

Legacies and Afterlives of Dutch Colonialism: Told and Imagined
Accounts of South African Colonial Histories in Contemporary
Exhibition Practice

PhD Thesis

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DEPARTMENT OF FINE ART

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Dedications

For Lesedi Rami who has taught me so much and from whom I continue to learn every day.

This work is also dedicated to those who have come before me, who have suffered great losses, made significant sacrifices and are left with unmendable wounds as a result of the European colonial project in South Africa and elsewhere. It is a celebration of past resistance struggles and an acknowledgement that global struggles for reparative justice and emancipation continue in the present.

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Abstract

This research takes a critical stance to what is commonly referred to as the 'decolonial turn' in European museums, exemplified by the recent prevalence of 'decolonial exhibitions' and programming to be found across the continent. Specifically, it analyses current representations of Dutch colonialism in the Netherlands and South Africa through the case study exhibition: *Goede Hoop: South Africa and the Netherlands from 1600*, which was on display at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam from February 17 to May 21, 2017. Through a close reading of this case, this study examines how questions of national identity, racialised self-and-other ideologies, and notions of epistemic violence and cognitive injustice relate to the materialities of museum display and exhibition practices. By investigating the colonial epistemologies and practices that continue to haunt contemporary European museum exhibitions in the wake of global imperialism, the study evaluates whether exhibitions might serve as interventionist instruments to demolish colonial systems inside museum institutions and build strategies to unlearn imperial knowledge.

By analysing the contemporary cultural phenomenon of the 'decolonial exhibition', the study demonstrates how the practices and approaches adopted in these projects can contradict their stated objectives and fail to address the core challenges and legacies of colonialism. Positioned as benevolent gestures, post-colonial museum exhibitions in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe frequently elicit contentious public debates but do little to address the repatriation and restitution of stolen heritage from former colonies and the ongoing, urgent issue of reparations for colonial violence. They instead foster or strengthen colonial assumptions of cultural and racial superiority.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In May 2017, a collective of Dutch activists and cultural workers from diverse backgrounds and cultural fields sent an open letter to Taco Dibbits, director of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The group's critique was directed at the Rijksmuseum's exhibition, *Goede Hoop: Zuid-Afrika en Nederland vanaf 1600*¹ (*Good Hope: South Africa and the Netherlands from 1600*), which had opened in February of that year and was curated by Martine Gosselink, the museum's then-head of the History department. This collective action was led by Simone Zeefuik, a Dutch writer, cultural worker and activist, and the veteran Dutch anti-apartheid activist Marjan Boelsma. The exhibition showed from February 17 to May 21, 2017, positioning its orientation as the Rijksmuseum's promise of a critical examination of the colonial relationship between the Netherlands and South Africa, its former colony. This commitment was reflected in the exhibition's promotional material, setting up the expectation for a critical intervention into the way that Dutch publics understood and remembered its colonial past.

According to the collective's letter, the exhibition represented a "missed opportunity" to articulate a perspective on colonial histories other than that of the Dutch (Zeefuik, 2017a). The letter further claims that by presenting history from the viewpoint of the colonisers, the exhibition "replicated colonial power systems and misinformed and misled the 80,000 visitors to the exhibition" (Zeefuik, 2017a). The collective expressed a series of concerns that include: the exhibition's lack of clarity

¹ Hereafter referred to as *Goede Hoop* or the *Goede Hoop* exhibition.

regarding the Netherlands' role in colonising South Africa; the absence of Black² South African or Black/afro-Dutch contributors; the erasure of Indigenous social structures that were in existence before the Dutch colonised South Africa; and the failure to acknowledge that the historical narrative presented by the exhibition was largely based on Eurocentric archival documents.

On receipt of this letter, the director, supported by the board of the Rijksmuseum proposed a private meeting between the institution and the collective to discuss these concerns. However, the museum's gesture did not appeal to the activists, as they had made it clear that a conversation of this nature was of interest to the museum's publics, and that the issue of misrepresentation required public discussion. Responding to the museum's proposal, on the 17th of May Zeefuik (2017b) sent the following email to members of the collective:

Good morning all,

Hopefully, all is well with you. The Rijksmuseum just contacted me: they want to meet up with (some of) the initiators and co-signers of our open letter. I asked them to be more specific about 'having a meeting' and told them that I'd first check with

²Throughout this dissertation, the capitalisation of Black and White is employed to draw attention to the ways that Blackness and Whiteness have been constructed as opposing and hierarchical categories by the social institutions of global imperialism. However, while the notion of race is a global phenomenon, racialised constructions of Black and White have different meanings and applications in the localised context. In South Africa, constructions of otherness was first embroiled in the social interactions between the colonisers and indigenous people in the first colonial occupation by the Dutch. Later, racial segregation was legislated during British colonial rule. In apartheid in South Africa, race was used to justify the exclusion of Black people from political and economic power and the creation of a racial hierarchy (Houston, Kanyane and Davids, 2022), which was legislated through various state laws that governed the ownership of land, the freedom of movement and social interactions, among many other aspects of social and economic life. For the purposes of this thesis, Black refers to the Black Consciousness Movement's (BCM) formulation on blackness, incorporating the racialised categories of Black African, Indian and 'Coloured'. In the BCM definition of black, race is defined in terms of Black people's common experience of oppression and not on biological markers (Houston, Kanyane and Davids, 2022).

'some of us' if people are interested to begin with and, if so... what dates early June would work for you.

Personally, I say: Let them sweat. They took their sweet time to make this rubbish exhibition so none of us needs to be on their schedule. Let them have all the seats until we tell them to get up and meet us wherever we want them to meet us. My suggestion: let them come to Bijlmer Parktheater to have a public conversation with us. Let them come to Amsterdam Blackest neighbourhood to explain themselves. I'm beyond uninterested in drinking coffee in one of their offices and talking about intentions. Their exhibition is public. Their tv-show about South Africa is public. Our letter is public. No need to settle this behind closed doors if you ask me.

But that's just me, please let me know what you think.

Hugs,

Simone Zeefuik

Zeefuik's (2017b) address to the collective demonstrates how the power asymmetries embedded in the museum's interactions with its publics systematically, and predictably undermine its own efforts at redress. Laden with a dense affectivity, the letter draws attention to how museum institutions often approach potential engagements with dissenting publics. The Rijksmuseum's address to dissent operates as 'non-address', much in the ways that the notion of the 'decolonial exhibition' is developed in this study. Zeefuik (2017b) attends to the museum's desire to control the narrative or co-opt the critique raised by the collective by refusing to engage the group in a public conversation on their terms, or as representative of a 'whole' in terms of the museum's sense of its public. The museum's refusal to participate in substantive public engagement performs what Zeefuik presents as a non-performative commitment to decolonisation, displacing

engagements with discomfort and friction with “drinking coffee in their offices and talking about intentions” (2017b).

Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s (2006, 2007) perspective, the museum’s address, or ‘non-address’ demonstrates Whiteness as a background to social action, so habitual that its actions can both be named, and not named. The nonperformativity of the Rijksmuseum’s invitation falls in line of the habits, and more specifically the institutional habits, and institutional speech acts that leverage the kind of regret that gives the institution interiority, while simultaneously augmenting the status of Whiteness as unnoticed and simultaneously worldly, particularly in how the museum constructs its ‘public’. The invitation to the museum’s offices for a discussion in Zeefuik’s (2017b) expression reveals the nature of how the museum’s institutional speech acts are intended to ‘work’, defined by Ahmed as ‘nonperformative’:

the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, but it is actually what the speech act is doing. In other words, the nonperformative does not ‘fail to act’ because of conditions that are external to the speech act: rather, it ‘works’ *because* it fails to bring about what it names. (2006: 105, emphasis original)

Nick Shepherd and Christian Ersten (2017) argue that the *Goede Hoop* exhibition is ‘misplaced’ in what they historicise as the ‘post- postapartheid’, contending that the exhibition’s flaws are entirely due to the Rijksmuseum’s failure to examine the history, representation, and politics of the present thoroughly. In Shepherd and Ersten’s (2017) perspective, a central question for the museum should have been: “how do we approach an exhibition like *Goede Hoop* after the events of #RhodesMustFall?”. This misplacement operates in at least two levels of my presentation: first, in mobilising the project of decolonisation as a response to the present in the sense that is developed in ‘decolonial exhibition’ a model, and

concept under pressure in my critique precisely in its nonperformative acts; and second, that the method of historicizing the 'post-apartheid' is narratively presented in the story-telling of the Rijksmuseum's exhibition to specifically mobilise a happy ending to colonial intimacy and injury at once.

#RhodesMustFall (#RMF), associated with #FeesMustFall (#FMF) and a series of other related #Fallist movements gained prominence and global attention in 2015, drawing attention to ongoing struggles in daily life in South Africa (Naidoo, 2015), along with a swelling of resistance against the epistemic violence (Motimele, 2019) implied in the significations of the post-apartheid as a historical break from a colonial past. The end of formal apartheid did not imply the end of coloniality as a systemic, structural, affective and epistemic problem most substantively understood as a world-system that gains its expression in the 16th and 17th centuries, despite the frequent logic of European imperialism and colonialism in its formal procedures in the 19th and 20th centuries (Wynter, 2003).

Suren Pillay argues that for the #RMF movement, "colonialism as a problem in society and in the university was identified as an ongoing one and therefore necessitated anticolonial political intervention to decolonise knowledge in the university" (2021: 389). The post- and rupture, or break from the vision of a vision of post-apartheid is highlighted in the Shepherd and Ernsten highlight two major criticisms #Fallist movements make of representation and history:

The first is a critique of episodic history, or the tendency to think of history as a series of discrete periods. [...] Perhaps their most radical idea is not to think of the past as past but as present, in the sense that it forms and conditions the contemporary moment. Structures and social relations from the past recur through time, often in new forms and disguises. Hence the return to the idea of the colonial as a way of naming the structural constraints of contemporary

society, and hence the call to 'decolonize' knowledge, the curriculum, and society itself. The second point concerns the perspective from which history is told and imagined. Precisely because colonial institutions and apartheid constructed Whiteness as power and Blackness as alterity, students in the #Fallist movement question what it means to develop a White gaze on Black histories. They talk about White bodies and Black bodies in former colonial institutions—universities, museums, galleries—and what it means to navigate such spaces. (2017: para 7).

Given that the Rijksmuseum, a national symbol of Dutch imperialism, had never before staged a sizeable exhibition critical of Dutch colonialism, the *Goede Hoop* project was an ambitious undertaking. The murder of George Floyd by police in the United States in 2020, in line with a series of collective actions of a swelling #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) to the scale of a transnational movement (Mupotsa, 2022; Rodriguez, 2022; Wong 2021) — giving visibility to the #BlackLivesMatter movement in Europe, and prominence to engagements with the colonial histories of the Netherlands (Chavin et. al. 2018; Ghorashi, 2023; Witte, 2019). The general environment in Dutch public discourse typically devolved discussion of colonial histories into irrational, violent denials of racism from White Dutch publics and were subsequently shut down. These transnational movements intensified the momentum of the efforts of Black/afro-Dutch anti-racism and anti-colonial movements in the Netherlands, includes Black Manifest, The Black Archives, Kick Out Zwarte Piet, and Zwarte Piet Is Racisme among many others. The staging of *Goede Hoop* in 2017 demonstrates shifts in public perceptions and willingness to engage in dialogues about colonialism and race due to these efforts.

