black person but… you know for instance […] there was [name of writer/ inaudible] in a piece of the [name of outlet/inaudible], it's on the discussion on whether or not to use 'slaves' or 'enslaved' […] and he's a Black guy, so to say, so… he's, so to say, more entitled to having that kind of opinions, which is an interesting discussion on who's entitled to what, and he said 'no it's not'… for him it was not the

8. Interview No. 4, from minute 50:33.
9. Interview No. 2, from minute 53:28.

> point, an issue of whether or not to use it […] [some] people are much more, I wouldn't say relaxed, but they have a different opinion on it.[10]

In the above testimony we see how, by bringing in the example of a Black writer who shares a similar view, the participant suggests that their opinion on the use of the n-word, has nothing do with their identity. As discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to views of the Golden Coach panels that frame them as mere historical artefacts, I maintain that seemingly factual perspectives based around "connotation or context" foreground the experience of dominant subjects. To be sure, subaltern subjects, just as dominant ones, do indeed hold a variety of different ideas, which may or may not coincide with the dominant narrative. However, while opinions may align, they do not originate from the same experience. Wekker examines this tendency "to mobilize black people"[11] to support the legitimacy of one's view in the context of debates around Zwarte Piet. Wekker explains how the common argument "I know so many Surinamese and Antilleans […] who celebrate it too and who don't see anything wrong with it", overlooks "the power relations that are operative"[12]. In other words, these views might reach similar conclusions, but arise from different power relations. In the same way, the participant's opinion on what seems to constitute an appropriate affective reaction to the word, is also grounded in the perspective of those who are not at the receiving end of such unequal power dynamics. In the above statement, the interviewee defines the reaction of their co-worker as "almost too sensitive", while refers to that of other Black people holding less critical views as "I wouldn't say more relaxed, but". Here, similarly to the interview excerpt examined as *distance as neutrality* in Chapter 3, evaluation of critical stances around racism seems to take place in the domain of emotion. Again, the case of Zwarte Piet offers relevant insights, as those contestations are similarly dismissed using affective language. As seen, by labelling them as "moan[ing] or exaggerat[ing]",[13] grievances about discrimination are reduced to "a feeling of hurt"[14], which renders the act of denouncing something as racist a matter of individual levels of sensitivity and appropriate display of negative feeling.

---

10. Interview No. 2, from minute 57:26
11. Wekker, 156.
12. Ibid.
13. Wekker, 158.
14. Wekker, 145.

Although the episode recounted by the participant illustrates a case where divergent opinions required lengthy discussions, it is interesting to note how earlier in the interview, when asked whether they recalled an instance of disagreement, the participant answered "well not on a, on a very… if you talk about colonialism or stuff like that, I mean, I think it's, I wouldn't say obvious, but it's really pretty clear"[15]. I maintain that this statement reveals how the underlying assumption of 'being on the same side' that residing in a space of criticality affords, gives way to moral certainty over the issues addressed. In the testimony, the expression "we are in a very secure environment", acts as counterargument to the stance held by the co-worker. It is because this is a secure environment, that a language that would arguably make the environment non-secure can be used. In fact, it could be argued that for the Black worker, a safe space is a space where the n-word does not appear, and where their opinion on the matter is not deemed exaggerated. The sentence "we are in a very secure environment" then, seems to act as what Ahmed defines as nonperformative, that is, "a speech act [that] does exactly what it says that it does not do: it refuses to hear complaint in the very moment it says that it does hear complaint".[16] In the same way, the assurance that "nobody will take offence", acts to negate the very statement pronounced by the Black worker, "I'm very offended". Here, operating in the realm of criticality suspends further criticality, while providing certainty on its intended effects. The interviewee's statement would seem to suggest that because the exhibition engages critically with language, the use of language that would otherwise be considered harmful, will not be. This stance therefore demonstrates the necessity for recognising one's own ideas as necessarily located in one's own subject position, and cultivating ongoing critical self-reflection. As Butler and Applebaum note, acknowledging one's complicity "does not imply that critique is impossible but rather that uncertainty and humility must be an inherent part of critique"[17]. Acting from

---

15. Interview No. 2, from minute 32:43.

16. Ahmed, 2006, 111. As briefly discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Ahmed argues that sentences such as 'we are committed to antiracist values', included in diversity documents issued by higher education institutions, should be understood as nonperformative speech acts, in that they do not enact the commitment they enunciate. On the contrary, her study reveals how there are no actual measures in place to corroborate the declaration of commitment. The declaration in itself *is* the commitment.