I develop the term 'decolonial fronting' as a means to understand the Rijksmuseum's *Goede Hoop* exhibition as a social intervention within this context. The use of events such as #RMF, of #BLM, much like the anti-apartheid or the civil

rights movements are often operationalised in historical story-telling to mark an awareness of injury, while simultaneously disavowing it with the promise of racial justice. Nadia Fadil's (2023) 'The Will for Racial Justice' points to the affect of responses to these historical events, particularly for the sovereign states of Europe aiming to present themselves a post-racial society – which is echoed in Gurminder K. Bhambra's (2022) framing of the European 'decolonial project':

a project that acknowledges Europe's past as one largely constituted by its colonial activities and seeks to rethink Europe and its contemporary relations to the rest of the world on that basis.

[structured by omissions of the historical evolution of European identity]

The failure to acknowledge decolonization across the twentieth century occurs alongside the failure to acknowledge colonialism itself as central to the development of the modern world. As such, the first task of any decolonial project for Europe has to be to account for the colonial histories which have shaped it. (Bhambra, 2022: 230)

Read as a 'decolonial project', staging the *Goede Hoop's* exhibition in a museum that is widely regarded as an emblem of the Dutch Golden Age and Dutch imperial power operates in the terms of Fadil's 'promise':

Rather than treating them distinct stories, it is interesting to consider how the motive of optimism and pessimism rely on a shared engagement with a liberal story on racial justice and progress. While the optimists insist on the *potential* of progress and seek to highlight the potential of a further advancement, the pessimists, on the other hand, appear as disenchanted: they may have believed in this promise of racial justice, but have concluded that they are ultimately self-defeating. Both accounts, however, seem to rely on a shared commitment with racial progress as it is

framed and confined to a liberal and European/ Western treatment of the question.
(2023: 970)

The 'decolonial project' operates under the conditions of a 'threat' posed to European identity and its borders, what Mina Karavanta (2021) proposes as contending with the task of decolonizing the political imaginary of Europe, with the paradox of the extended period of neocolonial, and neoliberal relationships with colonial territories in what is presently configured under the rubric of the global south. This relationship is perhaps most evident in the refusal/ rejection of reparations that is explored in the final chapter of this dissertation. In critical museology and heritage scholarship, colonial histories are often categorised under "difficult heritage" or "heritage that hurts", and in the public imaginary of the Netherlands, given its sizeable imperial footprint, these hurtful histories have yet to be addressed with the kind of attentive rigour, honest reflexivity, and sensitivity they deserve. It seems critical in the treatment of the Netherlands' history as a national, modern and sovereign European state to address what the critical stakes are for place/ing the intimacy and injury of a relationship with South Africa as an articulation of its multicultural, or intercultural discursive strategy.

Rationale

Publics learn about and recollect their pasts in museums, and museum practice plays a crucial part in the retelling of national identity and colonial memory. Originating in Western Europe, museums originally functioned to classify, categorise, and represent cultures that were seen to be 'other'. Over recent decades, museums in Europe have undergone numerous changes in how they relate to their diverse publics. From monologue to dialogue and from mono-vocal to poly-vocal, these changes in praxis can be seen to coincide with increasing

demands from the museum publics to have a say in how “their” museums function to serve them.

In the context of the decolonial turn in critical heritage and curatorial studies, I am interested in how public European museums, through curatorial practice and the exhibition form, deal with their colonial pasts in the present. Specifically, how these institutions present and commemorate the history of colonisation, considering the haunting legacy of nineteenth-century technologies of museum display. The cultural objects belong to colonised peoples were historically presented as less cultured and primitive and remnants of these ideologies have yet to be exorcised from contemporary institutional exhibition practices.

Throughout the first two decades of the twenty-first century, major museums in Europe have produced exhibitions and programmes that claim to address Europe's colonial past. Moreover, shows in European cultural institutions claiming to have been curated from a decolonial curatorial perspective have become commonplace during the past decade. Several of these decolonial projects purport to address the colonial attitudes and racist legacies contained in Eurocentric practices of representation and curatorial sentiments as many European museums continue to claim ownership over, house, and exhibit objects from the global south. It is frequently the case, that in order to achieve these decolonial objectives, museum curators appeal to artists, researchers, and curators from outside the museum to generate solutions to these problematic legacies.

In the Dutch context, over the past ten to twelve years, museums have increasingly launched projects and exhibitions that are intended to think critically about the country's colonial past. In 2014 a major restructuring of the museum landscape in the Netherlands occurred when the Tropenmuseum merged with the Volkekunde

(Ethnographic) Museum in Leiden and the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal. Later, these museums merged with the Wereld (World) Museum in Rotterdam. These museums were then united under a new entity called the National Museum of World Cultures (NMWC), headed by Wayne Modest. In 2017, during the same year as the opening of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, the Tropenmuseum started the process of thinking through and relooking at its colonial pasts with the exhibition *Afterlives of Slavery*. In 2022, the Tropenmuseum opened its new permanent exhibition: *Our Colonial History*. Since the launch of *Goede Hoop* at the Rijksmuseum in 2017, the institution, under the leadership of Dibbits has opened two other exhibitions that address the Netherlands' history of colonialism, the most recent of these shows at the time of writing being *Revolusi! Indonesia Independent*, in 2022. Examples of exhibition projects and public programmes in museums and galleries that have claimed to take a decolonial approach to Dutch colonial pasts are listed in the non-exhaustive list below:

- *Read the Masks: Tradition is not Given*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2008.
- *Be(com)ing Dutch*, Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, 2008.
- *The Birth of Black Pete*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2014.
- *Re(as)sisting Narratives*, FramerFramed Gallery, Amsterdam, 2016.
- *Collections in Transition: Decolonising, Demodernising and Decentralising?*, Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, 2017.
- *Goede Hoop*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2017.
- *Afterlives of Slavery*, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam. 2017.
- *Trots of Schaamte? (Pride or Shame)*, Van Riebeeck Museum, Culemborg, 2019.
- *Black in Rembrandt's Time*, Het Rembrandthuis, Amsterdam, 2020.
- *Slavernij (Slavery)*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2021
- *The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past*, Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam, 2021.
- *Decolonial Futures of the Museum?*, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, 2022.

- *Our Colonial Inheritance*, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, 2022
- *Revolusi! Indonesia Independent*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2022.

This trend is troubling because the practices and strategies employed in these projects often work against the very ethos of what they claim to want to achieve and fail to address the real issues and legacies of colonialism, sometimes repeating or reinforcing colonial tropes of cultural and racial superiority. Consequently, the communities whose histories these museums aim to represent and include end up feeling further alienated.

The early chapters of this study develop a reading of the 'Our' constituted in the assumptive logics of these 'decolonial' exhibitions, which as I note, mark themselves as absent from the role of the Other whose historical formation is named not only as a community, or a history that is *a relation outside of the whole*. In the latter parts of this study, the constituent's relationship (at times in the form of 'communities') to the constitution of power the museum as an institution. This constitutive process becomes the rationalise a range of exhibiting practices, ranging from a lack of consultation with critical voices from the global south and within the Netherlands, to a reluctance to develop alternative and non-Eurocentric perspectives, as evidenced by the uncritical visual and textual elements that are often observed in these exhibitions. Moreover, these projects exemplify the institutionalisation of decolonial discourse, similar to the way institutional critique has been institutionalised and canonised.

As exhibitions are understood as both a physical space of display and a conceptual ground for reflection, my focus on the *Goede Hoop* exhibition probes the phenomenon of Europe's 'decolonial project' through the lens of 'decolonial' exhibitions to highlight the difficulties currently faced by European museums to

rework their collections through the decolonisation rhetoric, which often appears to have been co-opted and appropriated. The overarching question is whether decoloniality can be achieved in museum institutions when their pasts and presents are rooted in colonial extraction. While several museums across Europe seem to be grappling with their colonial histories and the colonial histories of the nations in which they are situated, fewer “are reasoning in terms of coloniality within, through which the institution produces and replicates structural inequality” (Caradonna, 2022: 59). Furthermore, what has this museological turn meant for the way that Afro-diasporic histories of slavery, colonialism, and decolonisation are exhibited, and what are the implications in terms of a catalysed decolonial response for the Netherlands?

I travelled to the Netherlands in May 2017 to see the *Goede Hoop* exhibition at the Rijksmuseum and was disappointed to find that it lacked a cohesive narrative that addressed the influence of the Dutch colonial past on contemporary South Africa, while the show’s marketing material had promised otherwise. Most disappointing to me was the curatorial approach taken towards depicting South Africa’s apartheid era, which was limited to a reticent display of Dutch anti-apartheid activism and solidarity. Moreover, the limited and fragmented historical treatment of the anti-apartheid liberation movement was centred on the African National Congress’s (ANC) initiatives to mount resistance and ignored contributions from other activist groups that are perhaps perceived to be more radical — for example, the Pan African Congress (PAC), led by Robert Sobukwe³. I attribute this omission both to the ways that the political transition from apartheid was packaged and framed

³ The PAC were interested in forming a “government of the Africans for the Africans” (Lissoni, 2009: 288) and were less concerned with minority rights. While the PAC’s Africanism found more resonance on the African continent than the ANC’s multi-racial approach (Lissoni, 2009: 288), their militant stance failed to resonate with the majority of South Africans (Kondlo, 2009). Moreover, while the ANC received funding from its wide networks of relations with factions of capital, which were part of its united front strategy, the PAC didn’t have access to these networks (Kondlo, 2009).

through a lens of 'rainbowism'⁴ to appease White fears within South Africa and outside of imminent Black rule, and as a nationalist strategy in 1994 to promote the 'new South Africa' on the global stage for Western consumption.

This visit raised several questions: why was this exhibition staged in 2017, and why at an art museum rather than a social history museum? Furthermore, what precipitated the need to represent the troubled colonial relationship through the rhetoric of resistance, as evidenced by the appropriation of graffiti-styled text and the inclusion of discarded placards collected by the curatorial team during the 2015 and 2016 #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall student protests at South African universities? Considering the exhibition statement that focuses on the shared histories of both countries, it is curious that an exhibition of this nature, framed by the museum as a form of decolonial aesthetics, seems to be about the museum positioning itself in the shifting political landscape in Europe. This is especially true as museums across the continent and other Western centres are engaged in processes of public reckoning with the acquisition histories of their collections and what to do with them in the future.