17. Applebaum, 2010, chap. 1.

complacency, Spivak warns, can potentially blind towards the ways in which power dynamics are reproduced through good intention.[18]

Agency in self-doubt

One interviewee, when asked about unsolved doubts and dilemmas, replied:

> many people they're just, like, critical of the coach and rightly so, they're just, like, questioning, well like, well, you're still presenting it, you're still, like, putting it on a pedestal in the middle of, you know, this court yard where it's still made into this, sort of, sacred object almost, with the glass box around it and it's completely, like, untouchable, still, and that's, yeah, still something that I don't have the right answer to I guess, like, I… and that's just generally, I guess, to maybe… it leads to, like, the discussion of, like, museums in general, like, are they even able to do anything that I think it's right or that needs to be done, or should we just reject the institution as a thing on its own? And that's, yeah, just a larger topic that I don't know the answer to but I do feel conflicted about. It's just, do you do any work when still reproducing these modes of display that are also rooted in colonialism, and the whole functioning of the institution in the end is rooted in colonialism? So I'm not sure if there's any method we can develop within it that will properly contest the things I'm trying to contest. […] but for now I have made the decision to work in this field so I am contributing to it but, yeah, I don't know […] it's just an ongoing struggle of trying to align the sort of critical theory and while still working within the institution.[19]

When asked how they come to terms with these conflicted feelings, the participant declared

> I guess my answer so far has just been that, like, there's never a full right or a full wrong, so I guess any place I would end up in, even if I would decide to reject this all and go somewhere else, that would still, like, those conflicts will arise so I'll just need to try and work through it. I do have conversations with colleagues, with friends as well about this and, yes, I just keep coming back to the argument, it's like, there's never a full right to anything so I guess the best thing I can do is try to, yeah, continue to be critical of it and see my own position within it and how I, sort of, construct that. Yeah, it will require ongoing work, I guess.[20]

In the above testimony, the participant reflects on the deadlock posed by, on the one hand not wanting to reproduce inequalities in the sector, and on the other, "contributing" to

---

18. Spivak quoted in de Jong, 2009.
19. Interview No. 4, from minute 44:47.
20. Interview No. 4, from minute 47:41.

them by working in the field. However, despite not having a definite answer, they are not disarmed in the face of such dilemma, but express the intention of devising ways to intervene that are compatible with their moral and political beliefs. By stating that "it will require ongoing work" and that "there's never a full right or a full wrong", the participant seems to consider exercising power within such environments as requiring continuous vigilance, both towards the institution one inhabits and one's own role in "construct[ing]" it. This testimony therefore would seem to posit reckoning with one's own implication as an unfinished process, one that entails a "repeated acknowledgment of complicity"[21], but that does not stop at such acknowledgement. The type of agency that emerges here appears to originate precisely from within this open-ended space of self-doubt and questioning, that demands for recalibration of one's intervention at each turn.

Rigorous and Vigilant Agency

In the analysis of the findings conducted in this chapter, I have showed how distinct modes of agency can be understood as resulting from different ways of relating to one's own implication. I argue that the modalities described as agency in the p*ractice of responsibility* and *agency in self-doubt* can be considered as declinations of Mahmood's notion of ethical self-formation. In both cases in fact, we see how the interviewees express the intention to model their behaviour after autonomously chosen codes, beyond the fixed requirements of their job position or the standardised procedures of the museum. These stances also illustrate the dangers of failing to understand one's own actions as sitting at the intersection of past and future temporalities.

In what I have identified as *agency in the practice of responsibility*, we see how the unquestioned repetition of practices that are seemingly based on efficiency —such as the museums's methodology for hiring external partners— crystallises into processes that are "very easily"[22] reproduced. As Butler explains, it is precisely in their repetition that norms come to "for[m] "the horizon of choice [and] creat[e] the conditions under which we assume responsibility".[23] The interviewee in this testimony therefore seems to acknowledge how following norms, while not equating to initiating them, entails a degree of responsibility

21. de Jong, 2009, 391.
22. Interview No. 3. from minute 42:25.
23. Butler quoted in Applebaum, 2010, chap. 6.

towards their harmful effects. Instead, by engaging critically with them, for example through the introduction of new readily available contacts, norms can be potentially disturbed or "done anew"[24] for future hires. As Butler puts it in fact, "[b]eing compelled to reiterate norms does not relieve us of responsibility but instead is the start from which our responsibility springs, a responsibility that begins with uncertainty and is rooted in our vulnerability".[25] I suggest that the reflections that seem to lead this participant to act independently, and later to assess the extent of their own commitment, reveal how they position themselves in a temporal trajectory in which 'how things have been done so far' inevitably determines present and future actions. Conversely, not taking into account the *historicity* of present conditions and our role within them, might lead to fail to recognise present iterations of language as manifestations of "prior invocations"[26]. As discussed in the section *Agency in moral certainty*, the use of the n-word has effects that go beyond the critical intent of the interviewee. However, by foregrounding intention over historicity, the participant does not consider their agency as arising from power dynamics, but rather as located exclusively in their individual and autonomous will.

I maintain that the theories of agency advanced by Mahmood and Spivak, offer an extremely useful model to delineate the type of political agency that well-meaning implicated subjects arguably strive towards. That is, agency aimed at limiting the reproduction of the conditions of structural injustices, along with one's own domination on others. Complicity as a practice of responsibility as advocated by Spivak, as well as Mahmood's formulation of agency as ethical self-formation, both repose on the acknowledgement that they can "never be complete"[27]. In the same way, Rothberg's notion of the implicated subject is not meant as a fixed identity, nor a one-off deliberation, but rather works as a process; only by understanding it as such can we transform the ways in which we are folded into past and future injustices. Using the theoretical tool of the well-meaning implicated subject to reflect on one's own positionality, therefore necessarily entails taking up its invitation to devise rigorous and vigilant modes of being in the world.

---

24. Butler, 18.
25. Ibid.
26. Derrida quoted in Applebaum, 2010, Chap. 3.
27. Keenan quoted in de Jong, 2009, 390.

Concluding Remarks

In thesis I have built on Michael Rothberg's notion of the implicated subject to investigate the position of art workers engaging with themes of systemic inequality from a privileged social location. I have suggested that when looking at the arts sector's efforts at tackling colonial legacies, further scrutiny should be given to the role of benevolent intentions in the preservation and/or reproduction of inequalities, and I have brought attention to how the seemingly contradictory relation between benevolence and complicity unfolds at the level of individual workers. I have proposed the theoretical tool of the well-meaning implicated subject and I have argued that by understanding workers' positionality through this framework, we are better equipped to envisage modalities of agency that do not contribute to structural power imbalances. I have developed my argument through the case study analysis of workers' experience in the making of the Amsterdam Museum exhibition *The Golden Coach*, an initiative aimed at critically engaging with the colonial symbology represented on the royal carriage, and the debates around it. This research has therefore focused specifically on issues of racial inequality and has primarily considered as privileged position the one afforded by whiteness.