It is worth noting that the Rijksmuseum's first major exhibition on Dutch imperialism centres around the South African-Dutch colonial past, despite the more recent history of Dutch colonisation (in the ways that 'colonial' is understood as a political formation that meets its end through anticolonial nationalist liberation movements, or the advent of 'democracy') in countries like Curaçao and Suriname, both of which have large communities of descendants living in the Netherlands. This deliberate choice may have been made to gauge the reactions and responses of the Dutch public to a prominent national exhibition that portrays Dutch colonial history,

⁴ The notion of the 'Rainbow Nation' can be viewed as a form of "symbolic violence" that perpetuates the myth of a post-racial society while neglecting the structural systems that impede genuine social and economic justice (Vanyoro, 2015).

considering that the South African-Dutch colonial history is less-known in the Netherlands compared to the histories of Suriname or Curaçao. This mis-placement may also indicate what I present as subterfuge, or obfuscation of the background of Whiteness through the institutional habits of museums in constructing various interactions with their publics. In my concluding chapter, this model of collaboration presents the subjects of its constituency to mask the a world system and its constituent power, evidenced in this performance of consultation and collaboration with South African counterparts. Despite the fact that there were a number of interactions between curators and management of the Rijksmuseum and their South African counterparts at the Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG) during the research phase of the exhibition's planning, it does not appear that the two institutions had a collaborative working relationship (Valley, 2021).

Gosselink coedited the *Goede Hoop* catalogue, along with co-curators Holtrop, and Robert Ross (2017), featuring contributions from several prominent South Africans. The range of the selected contributors is curious, as almost all of the commentators have little knowledge or expertise in museum practice: historian and public intellectual Nigel Worden; political journalist and national radio show host Eusebius Mckaiser; and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, Mamokgethi Setati Phakeng for example. This choice of commentary has at least two implications: the over-application of surface-level research into a curatorial process that necessitated a robust approach; the intentions of the exhibition to approach its publics through a generalized, perhaps even sentimental gesture. There are several South African scholars, artists, and authors whose work confronts the entangled colonial relationship between South Africa and the Netherlands, that were not consulted for contributions to the exhibition and catalogue.

I examine the *Goede Hoop* exhibition besides several other representations of colonial pasts in order to draw connections between the politics of exhibition practices and notions of epistemic justice and social intervention. Despite a latent presence, even attachment to Dutch material culture and symbolism in South Africa, the converse of this relationship is largely absent from public culture and national history in the Netherlands. The occlusion of an intimacy with South African colonial histories within the Dutch public imaginary that presents *Goede Hoop's* intervention as a *social intervention* relies on the worldliness of Dutch nation-making. Drawing once again from Ahmed's description of worldliness:

We might even expect such projects to fail, and be prepared to witness this failure as productive. And yet, we can get stuck in this position, endlessly caught up in describing what we are doing to Whiteness, rather than what Whiteness is doing. [...] I want to consider whiteness as a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience, and how this disappearance makes Whiteness 'worldly'. To put this simply, what I offer here is a vocabulary for redescribing how Whiteness becomes 'worldly'. Whiteness describes the very 'what' that coheres as a world. [...] We can consider how Whiteness becomes worldly as an effect of reification. Reification is not then something we do to Whiteness, but something Whiteness does, or to be more precise, what allows Whiteness to be done.

[...]

I re-pose the question of Whiteness as a phenomenological issue, as a question of how whiteness is lived as a background to experience. In so doing, [I] consider what 'Whiteness' does without assuming Whiteness as an ontological given, but as that which has been received, or become given, over time. Whiteness could be described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space. (Ahmed, 2007: 150)

Where South Africa's colonial histories are visible, they reveal partial viewpoints that primarily elevate the Dutch position, which is often based on falsehoods and assumptions of superiority. In focusing on the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, I investigate how the cultural mirroring apparent in the exhibition's curation reflects ideas about subject and object, self and other, (Valley, 2021) and to engage with the complexity of the decolonial turn as it manifests in European exhibitions about colonialism.

Since my first impression of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition was that it retrospectively projected Dutch and South African identities back in time, I address the gaps created through the adoption of this approach. An example is the misrepresentation or rather, the failure to represent the San Genocide. Curiously, the *Goede Hoop* exhibition shied away from acknowledging the genocide and shows "how exhibition practice cements a partial and limited visual legacy" (Valley, 2021). By disregarding the San Genocide, the exhibition fails to address the atrocities committed against the San people, contributing to a skewed and inadequate representation of colonial experiences. Through the lens of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, it becomes evident that museum institutions often engage in a practice of suppressing the full extent of colonial horrors. By presenting imagined histories that downplay or overlook the brutal realities of colonialism, museums inadvertently shield the public from confronting uncomfortable truths. In doing so, these institutions perpetuate a distorted narrative that fails to reflect the depth and magnitude of suffering experienced by colonised communities, effectively perpetuating a sanitised version of history.

Goede Hoop: South Africa and the Netherlands from 1600, presented the opportunity to engage with the enduring impacts of imperialist museum and exhibition practices in the Netherlands, while locating these practices as the contemporary mode of colonial representation even as they are reassessed, or

addressed by museums and curators. The 'decolonial exhibition' assembles this promise, as well as the means by which refusal and rejection are sustained and systematic to present-day museum practice. Examining this exhibition from this premise also allows me to analyse refusal from an alternative premise, particularly as this is expressed by artists, scholars and activists on this subject who continue to not only engage with exhibiting, but the public work of these institutions, as well as the forms of being constituent to all aspects of these formations.

Focal Research Problem and Research Questions

Problem Statement

In spite of their presentation as benevolent gestures, decolonial exhibitions claiming to represent colonialism in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe are frequently the subject of contentious public debates. They fail to address colonialism from the perspectives of formerly colonised nations/communities/individuals and their concerns around the restitution of stolen cultural heritage and human remains reparations for colonial violence and retributive justice. The *Goede Hoop* exhibition, is utilised to assess the broader phenomenon of the decolonial turn in exhibition-making in European museums, and how it contributes to the ongoing formation of the Dutch sense of self.

Research Questions

This dissertation considers whether curatorial interventions can address and unsettle the legacies of colonial power and subjective authority embedded in museum practice.

The key research question is: Considering the curatorial disjuncture of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, can interventions in the form of exhibitions that deal with colonial

pasts unsettle the colonial/colonised gaze in institutions that were specifically designed for this purpose?

To engage with broader questions of how one would start curating exhibitions on colonial pasts differently to develop new meanings, knowledge and new forms of exhibiting and curating, the following sub-questions are central to this study:

- I. Considering the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, how are postcolonial 'relations' represented in European museums in the contemporary?
- II. Is the museum institution the appropriate space for interventions that present counter-hegemonic understandings of colonialism, given that many European museums haven't truly examined and reflected on the ways that they themselves have benefited and continue to benefit from colonialism?
- III. What is meant by decolonisation, particularly with reference to museums?
- IV. How might the relationality between the Netherlands and South Africa be perceived in the contemporary?
- V. How can the violence of colonialism be addressed by European museums without re-affirming and re-enacting notions of European supremacy?

Conceptual Framework

Developing an analytic and method concerned with responsive and affective curatorial practice, I explore the concept of the exhibition as a social intervention, or that connects conceptions of epistemic or cognitive injustice to curatorial and exhibition practice. Considering the contradictory nature of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, there is a sense that the Rijksmuseum sought to intervene in the manner in which colonial relations between the two countries are represented. Recognising

the inherent dogmatism of the museum exhibition, I offer an interrogation of the theoretical viability of 'showing' the decolonial condition.

Joshua Decker and Helmut Draxler's (2014) propose the notion of exhibition as a social intervention on several premises: that exhibiting involves processual and cooperative practices that gather their publics through negotiated social encounters, multiple networks and co-production with these audiences; that in operating as a social intervention, exhibiting maintains an attentiveness to historical formations, sites, forms, conventions and the conceptual inscriptions that mediate who the museum, or exhibitions 'public' is. In this edited volume, Draxler elaborates further on the exhibitionary and discursive practices inherited to this notion:

The exhibitionary includes ways of arranging and presenting objects or displaying information; ways of addressing, assembling and guiding people; and ways of interacting symbolically with those objects or information via conversation, education, marketing or critique, in which the discursive has become a means of intervening into the exhibitionary situation through voiced debates and targeted questioning. (Morris and O'Neill, 2014: 10)

I make use of the notion of 'exhibiting' that is more than the act of presenting an exhibition to the public; it is a dynamic and ongoing practice of epistemological production that includes research, interpretation of materials, objects and collections, and engagements with collaborators and publics. It also incorporates ideological positions, biases and power disparities. Thus, the practice of exhibiting requires self-reflexivity, and understanding that no piece of 'knowledge' is ever complete. The conception of exhibiting invites curating practitioners to reflect on their own prejudices and positionality to make room for

the notion that ideas and approaches need to be constantly reworked and at times abandoned entirely to respond to changing contexts or circumstances.

I use the concept of the exhibition as social intervention to show how, through practices of display, museums enact the knowledge they create through exhibition practices. In the museum context, this conceptual approach involves a cautious engagement with positionality and epistemic violence. In his 2009 essay, Walter Mignolo encourages his readers to question "For whom and when, why and where knowledge is generated?" (2009: 2), to foreground that it is crucial to pay attention to *who* intervenes and how this influences the interpretation and representation of colonial history. As already established, the museum is not a neutral site of display. It is regarded as a context where feelings about others as "others" materialise in a particular geometry of power relations (Tolia-Kelly, 2016: 897). The museum is a container for residues of knowledge built on colonial hierarchies of cultures and their racist underpinnings.

On the other hand, museums and galleries have the potential to become sites of visual representation where colonial knowledges are contested. However, as Mark W. Rectanus (2020) concludes, it is imperative to consider that while museum professionals may be positioned to incite some forms of institutional change from within, they are also subject to institutional networks of dependency, including institutional politics, external funding, and the financialisation of social and cultural relations. Consequently, it is critical to understand the positionality of the agents who develop exhibition narratives. It is equally important to recognise who is doing the representing as it is to know who or what is being represented and how it is being represented.

My approach to positionality is influenced by Ramón Grosfoguel's (2011) argument that any practice or endeavour to decolonise knowledge must give due consideration and weight to the epistemic viewpoints, cosmologies, and insights of critical thinkers hailing from the global south, who approach their analyses from the vantage point of subalternised racial, ethical, spatial, and bodily experiences. Thus, I contend that Western/European museums cannot claim to decolonise their geopolitical viewpoints and epistemologies without engaging the anti-colonial approaches to curatorial and exhibition practices and theories that have emerged in the global south.

Feminist and anti-colonial scholars remind us that we always speak from a particular location in a global system of power structures (Dussel, 2008) and that our knowledge is always situated (Haraway, 1988). Mignolo (2002) refers to this as the geopolitics of knowledge, while Ramon Grosfoguel (2011), and Frantz Fanon (1967) use the term "body-politics of knowledge", drawing attention to the "geo-political and body-political location of the subject that speaks" (Grosfoguel, 2011: 6). As a scholar studying the curation and display of the colonial material culture of the global south and as an "outsider" to the Netherlands, it is important for me to discuss my positionality in this context, in an acknowledgement that the "pedagogical encounter is full of angles" (Ahmed, 2004: 10). Further, as noted by Gaile Polhaus Jr. (2012: 720), outsider status and marginal situatedness may lead to more "objective knowledge" as "it is from marginalised situatedness that the inadequacy of our epistemic resources for making sense of parts of the experienced world is noticed". Polhaus Jr. further argues that marginally situated knowers are therefore in a position to notice inadequacies in *[our]* epistemic resources that are more entrenched" (2012: 720).

South Africa's Dutch-colonial past is interwoven with my personal history, creole familial lineage and aspects of my identity, as evidenced by my mother's family name: Van Wyk (or Van Wijk in the original Dutch) and in my parents' mother tongue, Afrikaans, the creole language derived from Dutch, seafarer variants of Malay, Portuguese, Indonesian and the indigenous Khoekhoe and San languages. One of the first recorded instances of my mother's surname, Van Wyk emerges in The baptism record of Willem Van Wijck⁵, who was baptised on 8 May 1712 at the Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) in Stellenbosch, Caep de Goede Hoop. Between 1652 and 1795, the Cape Colony was a part of the vast network of Indian Ocean colonies, where the abduction and trading of humans constituted a significant component of economic activity. Parts of my paternal lineage are connected to the Indian Ocean histories of forced migration dominated by the VOC (Dutch East India Company) in the seventeenth century when Indonesian and Indian people first entered South Africa as enslaved labourers through its ports. My great-grandfather, Mohammed Valley⁶ first entered the port of Cape Town onboard a British trading vessel in the late 1800s.

Kirin Narayan (1993) captures the interactivity of positionality, power, and knowledge with her discussion of 'positioned knowledges and partial perspectives'. She writes:

To acknowledge particular and personal locations is to admit the limits of one's purview from these positions. It is also to undermine the notion of

⁵ The story of Willem Van Wijck is particularly curious because he married the daughter of a Nama chief, Lysje, in a Khoe marital ceremony and was initiated (known as 't Kammi) into the Khoe society to which he married (Elphick and Shell, 1992: 158-159). The marriage between Willem and Lysje raises crucial questions concerning love partnerships and marriages between the Dutch and indigenous people during the early period of Dutch colonisation, and what this meant for social lives in the colony at the time. We are aware that in late colonial South African society, multi-ethnic relationships were publicly discouraged by both the Boers (Dutch descendants) and later the British colonialists, as race, class, and gender became increasingly intertwined with imported European notions of social hierarchy that were eventually legislated.

⁶ Likely spelled Vally at the time, a surname with origins in the Gujarat region of India.

objectivity, because from particular locations all understanding becomes subjectively based and forged through interactions within fields of power relations (1993: 679).

Positionality is crucial in understanding the epistemic underpinnings of museum discourse. In the seminal text on colonialism and race, *The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power*, Stuart Hall underlies the importance of discourse "as a crucial medium between the production of knowledge and subsequent representation of reality. In other words, the way of talking about and creating knowledge about something shapes the ways we understand it and act upon it" (2018: 86)⁷. Similarly, the North-South divide is constructed and historically formed in response to global economic structures, as Lynn Doty (1996: 2) argues that "North-South relations have been characterized by practices that have been implicated in the production of meanings and identities. These meanings and identities cannot be separated from the relations that have developed between the North and the South". A consequential element that is present in the encounters between North and South has been "practices of representation by the North of the South" (Doty, 1996: 2), as Doty reminds us of the ways in which the South has been discursively represented by scholars, museums practitioners, artists, journalists and others that engage in representation practices in the North⁸.

⁷ Hall makes the point that "the west" as a regime of knowledge relied heavily on archival documents, myth and folklore, fictional writings, and government reports. Each of these forms of knowledge played a role in how "the west" became constructed in government, intellectual circles and the popular imagination. Hall emphasises that with sufficient time and effort, certain ways of understanding and talking about the world can become so natural or taken for granted that they can become to be seen as "true" and in doing so, make it difficult for alternative understandings of the world to take root (Hall, 2018: 86).

⁸ Doty argues that this "does not refer to the "truth" and "knowledge" that the North has discovered and accumulated about the South, but rather to the ways in which regimes of "truth" and "knowledge" have been produced...Thinking in terms of representational practices calls our attention to an economy of abstract binary oppositions that we routinely draw upon and that frame our thinking. Developed/underdeveloped, "first world"/"third world," core/periphery, metropolis/satellite, advanced industrialized/less developed, modern/traditional, and real states/quasi-states are just a few that readily come to mind" (Doty, 1996: 2).

The concept of the exhibition as intervention, as a means of disturbing formally created power relations, is interwoven with positionality. To address questions of who has a voice; who doesn't and who is being acknowledged and engaged with in exhibition practice, I draw on scholarship that examines the operation of social power in epistemic interactions. Given that, at their core, museums have an epistemological mandate, I make use of Gayatri Spivak's (1988) conception of epistemic violence, Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of Epistemic Injustice, a hermeneutical and marginalising injustice that is expressed in K'eguro Macharia's (2016) lament:

This dissonance between the said and the heard registers. (182)

The thing-making labour of colonial modernity demands rubrics other than those of inclusion/exclusion, inside/out, subject/abject, majority/minority. And nothing is quite as futile as trying to occupy or reclaim a negating space. (186)

Tavia Nyong'o's (2014) reading of Spivak is instructive, as they note Spivak's discussion on the politics of representation inherent to the stakes of this discussion. The meaning of the word 'representation' bears to meanings, 'to represent' can mean 'to depict or portray' (darstellen); it can also mean 'to speak or decide for' (vertreten). Nyong'o's continues,

Spivak is sometimes understood as taking the position that any act of minoritarian or subaltern speech, when within a hegemonic discourse, can only reproduce the terms of subordination guaranteed by that discourse. But I read her instead suggesting that there is always a space of intervention, if only sometimes a hairline fracture, between the two senses of representation: vertreten and darstellen. However, much they can and do align, it is their tendency to pull out of sync with each other, for their alignment to be less than seamless, that enables possibilities" (2014: 72).

Research Design and Methodology

While the public museum as we know it today has its roots in the European enlightenment and colonial modernity, the museum project was exported, via the European voyages of colonial conquest to many other parts of the world. Many of the museums that were built in the settler colonies, for example in South Africa, are now in ruins, facing challenges of relevance, lack of patronage and ailing infrastructure⁹. These museums are vestiges of the past that are among the many burdensome ruins of colonialism, the inherited debris we are left with, haunting the present and competing with the thinking and innovative contributions that curators and museum workers in these contexts often bring to these spaces. While museums of the South, too, need to engage with the challenge of decolonisation, my focus in this dissertation is on the phenomenon of European museums facing the task of decolonising their collections, processes and programming.

The case study of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition allows me to discuss and analyse the emergence of the 'decolonial exhibition' that has become commonplace in European and or Western museums. While the *Goede Hoop* exhibition is located in Amsterdam in a specific temporal moment, I contend that it points to a larger continent-wide cultural phenomenon that has gained traction in museums and other institutional spaces since the late 2000's, informed by Europe's 'decolonial project'. As Helen Simons (2014: 455) asserts, "a case study, in common parlance, documents a particular situation or event in detail in a specific socio-political context". To expand on this definition, I propose that a close reading of the *Goede Hoop* case study and its context, may point to broader cultural, political and social shifts. Case study research is not defined by methods and methodology (Simons,

⁹ Examples of this in South Africa include but are not limited to the Johannesburg Art Gallery, built in 1915.

2014) and thus the approach taken is qualitative, as emphasis is placed on the experiential and presentational rather than the propositional. Further, a qualitative research methodology engages in-depth perspectives in the examination of a specific research topic and primarily relies on language (i.e., textual information over numerical data) to contribute to diverse knowledge systems in numerous humanities disciplines (Ndimande, 2012). Due to the fact that I will be engaging with non-quantifiable data, a qualitative study is the most appropriate approach for this research.

The role of affect and emotion in conducting this research is acknowledged here. Emotive responses to the research material includes my personal affective responses to first viewing the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, while also acknowledging the ways that gathering or generating data have in drawing researchers into relationships (Bondi, 2007). According to Liz Bondi, these “might be relationships with texts, with numerical datasets, or with the interfaces through which such data are extracted or analysed” (Bondi, 2007: 236). further, research methods that “draw directly upon interpersonal interactions, such as interviews require researchers to use themselves in distinctive ways since the people with whom they interact are also sentient, feeling human beings” (Bondi, 2007: 236). While qualitative research often requires of researchers to be reflexive, by reflecting on positionality, it is equally important to reflect on emotional states and responses to cultural material.

From this premise, the ‘case study’ is developed in another direction, through Lauren Berlant’s (2007) presentation of the affectivity of ‘the case’. Footnoting the narrative method of the case study as a qualitative method, Berlant notes “the descriptive and interpretive processes of determining likeness, generally patterning and whose interest in typification often (incoherently) produces evidences of singularity as the optimistic moment of excess or surplus to its very analytic

activity”(2007: 663). This articulation of the method operates besides the opening statements of the article, “[t]he case represents a problem-event that has animated some kind of judgment. Any enigma could do — a symptom, a crime, a causal variable, a situation, a stranger, or any irritating obstacle to clarity. What matters is the idiom of the judgment” (Berlant 2007: 663) Articulated as such, the normative ways that organizes publics, authority, and expertise. What makes this a case is its example as a site of intensity, the extended affectivity of the ‘decolonial project’ and the ‘decolonial exhibition’.

The idea of ‘the exhibition’ and the practice of ‘exhibitioning’ are brought to the forefront, not *just* as a the object of research, but also as a critical concern in contemporary visual culture. The notions of presenting or showing objects to an audience are associated with the concept of exhibiting, and while the exhibition’s accessibility to the general public is undoubtedly important, so too is the opportunity to examine the subtle but significant boundaries between what is supposed to be publicly shown and what is meant to remain in the background, often unnoticed but always present. Exhibition Studies is an emerging sub-discipline in the Museum and Curatorial Studies disciplines, contesting and redefining fundamental canonical and methodological limits in art research. Like museums, exhibitions, as an object of study, is essentially a social phenomenon and requires an interdisciplinary approach (Bal, 2005; and Elkins, 2012).

This project’s mode of interpretative practice of draws insights from autoethnographic research methods where “describing and analysing one’s subjective engagement and personal experience is used to approach the understanding of cultural experiences” (Adams, Jones, and Ellis, 2015: 1-2). In this sense, I draw from my own experience of visiting the *Goede Hoop* exhibition in 2017, with particular attention placed on how witnessing the presentation of South African colonial history in a Dutch museum evoked powerful personal and affective

responses that ranged from a haunting sense of loss and disorientation to anger and frustration, and the feeling of the need to intervene. These feelings acted as the impetus for writing this thesis. Thus, my positionality and situatedness are central to the method and approaches I have employed in the completion of this study. Using a reflexive journaling approach, I documented how I felt as I walked through the Goede Hoop exhibition, *observing* the spatial arrangement and design of each room and the texts and objects on display, noting my emotional reaction and thus paying attention to the exhibition's affective grammar as it ushered my body through the space. This included paying attention to lighting, sounds, temperature of the space, the colour palette and design of the exhibition. In addition, I also made a note of observing the reactions of other visitors to the exhibition.