In the first part of this thesis I have presented the theoretical frameworks grounding my thinking around the notions of implication and complicity, using them as lens through which to understand the role of the art workers interviewed. The notion of the implicated subject formulated by Rothberg has offered a concrete way to look at the relation between the systemic and the individual dimension of the perpetuation of past injustices. I have shown how this framework dovetails with both post-structuralist and post-colonial notions of complicity, providing a nuanced understanding of how existing power dynamics are continuously re-staged, beyond intentionality. In Chapter 2 and 3 I have further developed this framework applying it respectively to the analysis of the object at the centre of my case study, the Golden Coach, and the subject positions this generates. I have argued that the Golden Coach constitutes what I have defined as *object of implication*, by showing how the colonial ideology identifiable in the panel "Tribute from the Colonies", spills out of the boundaries of its original context, implicating contemporary subjects in its ongoing effects. I have argued that different degrees of belonging to the dominant community afford distinct ways of relating to the Golden Coach, hence materialising how we are positioned in other

respects of social life. I have therefore examined how these subject positions unfold, by engaging with the testimonies of the workers interviewed, showing how different ways of understanding one's identity may either encourage or foreclose reflection on one's implication in histories of oppression. I have proposed the figure of the *well-meaning implicated subject* as a category that affords to hone in on the coexistence of desires to contribute meaningfully to the issues at hand, and inadvertently complicit behaviours.

In Part II, I moved towards an analysis of ways of acting upon one's implication. I have therefore focused on Mahmood's conceptualisation of agency as ethical self-formation and Spivak's (and de Jong's) notion of constructive complicity to draft an understanding of agency as exercise in acknowledgement of one's enmeshment with power rather than repudiation. I have argued that the research findings reveal a direct causality between rigorous self-reflection on one's role in the present unfolding of past injustices, and sense of responsibility towards one's exercise of power. I concluded by arguing that an understanding of agency as premised on ongoing, rigorous and humble self-reflection, is what a reckoning with implication urges to train in order to develop responsible and non-harmful ways of being in the world.

Beyond Individual Responsibility

Through this thesis I advocate for the potential for change harbouring within institutions in the form of individual responsibility to actively choose not to contribute to harmful practices. I maintain that the findings analysed in this research show how individual action plays a decisive role in either preserving or countering unfair practices taking place within the museum. However in making this claim, I do not propose individual action as a replacement for structural measures. The findings in this study in fact also demonstrate the limitations of individual agency in the face of lack of strategies already in place at an institutional level. The testimony analysed in Chapter 5 as *Agency in the practice of responsibility,* demonstrates this. The lack of time and adequate network the participant refers to, are precisely structural aspects that should be addressed outside of and prior to individual projects. Such issues are recurrent ones in reports across the sector[1], demonstrating the

1. For example, Inc Arts, "Hold on. Diversity and Managing in the Arts", November 2020, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c18e090b40b9d6b43b093d8/t/5fb6967ab3db4d4323bf1f77/1605801598364/Hold+on+Inc+Arts+V19+FINAL+FULL+REPORT.pdf

insufficiency of approaches to 'decolonisation' exclusively at the level of content. As long as policies and procedures are left out of processes of critical reflection, these endeavours will inevitably leave no substantial trace in individual institutions nor the sector at large.

Reflections on the Research Process

As already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, I entered the qualitative research process from a dual position of insider/outsider with respect to the field of reference.[2] Following ethnology scholar Fataneh Farahani's work on such fluid position, I have understood the research process as a way of stepping out of my field of work to analyse its dynamics critically, thus "look[ing] in from the outside while also looking out from the inside"[3]. While conducting the interviews I found not only my insider status but also my whiteness to be useful in the construction of rapport with the participants, as both constituted the basis for what sociology scholar Rachel Thwaites refers to as "matching".[4] As explained by Thwaites, the latter takes place when rapport is built upon a sense of identification between researcher and participant around shared identity markers (such as gender, race, class) or communities of belonging. However, as she notes, building rapport may also entail a degree of 'surface acting', that is, controlling one's emotional reactions and "minimising strongly held viewpoints"[5]. While this is done in order to preserve a cordial atmosphere and lessen influence over the findings, I share Thwaites' point that this also "means full and honest sharing has been side-lined"[6].

Attempting to maintain the balance between being transparent about my angle and not delimiting participants' reflection, has been a central concern not only during the interviews but also leading to them, when approaching workers to request their participation, and in the formulation of the questions. In the first contact via email and at the beginning of the interviews, I strove to clearly lay out my research agenda, briefly introducing the theoretical framing of the research and making known my critical stance. Devising the questions has also

---

2. Fataneh Farahani, "On being an insider and/or an outsider: A diasporic researcher's catch-22", in *Education Without Borders: Diversity in a Cosmopolitan Society*, ed. Loshini Naidoo (Nova Science Publishers: 2010).