This principle and practice applies to the study's engagement with various objects and methods of documentation. This information communicates tacit and overt messages about the content of the exhibition and the curatorial decisions made by the museum (Tucker, 2014: 342). Detailed photographs were made of the exhibition display, and this material was subsequently analysed. The research began with a detailed description and analysis of the exhibition, with attention given to the following:

- Architecture of museum buildings.
- Floor layout and design of exhibitions.
- Written texts: autobiographies of the curators, annual reports, reviews of *Goede Hoop*, scholarly articles and online media.
- Exhibition catalogues.
- Online promotional material.
- Personal accounts, photographs of displays and other images.

- My personal experience of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition in 2017 and other exhibitions running concurrently at museums in Amsterdam that also analysed Dutch colonial histories (for example, *Afterlives of Slavery* at the Tropenmuseum in 2017).
- A discursive analysis of the technologies of the museum such as: technologies of display: vitrines, open displays, internal layout, etc.
- Textual and visual technologies of interpretation: e.g. labels and captions, information panels and catalogues.
- I visited various cultural sites in the Netherlands, such as the Black Archives, the National Archives in the Hague, and several museums in the city of Amsterdam that represent the city's histories.

Supported by recorded dialogues and unstructured and semi-structured conversations, the methodological approach is ultimately sustained by a series of unstructured conversations and discussions with interlocutors rather than formal interviews. I conducted a series of online conversations with Holtrop, one of the curators at the Rijksmuseum who curated both the *Goede Hoop* and *Slavernij* exhibitions. The conversations with Holtrop were facilitated in a way to elicit information about the museum's curatorial objectives, object selection, textual information and intended audiences. Further, conversations and interviews were conducted with artists Phumzile Twala and Smangaliso Sibiya, who attended an exchange in the Netherlands in 2017 and had multiple interactions with the *Goede Hoop* curators and the Rijksmuseum director, Dibbits. Unstructured discussions with Dutch activists Marjan Boelsma and Jesse de Abreau revealed their perspectives on the reception of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition by Dutch audiences, in particular afro/Black Dutch publics. Hayden Proud, former curator of Painting at the Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG), discussed the Rijksmuseum's relationship with ISANG and other local museums in an email exchange.

Thesis Structure

Chapter two provides a summation of the literature consulted for this dissertation. While not all the sources consulted are included in the review, the chapter consolidates the theoretical dispositions of the thesis.

The following chapter presents the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, using this example to illustrate the means by which the often-flawed curatorial decisions and strategies employed in decolonial exhibitions like it, are not innocuous. While *Goede Hoop's* curatorial team may have been committed to challenging public knowledge of the Dutch colonial past, the exhibition itself seems to be at odds with the very idea of the Rijksmuseum and its core purpose of celebrating Dutchness. I address the trend or phenomenon as seen in recent decades where museums across Europe have responded to critiques of their structural complicity in colonialism by staging revisionist exhibitions that aim to 'decolonise' these institutions or their displays. What is made apparent through the analysis of *Goede Hoop*, is that there are limits to the institution's willingness to reimagine how the national colonial narrative of the Netherlands has shaped its identity and the histories it puts on display.

Chapter four considers the national image of tolerance, benevolence and compassion that has been attributed to Dutchness and the ways that this is entangled with the White Dutch sense of self. *Goede Hoop's* curatorial approach appears blinded to how the White Dutch sense of self governs the relationship with those it considers other, both in the Netherlands and abroad, and how this connects to colonial logics of race. In the Netherlands this is best illustrated by the differentiation between the allochthon and autochthon identities ('native' and 'of foreign birth'). The curators present the oppressive Dutch rule in the colonies as an aberration from the tolerant, progressive Dutch sense of self and its modern European values. *Goede Hoop* exemplifies the paradox of how the Dutch choose to

forget colonial pasts that bring up feelings of discomfort that are at odds with its self-image of progressive tolerance and benevolence, yet continue to celebrate certain aspects of this past (e.g. the 'Gouden Eeuw' (Golden Age) narrative). In addition to considering how popular notions of nationalism, nativism, race, and ethnicity are incorporated into the curatorial practices of the Rijksmuseum, I discuss how this emerges in the *Goede Hoop* exhibition as a curatorial grammar of ignorance, evasion, omission, and denial.

Chapter five employs the notions of haunting, the spectre and afterlife as a metaphor for coloniality. Haunting is seen here as an agitation, a call to action to deal with the unfinished business of colonial violence. The chapter presents the artworks of three artists that contend with the idea that to recognise and reckon with the spectre is necessary for the move towards social justice.

Chapter six thinks through the affective nature of exhibitions, by assessing how emotive responses shape representation practices. In this regard, Divya P. Tolia-Kelly (2016) argues "that cultural heritage is articulated through curatorial frameworks and logics that enable affective responses, circulations and capacities to disturb, give pain and sadden". When viewing the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, I felt the uncanny feeling of mirroring or seeing myself represented through the eyes of others, the experience that W. E. B. Du Bois' (1903) calls 'double consciousness'. Edlie Wong's discussion of Du Bois's 'colour line' as a global problematic, to "show the strange feeling of being Black ... at the dawn of the Twentieth Century" (Du Bois 1903: 5; cited in Wong, 2021: 466). The relation, or relationality formed in the individual and collective forms of identification through Du Bois's conception of 'the Veil' through which the Black subject sees themselves, and themselves as they are represented in the world cohere in such an experience. The feelings of discomfort were particularly striking as it became clear that no South Africans had been part of

the authorship of the exhibition. At the same time, it was unsettling to witness White, European others looking at what was intended to be a representation of 'my' history. In tracing the Rijksmuseum's own efforts to deal with the politics of affect based on their experience with *Goede Hoop*, this chapter addresses how feeling and the senses contribute to the work of undermining, challenging, and refiguring imperial representational narratives in exhibitions on colonialism.

Chapter seven links conceptions of epistemic injustice and cognitive injustice to exhibitionary practice. It considers the requirements needed to critically engage with the idea of a decolonial practice of exhibiting, where colonial pasts are shown in European museums that is neither comfortable nor easy. In order to move towards a just museum sector, "museum institutions like the Rijksmuseum need to reflect on what it would mean to decolonise their museum practices when de

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter employs the metaphors of spectrality and haunting to delve into the enduring effects of colonialism, encompassing violence and loss. Following this premise, a focus on the representations of Dutch colonial history in South Africa leads to an examination of the conceptualisations of colonialism, coloniality, and decoloniality put forth by influential anti-colonial and decolonial theorists. The discussion that follows this centres on the museum exhibition as a vital tool for constructing meaning and generating knowledge, while considering its potential to serve as an interventionist platform that might challenge dominant narratives and fosters social justice. The last sections of the literature review explore scholarship on the museum as a political and discursive space, and it culminates in an examination of the emerging trend of 'decolonising' museums in Europe, which has gained notable prominence in recent decades.

Afterlives: Hauntology, The Spectre, Ghosts

In this dissertation the notions of spectrality and haunting are used as metaphors for the afterlives of colonialism. In particular, concepts of the ghost and haunting are employed here to address the non-temporal states of trauma in response to colonial violence as well as its parallel processes of resistance. Conditions of coloniality, like settler colonial whiteness for example, are "ghostly in that [they] remain un(re)marked, transparent in [their] self-evidentiality (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2013: 310). Eve Tuck and C. Ree see haunting as the "relentless remembering and reminding that all will not be appeased by settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation. Haunting is both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies" (2013: 642). For Avery Gordon (2008), "spectres or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize, is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view" (Gordon, 2008: xvi). In

other words, when the disturbances brought about by the appearance of the ghosts are untenable and cannot be ignored or invisibilised any longer. Gordon writes that “this confrontation requires a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of production” (Gordon, 2008: 7).

Hauntology is a concept introduced by Jacques Derrida (1994) in his work *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* and is commonly thought to be the catalyst for what some scholars have called the “spectral turn” (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2013: 2)¹⁰. ‘Hauntology’ (Hauntologie, in Derrida’s original French text) juxtaposes the concepts of ‘haunting’ and ‘ontology’, and it refers to the idea of lingering, ghostly traces of the past that continue to impact and shape the present. Derrida’s notion of hauntology builds on Marx’s idea that history is not a linear progression, but rather a complex web of relations and contradictions. Derrida argues that the past, even if seemingly dead or buried, continues to haunt the present in the form of spectres or ghosts. These spectres are the traces of ideologies, beliefs, and structures from the past that continue to influence and disrupt the present, often in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

Derrida’s spectre occupies a space of liminality, between life and death; presence and absence (Davis, 2013) and does not sit comfortably with traditional modes of knowing. Recognising this, Derrida’s contention is for us to listen to the spectre, “despite the reluctance inherited from our intellectual traditions and because of the challenge posed to them” (Davis, 2013: 56). Hauntology, according to Byron Good (2020: 414) “stands alongside, and in close relationship to studies of violence—interpersonal, gender, or political violence—and its persistent effects in post-conflict societies”. It is also closely positioned to studies of “historical forgetting and remembering, to silences as well as the

¹⁰ del Pilar Blanco and Peeren (2013: 10) point out however, that while Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* is often seen to stand at the origin of the so-called ‘spectral turn’, “it would go against the spirit of the specter—and Derrida’s elaboration of it to assign a unitary genesis to what was in fact a diffuse[d], extended cultural moment”.

partiality of that which is spoken—and to the eruption of ghosts of the past and the hidden present at unexpected moments” (Good, 2020: 414).

Haunting is not restricted to people. Rather, places, objects, memories, art and speech can be haunted. Toni Morrison’s (1989) argument that “invisible things are not necessarily not-there” are echoed in Michael Mayerfeld Bell’s idea of ‘ghosts’ as not referring to the dead, but of a felt presence, *geist* or *genius*. I want to add here that while ghosts may be invisible to a certain stratum of society, they are seen, felt, and may have to be confronted, by others. Subjectivity inflects structural positions in the scenario of haunting—*who is being haunted by whom* (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2013). The ghosts of place, Mayerfeld Bell contends, are more than collective or individual memories and “the ghosts of a place are not only ghosts of the past; they can as well be of the present, and even the future. However we locate them temporally, the ghosts of place are always presences and as such appear to us a spirits of temporal transcendence, of connection between past and future” (Mayerfeld Bell, 1997: 816). This sensed presence referred to here can be thought of as atmospheric and forms part of the layered meaning of place.

Gordon’s (1997; 2008) work on haunting and the spectre tries to articulate a sense of the spectre and its social and political effects. For Gordon, haunting gives notice that “what appears to be invisible or in the shadows is announcing itself” (Gordon, 2013: 113). Gordon further contends that Raymond Williams’ notion of “structures of feeling” is “perhaps the most appropriate description of how hauntings are transmitted and received” (2013: 115). She further elaborates: “in haunting, organised forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations and confounds the social separations themselves” (Gordon, 2013: 116). Using Morrison’s concept of “rememory”, Viviane Saleh-Hanna proposes the concept of Black

Feminist Hauntology¹¹ to provide a framework that is intent upon exorcising 'Colonial Systems of Control' (Saleh-Hanna, 2008).

Saleh-Hanna contends that Black Feminist Hauntology is "a socio-philosophical study of ghosts through whom we can locate the abusive and morally bankrupt nature of structural race relations as they manifest through the violent race-making and land-grabbing conquests of colonialism" (Saleh-Hanna, 2021: 1). Similarly, the scholar Saidiya Hartman's work focuses on the idea that the past is not simply a thing of the past, but that it continues to shape and haunt the present. She argues that the history of slavery and its legacy of violence and oppression continues to impact the lives of Black women today, and that this history must be acknowledged and confronted in order to move towards a more just and equitable future. One of Hartman's key contributions to black feminist hauntology is her emphasis on the importance of "critical fabulation" (Hartman, 2008). This concept refers to the use of imagination and storytelling to recover the experiences of marginalised groups who have been silenced or erased from history. Hartman argues that these stories can be used to create new visions of the future and to challenge the dominant narratives that perpetuate systems of oppression. The spectre of Dutch colonial history relentlessly haunts South African society in the present and yet, this haunting presence goes largely underacknowledged in representation practice.

Representations of Dutch Colonialism in South Africa

Although the history of the Dutch empire is interconnected with both past and present South African society, the countless archaeological fragments and objects, artworks, exhibits, symbolism, architectural markings and monuments, names of

¹¹ Saleh-Hanna proposes this as a counter analysis to broken conceptions of time and bodies that critiques dominant, White supremacist constructions of colonized/colonizing, enslaved/enslaving, and imprisoned/imprisoning bodies, lives, deaths, histories" (2021: 1).

places, buildings and other vestiges of the past that make up South Africa's visible colonial remains falls short of providing a nuanced historical account of this history. I contend that this failure is primarily caused by the ideological restraints of cultural and educational institutions, but it is also partially attributable to the reliance on conventional and uncritical exhibitionary practices and the limited historical accounts that are extracted from existing archival materials. To foreground the discussion on representations of the Dutch colonial past in South Africa, I will briefly discuss the scholarship that gives an account of this history.

The theoretical literature on Dutch colonialism in South Africa frequently centres around the experiences of Jan van Riebeeck, the Dutch commander who played a crucial role in establishing a refreshment outpost in Table Bay. This outpost was a crucial component of the Dutch East India Company's efforts to expand their trade network in the Indian Ocean (Gilomee, 2003; Marbeck, 2004; Ward, 2008; Schrire, 2014). At the time of Dutch occupation at the Cape, the notion of South Africa as a country did not exist and the lands the Dutch encountered when they docked their ships at Table Bay were inhabited by pastoralist Khoekhoe and hunter-gatherer San communities¹².

Prior to South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, the prevailing narrative of the nation's origins as told by the apartheid state revolved around Jan van Riebeeck, who was portrayed as the first European to interact with the Khoekhoe people. This narrative, fabricated by British and Dutch colonialists and perpetuated by Afrikaner nationalists during apartheid, aimed to mythologise and legitimise the European settler occupation. In offering a collective history, this narrative provided a sense of identity for the growing and increasingly diverse White settler

¹² Archaeological research shows that what is currently known as the greater Cape Town area, was first occupied by San peoples who lived as hunter-gatherers and migrated throughout the southern region of the African continent for thousands of years (Mountain, 2003; Worden, 2012).

communities. Witz (2003) and Witz and Rasool (1993) show how the Dutch colonial past was mythologised and mobilised by the Afrikaner nationalist government to build and solidify the nation state during apartheid through their staging of the Van Riebeeck festival of 1952.

Van Riebeeck's arrival was perpetuated by the British artist Charles Bell in the painting *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* (1850). Bell's painting, which immortalises van Riebeeck in the historic imaginary, is also the first image selected for the *Goede Hoop* catalogue edited by Gosselink, Holtrop and Ross (2017) (Fig. 1). In the painting, van Riebeeck, the first commander of the VOC's settlement in the Cape, meets a group of "awestruck, primitive Khoes" (Mellet, 2020: 103). The Dutch settlers are dressed in period-style European clothing, brandishing regalia, and are bathed in illuminating directional light while the Khoes men, whom they tower over, are cast in shadow. Bell conjures an image of the meeting between the Dutch colonists and indigenous African people as a metaphor for the supposed dawn of civilisation in Africa. The painting illustrates the employment of "the colonial gaze", which according to Yancy (2008: 6), "is that broadly construed epistemic perspective, a process of seeing without being seen, that constructs the Black body into its own colonial imagery".



Figure 1: An image of the painting 'Jan van Riebeeck Landing at the Cape' is published in the Goede Hoop exhibition catalogue (Gosselink, Holtrop and Ross, 2017: 48).

Contemporary historiography contests the prevailing narrative of the first Dutch commander, highlighting that van Riebeeck was not the first European to make contact with indigenous inhabitants at the Cape. Prior to Jan van Riebeeck's landing, between the years 1600 and 1652, there already existed a proto-port settlement at a nascent refreshment station run by the VOC, and before the year 1652 there had been 180 years of engagement between local Khoe social groups and Europeans¹³ (Mellet, 2020: 103). Similarly, Nigel Worden, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Vivian Bickford-Smith (1998) argue that the Dutch occupation of Table Bay was not the first but one in a series of contacts and occupations of the

¹³ Mellet bases this view on research focussed on mining Maritime historical record which he believes is more technocratically-focussed and less "colonially politicised" thus providing a more accurate account of what took place and potentially disrupting mainstream social history. The focus of these records is on vessels, their capacities and seaworthiness, ports, on the nature of the crews, and on the character of travellers aboard ships visiting the Cape prior to 1652 and what the purposes were for such large-scale travel. For example these records show that from 1601 onwards an increasing number of European ships began to stop over at table bay, with greater frequency (Mellet, 2020: 108-111).

Cape by European seamen, merchants and colonists en route to the East. The indigenous Khoe society, made up of the Gorachouqua and the Goringhaiqua groups were thus “well aware of the existence of explorers and traders from Europe long before the Dutch arrived” (Ernsten, 2022: 21)¹⁴.

Worden (1998; 2012) shows that “by the time of Dutch settlement in the Western Cape, the area was made up of complex social and economic networks that had been formed by indigenous inhabitants” (Valley, 2021); these networks stretched from the Cape Peninsula to as far north as current day Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Moreover, Patric Tariq Mellet (2020) contends that as early as the second millennium, when the Khoe first arrived in the Western Cape, “there were already slow overland trading lines crisscrossing much of southern Africa and leading to the northern Mozambique ports, reaching out to the rest of the world” (Mellet, 2020: 106). The existing inter-regional trading and social connections were deeply entrenched but were disrupted and altered by the Europeans’ arrival. The historical arguments above, made by Mellet and Worden et al. (1998), contradict the prevalent historical narrative of apartheid-era South African history prior to 1994, in which Dutch immigrants “discover” an uninhabited and empty land. Worden contends that this ‘empty land’ narrative served to “legitimise the claims of whites to land occupation” (2012: 9).

Across the globe, Dutch colonial rule lasted more than 250 years, which Britta Schilling (2020) argues, can be separated as two periods of Dutch imperial expansion. The first period, where both the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie—

¹⁴ Two decades preceding van Riebeeck’s arrival, the European presence at the Cape was semi-permanent, with ships destined for the East making regular stops, and local Indigenous groups traded with the colonial merchants. In 1652, the nature of the settlement changed, as a permanent Dutch colony was established, thus marking the beginning of the forced displacement of indigenous peoples from the Cape Peninsula and Table Bay.

VOC¹⁵ (United East India Company) and Westindische Compagnie—WIC (West India Company) were established, was directed at securing profits from overseas trade through economic and human exploitation in the Dutch East Indies and the wider Indian Ocean region (Sleigh, 1980; Schilling, 2020). Colonial territories that were seized in this first phase included Batavia, the Cape and territories in the Americas and the Caribbean. The second phase, according to Schilling, “occurred during the age of ‘new imperialism’ when the Dutch nation-state secured political control over the Dutch East Indies, Suriname and the Dutch Antilles, notably Curaçao” (2020: 120). By the late 1700s, the VOC controlled an expansive Indian Ocean trading monopoly stretching from South Africa to Japan, operating as a “state within a state” (Schrire, 2014) running its own military and navy operations, legal system and exercised political sovereignty over its colonies. Schrire (2014) and Gawronski (2002) argue that the expanse of the VOC’s empire is represented by around 300 remaining official sites that were manned by thousands of company men during the course of the 18th century.

The growing number of VOC colonists in the Cape Colony and other residents, including the vast number of enslaved¹⁶ people the Dutch brought to the Cape from the African continent and the East, required fresh produce that was locally cultivated. In response to this, a deliberate colonial programme consisting of policies and incentives was put in place by the VOC to encourage Dutch settlers to take up farming. As Marks, 1972; Ward, 2008; Mellet, 2020 et al. argue, this eventually led to a rapid increase in Dutch grazing pastures, expanded farming activities and settlements. The resultant dispossession of land and the “reduction of grazing pastures for the Khoe pastoralists created friction and conflict between

¹⁵ The VOC was chartered in 1602 in the Netherlands by the States General and was the largest European commercial enterprise of its time.

¹⁶ Enslaved people were forcibly migrated from other VOC realms, and the first significant numbers of enslaved people to arrive in the Cape Colony originated from West Africa in 1658 (Armstrong and Worden, 1989; Schrire, 2014).

themselves and the VOC" (Valley, 2021). The indigenous populations, unlike the Europeans, viewed the land as a collective resource and at first didn't realise that the Dutch were after stealing their land (see Mellet 2020). While an agreement was signed between the Khoe leader Gogosoa, and van Riebeeck, the Dutch did not honour this agreement and continued to invade Khoe lands, which resulted in a war between the Khoe and the Dutch from 1659 to 1660 (Marks, 1972). Subsequent to the Khoe resistance, van Riebeeck ordered the erection of a hedge that stretched from Kirstenbosch to Wynberg Hill that became a physical boundary separating the region's indigenous inhabitants and the European settlers (Marback, 2004), marking the beginning of spatial segregation in the Cape.

What followed was a series of attempts at ethnic cleansing and forced removals of the indigenous populations by van Riebeeck. The erasure of indigenous peoples became the primary obsession during van Riebeeck's tenure (Mellet, 2020), resulting in the construction of a number of frontier barriers to keep the indigenous inhabitants out. The phenomenon of forced removals and displacement of indigenous and black people at the hands of colonial settlers that began during Dutch colonial occupation, was fortified during British rule, was legislated by the apartheid state and that continues in the present, is intrinsic to the ways that settler colonial capitalism is structured in South Africa. Nowhere is this more obvious than in South Africa's Western Cape province, and in particular, its largest city Cape Town, which is said to be amongst the most inequitable cities in the world (see Turok, Visagie and Scheba, 2021). As Ernsten (2022: 18) reminds us, "the exclusion of Khoekhoe (and later Coloured and Black South Africans) from the dominant discourse of the Cape would become an inherent part of its functioning".