3. Trinh quoted in Farahani, 2010, 113.

4. Rachel Thwaites,"(Re)Examining the Feminist Interview: Rapport, Gender 'Matching,' and Emotional Labour", *Frontiers in Sociology* 2, no. 18 (2017).

5. Thwaites, 1.

6. Thwaites, 4.

required careful thinking, as the issues I set to analyse (i.e. implication, complicity, agency) cannot be tackled through direct questions but rather these had to serve as gateways through which these topics could emerge. This was especially the case around the subject of agency, as one's sense of freedom or constriction in daily circumstances cannot be easily pinpointed.

Great part of my reasoning and emotional labour during the interviews were invested in attempting to walk this line between maintaining honest communication and not imposing my views in ways that might inhibit the participants from conveying their viewpoint. Striking this balance revealed particularly challenging in instances of strong disagreement with interviewees' statements. In these cases, I at times found myself steering away from criticism altogether for fear of coming across as too confrontational or sidetracking the interview. When I did challenge the participants' views, I have attempted to do so in ways that I deemed useful to the research, however great attention went into regulating my body language and tone of voice in doing so. I find that this restraint also originated from a will to convey professionalism and not exposing myself to circumstances that might undermine my authority as researcher.

In cases of alignment with the interviewees' perspectives, I experienced a heightened sense of identification and empathy, based around what I perceived to be common struggles. In these instances, a more reciprocal interview style developed, whereby my personal experience seamlessly entered the conversation. Reciprocity was also fostered by my involvement, at the time of conducting the interviews, with the research collective Museum of Equality and Difference (MOED) in the curation of an online exhibition on the theme of the Golden Coach. Although in a smaller scale, I found myself sharing some of the dilemmas expressed by the interviewees, recognising myself as being equally implicated. My implication and responsibility in intervening as a white non-Dutch researcher, not previously familiar with the issues I treat in this thesis, has been a great preoccupation throughout the research process. My lack of knowledge of the Dutch language has meant that I went into this research being largely out of touch with the current developments around the topics addressed, especially across realms outside of academia such as popular culture, social media or independent media. This is a concern that more than others has made me question my place in this research, and whether writing from a place of near complete insulation from the evolving of discussions across the communities at the centre of one's work, is in any way valuable.

Limitations and Possibilities

While the intent of this research has been that of scrutinising dominant positions, I am acutely aware of the danger of centring whiteness that such an approach poses, as it leaves out the experiences of workers of colour. In doing so however, this thesis has aimed at putting forward a view that does not allocate the responsibility for 'fixing' or resisting inequalities to those who are affected by them, but instead frames such issues as concern of dominant subjects. As recently put in one open letter signed by Dutch art workers, "[i]nstitutions should refrain from asking BPoC employees to speak or advise on diversity and inclusion, or to dismantle existing institutional structures. When they are unable to avoid this, implicitly or explicitly, they should financially compensate for this work, which falls outside any task description".[7] That is to say that it should be a preoccupation of those in power to scrutinise existent practices and devise methodologies and approaches that minimise power imbalances, keeping in mind the emotional and material costs that go with doing so from more precarious social locations.

Related to this is also the aforementioned risk of foregrounding individual action over processes implemented at an institutional level. While this study was not aimed at acting as a report, nor at producing a set of indications for institutions, it is my contention that such measures need to be in place in order for individuals to act responsibly. Some of such measures could entail taking into account the emotional wellbeing of workers of colour, as well as equipping the white staff with tools to skilfully navigate conversations around race and familiarise with anti-oppressive practices. Research findings that were not included in the analysis, in fact reveal the difficulty amongst white workers to raise concerns or perplexities over practices or creative choices perceived as being not mindful of racial relations. I align with the open letter mentioned above in suggesting that "[i]nstitutions should implement a structural programme for White staff consisting of anti-racism and conflict de-escalation training, and critical education on decentering White-centered and Western understandings of (art) history".[8]

The findings examined in this study suggest that in preparing exhibitions that touch complex and ongoing matters such as racial discrimination, resources should be mobilised to

---

7. "Open Letter - No Anti-Racist Museum Without Structural Changes", 2020.
8. Ibid.

ensure an environment sensitive to how these issues unfold not only in working relations, but also outside of the walls of the museum. In other words, the work of the museum should not stop at doing historical research on the subject at hand, and relegating the politics to guest curators and artists, but rather institutions that wish to meaningfully engage with topics of social relevance should make sure to do so under conditions that foster growth and positive change for all the workers involved.

Acknowledgements

My deepest appreciation to my thesis supervisor and my second reader. I am greatly indebted to Maaike's ability to activate my thinking, I owe her my growth as a writer and researcher over the last two years, and possibly beyond. I am immensely grateful to Rosemarie for introducing me to the debate around the Golden Coach, and for her always generous and engaged feedback. A sincere thanks goes also to the team at the Museum of Equality and Difference, for giving me the opportunity to further explore the topics of this study in dialogue with them. Lastly, I would like to extend a special thanks to the Amsterdam Museum workers who have taken part to this research, sharing their time and their thinking.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. “The Nonperformativity of Antiracism”. *Meridians* 7, no. 1 (2006).

Ahmed, Sara. “Critical racism/Critical Sexism”. *feministkilljoys*. 19 December 2013. https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/12/19/critical-racismcritical-sexism/

Ahmed, Sara. *The Promise of Happiness.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Amsterdam Museum, “The Amsterdam Museum to Stop Using Term ‘Golden Age’”. 2019. https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/sites/default/files/press_release_the_amsterdam_museum_to_stop_using_term_golden_age.pdf

Amsterdam Museum. “The Golden Coach. An Amsterdam Gift”. Unpublished. Accessed February 2021.

Applebaum, Barbara. *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy.* Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2010.

Applebaum, Barbara. “White Ignorance and Denials of Complicity: On the Possibility of Doing Philosophy in Good Faith”. In *The Center Must Not Hold: White Women Philosophers on the Whiteness of Philosophy*. Edited by George Yancy. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010.

Balkenhol, Markus and Wayne Modest. “Caring for Some and not Others: Museums and the Politics of Care in Post-Colonial Europe”. In *European Memory in Populism: Representations of Self and Other.* Edited by C. De Cesari & A. Kaya. Routledge, 2019.

Biekman, Barryl. “The Golden Carriage in the Context of Afrophobia”. 8 September 2014. YouTube video, 1:05:15. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAHjLUf126E.

Boston Arts and Cultural Workers. “Open Letter from Boston Arts and Cultural Workers in Demand of Racial Equity and Social Transformation”. 12 June 2020. https://www.bostonartsforblacklives.com

Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.

de Jong, Sara. “Constructive Complicity Enacted? The Reflections of Women NGO and IGO Workers on their Practices”. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 30, no. 4 (2009).

de Jong, Sara and Jamila M.H. Mascat. “Relocating Subalternity: Scattered Speculations on the Conundrum of a Concept”. *Cultural Studies* 30, no. 5 (2016).

de Jong, Sara. *Complicit Sisters: Gender and Women's Issues Across North-South Divides.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Farahani, Fataneh. “On being an insider and/or an outsider: A diasporic researcher's catch-22”. In *Education Without Borders: Diversity in a Cosmopolitan Society*. Edited by Loshini Naidoo. Nova Science Publishers: 2010.

Fatah-Black, Karwan. “The Emancipating Subject in the Global Empire of Oranje-Nassau”. In *The Golden Coach*. Edited by Annemarie de Wildt et al.. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021.

Gatenby, Bev and Maria Humphries. “Feminist Participatory Action Research: Methodological and Ethical Issues”. *Women's Studies International Forum,* (2000).

hooks, bell. “Moving Past Blame: Embracing Diversity”. In *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice.* New York: Routledge, 2012.