In addition to the ongoing, unrelenting "land seizures, the VOC altered the landscape of the Table bay region" (Valley, 2021) by forging the built environment

according to Dutch spatial logics, “erecting permanent structures and cultivating gardens” (Valley, 2021), thereby rendering the landscape unrecognisable and alienating the local inhabitants. According to Worden, van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith (1998), a 1656 map of the Dutch settlement in Table Bay showing the early layout of Cape Town, “gives the appearance of control over a tamed and transformed environment” (1998: 18). The structures and buildings built by the Dutch settlers and their descendants have nostalgically been named the “Cape Dutch architectural style” (Bosdari, 1971; Simons, 2010) and is often problematically referred to as the Western Cape’s vernacular architecture by scholars who refuse to recognise the indigenous structures and homesteads of the Cape as a form of architecture (Valley, 2021). Many of these structures remain and “are meticulously maintained and protected under the South African National Heritage Resources Act (25 of 1999) (Valley, 2021) and along with colonial monuments and “statues, are potent symbols of colonialism” (Valley, 2021).

Among the oldest and most prominent architectural remains from the VOC colonial period is the Castle of Good Hope, commonly referred to as ‘the castle’ by Capetonians. It serves as a symbol of the Dutch influence and dominance both in the region and throughout their expansive empire and its distinctive pentagonal shape has left an indelible imprint on the city’s urban landscape. While its stone elevation does not provide much insight into the cultural background of its builders, its interior architecture showcases Dutch architectural elements such as gables, sash windows and double hung doors and its plan followed the fundamental principles of the Oudnederlands Stelsel (Schrire, 2014: 32). Ernsten (2022) writes that the novelist Karel Schoeman proposes that the most potent images of the first 154 years of Dutch presence at the Cape involve “shelter, enclosure, keeping together, shutting out, protecting, defending, establishing presence and ensuring the VOC’s survival” (Ernsten, 2022: 22).

The castle was thus closely associated with the VOC's concerns over fortification and the growing military authority it held in the region (Meltzer, 2004; Ernsten, 2022) and it served as the military headquarters up until the post-apartheid period. Beyond military purposes, the Dutch had intended to establish an organised settlement on the African frontier, and the castle was emblematic of this vision (Worden, 1996; Malan, 2012; Ernsten, 2022). This endeavour underscored the significance of asserting power and control by taming the indigenous environment which in turn reflected their ability to control and govern the indigenous people. Centuries later, in 2004, the castle was the host-site for the exhibition, Democracy X, Marking the Present, Re-presenting the Past, celebrating 10 years of South Africa's fledgling democracy which according to the catalogue, "was informed by post-colonial ideas around re-writing the past" (Becker, 2004: 272) and aimed to unearth the many layers in the country's complex past, from the pre-colonial period to 1994 and beyond (Oliphant, Delius and Meltzer, 2004). The Castle building has since been turned into a museum, housing various galleries and exhibits, mostly dealing with colonial histories.

In 1795 the Cape Colony was occupied by the British, but in 1802 with the Treaty of Amiens, it was agreed to end the occupation. Thus in 1803, the colony was returned to the Netherlands, which was then known as the "Batavian Republic"¹⁷. The Batavian colonial regime did not last long and was overtaken by British forces in a battle in 1806, but only in 1814 did the Dutch officially recognise the English authority over the Cape Colony. The Netherlands remained a global colonial power until after the second World War. In 2002 the Netherlands commemorated 400

¹⁷ The Batavian Republic (Bataafse Republiek) was the successor of the United Provinces Republic. It was established in 1795 following the French invasion of the United Provinces and dissolved in 1806 with Louis Bonaparte's ascent to the throne of the Kingdom of Holland (Huigen, 2009: 169).

years since the founding of the VOC on 20 March 1602¹⁸. In the contemporary, the hegemony of the VOC is celebrated and commemorated in popular culture as the Golden Age of Dutch commerce, and is known in Dutch as De Gouden Eeuw. However, contemporary critical voices in the Netherlands and in its former colonies point to the destruction of lands and the oppression and forced migration of people at the hands of the VOC. This past is being made progressively visible by scholars and activists in the Netherlands, many who challenge and counter the 'Gouden Eeuw' narrative in their work—for example, the *Slavery Heritage Guide* project edited by Diennek Hondius, Nancy Jouwe, Dineke Stam and Jennifer Tosch (2019).

Four hundred years after the VOC's arrival, South Africa, much like other Dutch colonies that include Indonesia, Suriname and Curaçao; is still inextricably bound up with the European economy and is still struggling to come to terms with the violent afterlives of colonial intervention. The narratives, or promises of freedom contained within these national, or territorial projects in the aftermath, or post- of colonialism necessarily operate to distance the intimacy of 'four continents' as Lisa A. Lowe (2015) presents the embeddedness in colonial conditions in the present. The uneven distribution of land and resources established during South Africa's colonial period persists as one of the pertinent underpinnings of high levels of income inequality and social disparity in the present. While the Netherlands holds the position as one of the wealthiest countries¹⁹ in the world, South Africa confronts absurd levels of socio-economic inequality that impacts on the lives of Black South Africans particularly. The representations of Dutch colonialism in South Africa are complex and multifaceted. The prevailing historical narratives, mythologisation,

¹⁸ In 1602, the VOC was granted a government charter which guaranteed it the right to the spice trade monopoly in East Asia. This government charter also gave the VOC the power to colonise whichever territory it desired and the right to enslave indigenous populations according to the requirements of the VOC. The company waged full-scale warfare on countries that would not cooperate with its demand for tea and spices, or which resisted the VOC-enforced cash-crop economy (SAHO, 2018: para 2).

¹⁹ <https://data.oecd.org/netherlands.htm> [2018, October 30].

dispossession, forced removals and architectural remains, highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of Dutch colonial history. Challenging and revisiting these representations is crucial for addressing the historical injustices and creating more inclusive and accurate accounts of the past.

Colonialism/Coloniality/ Decoloniality

While the understandings of colonialism, coloniality and decoloniality are interconnected, they are distinguished by specific theoretical applications and will be elaborated on in this section. Colonialism involved the global conquests of expansion, domination and control by Western empires in the 19th century, which resulted in nine-tenths of the entire land-surface of the globe to be in European control (Young, 2003 :2). Colonial and imperial rule was justified and legitimised by anthropological theories which Robert Young (2003) argues, “increasingly portrayed the peoples of the colonised world as inferior, childlike or feminine and incapable of looking after themselves, [thus] requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own best interests” (Young, 2003: 2). The basis of these anthropological theories was the concept of race. Racist theory about the inferiority of Africans was used to justify exploitative labour practices, which was sustained through the power monopoly the colonial regimes achieved by crushing all opposition with armed force.

The violent, extractive nature of colonialism allowed European nations to amass great wealth through the exploitation of African culture, resources, and people. Colonialism enforces displacement by implanting settlements on distant territory, ruling it, and formalising its exploitation within a system of an interconnected, global capitalist economy, while profits are transferred to the ‘mother country’ (Said 1994: 9; Rodney 1973: 162-3). In a similar vein, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) defines colonialism as a historical process characterised by a succession of

extractive, destructive, and administrative actions carried out by European states against Indigenous peoples in an effort to enhance empire prestige. In this system, European (White) knowledge and culture was constructed as superior, legitimate and civilised whereas African (Black) culture was constructed as inferior, primitive and uncivilised. Furthermore, the notion of being a citizen carved through national institutions was denied to colonised "subjects" (Mamdani 1996: 5). Furthermore, the structural continuities of colonialism had a deeper impact where "by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it" (Fanon 1967: 37). For Fanon (1967: 48), structural violence is the cornerstone of colonial rule and thus he argues that colonialism is violence in its natural state and will only yield when confronted with greater violence.

While colonialism needs a geopolitical core and a geopolitical periphery, coloniality is a system of power relations that can exist even after the end of formal colonialism. Furthermore, while formal colonialism has ended, the effects of colonialism have persisted through structural forms of privilege and bias (Muñiz Reed, 2015: 15). Mignolo argues, "coloniality is the continuing hidden process of expropriation, exploitation, pollution, and corruption that underlies the narrative of modernity, as promoted by institutions and actors belonging to corporations, industrialised nation-states, museums, and research institutions" (2013: para 2).

Aníbal Quijano, the Peruvian sociologist regarded as one of the founding thinkers of the decolonial movement, uses the phrase 'coloniality of power' to name the structures of power, control and hegemony that have emerged during the

modernist era, which he argues, stretches from the colonial period to the present²⁰. Similarly, Mignolo (2007) argues that modernity as a global universal process continuously reproduces coloniality. Critiquing the notion of a Totality which excludes all other totalities, Mignolo (2007) argues that Quijano's concept of "decoloniality of power" moves in two simultaneous directions: analytic and programmatic. As an analytic concept, "coloniality has opened up the reconstruction and the restitution of silenced histories, repressed subjectivities, subalternised knowledges and languages performed by the Totality depicted under the names of modernity and rationality" (Mignolo, 2007: 451). The programmatic direction Mignolo argues is manifested in Quijano's text as a delinking on which Mignolo (2007: 453) elaborates:

A delinking that leads to de-colonial epistemic shifts and brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics. 'New inter-cultural communication' should be interpreted as new inter-epistemic communication. Furthermore, de-linking presupposes to move toward a geo- and body politics of knowledge that on the one hand denounces the pretended universality of a particular ethnicity (body politics), located in a specific part of the planet (geo-politics), that is, Europe where capitalism accumulated as a consequence of colonialism. De-linking then shall be understood as a de-colonial epistemic shift leading to other-universality, that is, to pluri-versality as a universal project.

²⁰ Quijano developed the concept of coloniality which Mignolo (2007) refers to as the 'invisible and constitutive side of modernity' where he links coloniality of power in the political and economic spheres with the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007: 451). In this text, Quijano (1992) argues that a new world order emerged from the conquests of lands in the global south during colonialism which culminates in global capitalism 500 years later.

Mignolo argues that decoloniality²¹ is an option in that “the decolonial opens up a way of thinking that delinks from the chronologies of new epistemes or new paradigms (modern, postmodern, alter modern, Newtonian science, quantum theory, the theory of relativity etc)” (Mignolo, 2011: para 1). Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2011) argues that decoloniality has always existed alongside modernity and is an unfinished project which is still unfolding. Moreover, Maldonado-Torres (2011) argues that a decolonial turn has emerged in the domain of knowledge from the global south in the fields of theory, philosophy and critical thought and the main aim of this movement is to decolonise knowledge, power and being, including institutions such as the museum.

Decolonial thinkers call for “radical exercises of un-thinking, de-disciplining, and re-educating” (Maldonado-Torres, 2014). In the field of art theory, the main contribution has been the concept of decolonial aesthetics where “Mignolo suggests that Kant’s theorisation of aesthetics was the cognitive operation that marked the colonisation of aesthetics, a process that led to the devaluing of any sensory experience conceptualised outside of European aesthetic categories” (Muñiz Reed, 2015: 15). Mignolo proposes decolonial aesthetics as a counter concept, which becomes a “confrontation with modern aesthetics and its aftermath (postmodern and altermodern aesthetics) to decolonise the regulation of sensing all the sensations to which our bodies respond, from culture as well as from nature” (Muñiz Reed, 2015: 15). Ivan Muñiz Reed elaborates on the decolonial critique on postmodern and postcolonial discourse:

²¹ Decoloniality has its origins in the global South and its historical grounding in the Bandung Conference of 1955 in which 29 countries from Europe and Asia gathered. The main goal of the conference was to find a common ground and vision for the future that was neither centred on capitalism nor communism (Mignolo, 2011: para 1).