Jones, Guno. “Biology, Culture, ‘Postcolonial Citizenship’ and the Dutch Nation, 1945–2007”. In *Dutch Racism*. Edited by Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Jones, Guno. “The Shadows of (Public) Recognition: Transatlantic Slavery and Indian Ocean Slavery in Dutch Historiography and Public Culture”. In *Being a Slave: Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean.* Edited by A. Schrikker, & N. Wickramasinghe. Leiden University Press, 2020.

Kapoor, Ilan. “Capitalism, Culture, Agency: Dependency Versus Postcolonial Theory”. *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2002).

Kassim, Sumaya. “The Museum Will Not Be Decolonised”. Media Diversified. 15 November 2017. https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/

Kassim, Sumaya. “Decolonial Daydreams: Can Museums be Hopeful Places?”. Linden-Museum Stuttgart, 7 September 2020. YouTube video, 12:07. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Wy_mTxPJ-A&list=FL4U0Rg2Vl76_u96k6ZdkoWw&index=1&t=639s

Kowsoleea, Ghanima. “A Personal Look at the Nation’s Most Disputed Panel”. In *The Golden Coach.* Edited by Annemarie de Wildt et al.. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021.

Mahmood, Saba. “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival”. *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001).

Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Modest, Wayne. “Museums are Investments in Critical Discomfort”. In *Across Anthropology: Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial Book.* Edited by Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius. Leuven University Press: 2020.

Nimako, Kwame and Glenn Willemsen. *The Dutch Atlantic: Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation.* London: Pluto Press, 2011.

Nimako, Kwame, Amy Abdou and Glenn Willemsen, “Chattel Slavery and Racism: A Reflection on the Dutch Experience”. In *Dutch Racism*. Edited by Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Oostindie, Gert. *Postcolonial Netherlands: Sixty-five Years of Forgetting, Commemorating, Silencing.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011.

“Open Brief van 600+ Kunstprofessionals: Wij Zien Jullie, Witte Kunst- en Cultuursector”. 15 June 2020. https://www.theaterkrant.nl/nieuws/open-brief-wij-zien-jullie-witte-kunst-en-cultuursector/

“Open Letter - No Anti-Racist Museum Without Structural Changes”. *Metropolis M*. 19 June 2020. https://www.metropolism.com/nl/news/41218_open_letter_no_anti_racist_museum_without_structural_changes

Ortega, Mariana. “Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color”. *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006).

Probyn-Rapsey, Fiona. “Complicity, Critique, and Methodology”. *ARIEL* 38, no. 2-3 (2007).

Rey-Lamslag, Maria. “Tribute from the Colonies? Indonesian Nobility at Queen Wilhelmina's Coronation”. In *The Golden Coach.* Edited by Annemarie de Wildt et al.. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021.

Rothberg, Michael. *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019.

Rothberg, Michael. “Thinking With”. Research Center for Material Culture, 27 October 2020. YouTube video, 1:42:28. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29Bc2JHAbX8&list=FL4U0Rg2Vl76_u96k6ZdkoWw&index=20&t=54s.

Schavemaker, Margriet. “The Golden Coach in the Amsterdam Museum”. In *The Golden Coach.* Edited by Annemarie de Wildt et al.. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Museum, 2021.

Spivak, Gayatri C.. “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Edited by L. Grossberg and C. Nelson. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Spivak, Gayatri C. *A critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Thwaites, Rachel. “(Re)Examining the Feminist Interview: Rapport, Gender ‘Matching,’ and Emotional Labour”. *Frontiers in Sociology* 2, no. 18 (2017).

Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor”. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012).

Vera, Amir and Laura Ly. “White woman who called police on a black man bird-watching in Central Park has been fired”. *CNN*. 26 May 2020. https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/26/us/central-park-video-dog-video-african-american-trnd/.

Vintges, Karen. “Muslim Women in the Western Media: Foucault, Agency, Governmentality and Ethics”. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19, no. 3 (2012).

Weeks, Kathi. “Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics”. *Ephemera* 7, (2007).

Wekker, Gloria. *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race.* Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2016.