A decolonial critique of postmodern and postcolonial discourses is that although they focus on understanding the aftermath of colonialism, this exists within the frame of European Philosophy with little attention given to the problems arising outside of Europe. Although postcolonial theory is considered valuable for analysing and critiquing imperial structures, decolonialists argue that ultimately, by operating within the academy and through European-generated categories, they construct a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism (Muñiz Reed, 2015: 16).

In an effort to make sense of the task at hand, Muñiz Reed (2015: 15) cites Quijano, who describes coloniality as a “matrix of power that produces racial and gender hierarchies on the global and local level, functioning alongside capital to maintain a modern regime of exploitation and domination”. Quijano’s thesis is that decoloniality should also be understood in reference to coloniality, which is ever-present and is distinguished from colonialism in the sense that it is made up of the underlying logics of colonialism (Mignolo, 2007).

Decoloniality is defined as “the production of counter-discourses, counter knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world” (Madlodonado-Torress, 2016). Mignolo (2007) defines decoloniality as “epistemic disobedience”, “epistemic delinking” and “epistemic reconstruction”. It aims to liberate education and knowledge production from the epistemology of power, inequality, various forms of discrimination and exploitation. And, as Catherine Walsh (2018: 17) contends, resistance and refusal comes with colonialism and coloniality:

Decoloniality necessarily follows, derives from, and responds to coloniality and the ongoing colonial process and condition. It is a form of struggle and survival, an

epistemic and existence-based response and practice—most especially by colonised and racialised subjects—*against* the colonial matrix of power in all of its dimensions, and for the possibilities of an otherwise.

In Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yangs' (2012) seminal text 'Decolonisation is Not a Metaphor', they argue that 'settler moves to innocence' are moves or actions that seek to promote reconciliation over reparations and restitution of land. These are moves by settlers that detract from the true goals of decolonisation and the impact of settler-colonialism in nation-states. Borrowing from Fanon's (1963) formulation of decolonisation, they assert that decolonisation is ultimately an unsettling process underpinned by disorder. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon writes that "decolonisation, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder... Decolonisation is a historical process: that is to say, it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except, in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content" (1963: 36). Echoing Fanon's sentiments, Tuck and Yang assert that no part of the decolonisation process should be pleasant or comfortable: "the theorisation of decolonisation makes possible a set of evasions or settler moves to innocence that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 1). Their discomfort and apprehension largely come from the noticeable trend in the ways that decolonial language has been adopted by education and cultural institutions with ease and general acceptance. This is dangerous because, as the authors point out, "this kind of inclusion is a form of enclosure, dangerous in how it domesticated decolonisation. It is also a foreclosure, limiting in how it recapitulates dominant theories of social change" (2012: 3).

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui writes, “there can be no discourse of decolonisation, no theory of decolonisation without decolonial practice” (2012: 101). Decoloniality then, is a dynamic process, existing in the zone of becoming, seeking to “advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought” (Walsh, 2018: 17). Walsh proposes a decolonial for, or a decolonial otherwise that must go beyond decoloniality for decoloniality’s sake. Drawing from Walsh, and discrediting any notion of purity or moralism attached to decolonisation, Lewis R. Gordon (2020) argues that “without thinking about what decoloniality is for, it becomes a fetish and collapses into familiar patterns of religiosity, idolatry, and its accompanying moralistic investments” (2020: 21).

The notions of coloniality and decoloniality highlights colonialism’s ongoing effects, and they become useful theoretical frames for considering the implications for exhibition practice in the museum context. Exhibitions serve as a key mechanism for disseminating knowledge, often transforming the ordinary into spectacle and shaping people’s perception of their environment and themselves. They can transmit affect and have long-lasting cultural effects, perpetuating certain knowledge systems and power structures. Thus, this dissertation underscores the need to critically examine the power dynamics, production of knowledges and the representation of marginalised cultures and histories within exhibitions, advocating for decolonial approaches that challenge Eurocentric perspectives and foster alternative forms of knowledge and understanding.

Exhibition Practice in the Museum

The purpose of the museum has changed over time as museums have undergone several transformations over the last century — from their former authoritative focus on and enlightening and civilising publics to a focus on exhibitions and

interpretation. A key form through which knowledge is disseminated in museums, is through the technology of the exhibition, and exhibitions often disseminate knowledge by producing the quotidian as spectacle, transforming how people look at their environs and themselves (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Timothy Luke (2002, xiv) argues that "what is accepted as knowledge and the power to which many accede, are both easily articulated and constantly affirmed in the exhibitions museums produce, [and] while museum displays can change, their cultural effects can linger indefinitely".

For Tony Bennett (1995), there was a specific discourse of culture which saturated the births of the museum and gallery in that both these institutions had the same aim: to use culture as a tool of social management. In thinking about the relationship of museums, galleries and exhibitions to society, Bennett interprets museums as part of the "Exhibitionary Complex" (Bennett, 1995). Art museums, history and natural science museums, galleries, international exhibitions, shopping malls, arcades and related institutions have been closely connected since the nineteenth century by related and sometimes mutually reinforcing power relations. These institutions form an "Exhibitionary Complex" which consists of "linked sites for the development and circulation of new disciplines (history, biology, art history, anthropology) and their discursive formations (the past, evolution, aesthetics, man) as well as for the development of new technologies of vision" (Bennett, 1995: 59). Bennett argues that these sites might be productively analysed as particular articulations of power and knowledge that required the presence of the viewer to engage in the spectacle of witnessing displays of power.

Teresa Gleadowe argues that conceptual shifts in the late 1960s led to the contemporary understanding of exhibitions as a "creative entity". Exhibitions are widely referred to as something that is 'made', and as a "medium, interpretative

frame or lens" (Gleadowe, 2011: 29). Exhibitions are complex entities within a complex system of meaning and relationships that often have uncertain outcomes, often likened to a Laboratory (Porto, 2007; Heller, Scholz and Wagner, 2015, Treimo, 2020). As Sharon Macdonald and Paul Basu (2007) argue, exhibitions can generate and display knowledge that is more open to different readings and interpretations in a wider frame of representations by various "actants"(visitors, curators, objects, technologies, institutional and architectural spaces) brought into relation each other.

Further, Hooper-Greenhill (2020) argues that museum exhibitions are often designed by the curators to have open-ended meanings. In thinking about exhibitions as process, and as collaborative spaces, Raymond Silverman (2015: 2) suggests that collaborative work in the museum "is fundamentally processual in nature". Silverman suggests that the potential of the museum lies in the bringing together of actors with diverse backgrounds, interests and experiences to meet and engage in work that could potentially yield new ways of being in the world. Acknowledging the risk involved in exhibition-making, Silverman (2015) contends that even when museum exhibitions fail, they can often generate considerable controversy that leads to "public demonstrations and commentary in the news media, radical rewriting of exhibition narratives, early exhibition closures, or cancelled exhibition venues" (2015: 2). Thus, he argues that the perceived failure of an exhibition can also be viewed as a success in that failure can lead to critical insights and opening the potential for dialogue, and new of thinking about the exhibition process.

Thinking about the exhibition as a space of discovery, Anita Herle (2013) explicates the potential of the exhibition to generate knowledge through methodologies of fostering new and unexpected relations. Herle contends that this is achieved when

objects are displayed in non-didactic and non-linear ways and when audiences are challenged to take part in the generation of knowledge through “bodily, intellectual and emotional experiences to question preconceived ideas” (Treimo, 2020: 21). Through its primary function of showing or putting things on display, bringing together various “actants” the exhibition can also illuminate knowledges, insights, histories, relationships and narratives that may otherwise have remained hidden (Macdonald and Basu, 2007). These knowledges and ideas that are visibilised through the exhibition can vary in their relevance, problematic nature, or insightfulness as the primary case study analysed in this dissertation shows.

Exhibitions, like art objects can carry ‘embodied knowledge’ (Treimo, 2020). Eileen Hooper-Greenhill argues that the language employed by the exhibition is visual, and thus not always able to be articulated textually or verbally. While she doesn’t argue this explicitly — Hooper-Greenhill makes reference to the affective qualities of the exhibition: “the gut response to colour, the physical reaction to mass, the engagement with the visual that is both embodied and cerebral, remains mysterious” (2000: 4). She argues that exhibitions as pedagogy, however, are problematic instruments, as while they are produced to communicate meaningful visual and textual statements, there is no guarantee that the intended meaning will be achieved (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 4). Offering instead that museum curators should provide multiple prompts for the viewer to interpret and thus make their own meanings. The task of the analyst, argues Macdonald, is to explore the beliefs and rationales in operation through the exhibition and to examine how they are associated with wider historically located cultural logics and political rationalities (2010: 3). Further, Macdonald argues that “the task is also to explore the consequences of particular forms of representation in terms of the distribution of power: who is empowered or disempowered by certain modes of display?” (2010: 3).

Exhibitionary forms and techniques enable certain kinds of readings. The textual understanding of the museum considers the voice implicit in museum displays, set up by, *inter alia*, lighting, sound and labelling. We can read an exhibition as we do literary text, and as Mieke Bal (1992: 7) writes: "The most powerful form of address [in the museum] is narrative." Bal writes that the space of a museum presupposes a walking tour, an order in which panels are to be viewed and read. A museum display can thus be understood as a "sign system, working in the realm between visual and verbal, and in between information and persuasion, it produces the viewer's knowledge" (Bal, 1992: 561).

Through these sign systems, "museums generate representations and attribute value and meaning in line with certain perspectives or classificatory schemas which are historically specific" (Lidchi, 1997: 160). As Carol Duncan argues, museum exhibits may be organised in a way to construct and convey predetermined narratives of a version of history that may only represent the interests of those in power: "those who are best prepared to perform [the museum] ritual – those who are most able to respond to its various cues – are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial etc) the museum ritual most fully confirms" (1995: 8). In my assessment of the literature landscape relevant to this dissertation topic, I have observed a significant research gap regarding the analysis of the notion of exhibition as intervention that aims to unsettle and disrupt the perpetual impacts of colonial power structures and subjective authority ingrained in museum practices, and this is where this dissertation makes its contribution.

The Museum as a Political and Discursive Site

Historical Foundations

The museum is simultaneously understood to be a building and an institution, both an apparatus and an object of display, and also the site where the world is imagined (Stead, 2004). Bennett (1995) and Macdonald (2006) argue that the contemporary public museum in its many forms, for example, museums of History, Art, Ethnology, Anthropology, among others, has its origins in Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, evolving from earlier collecting institutions. While our contemporary understanding of the term 'museum' is situated largely within the public and institutional domain, the original use of the term emphasised its private and exclusionary functions. Prior to the existence of institutions like museums and libraries, wealthy European individuals saw it as their responsibility to take on the role of collecting and categorising objects that represented the world. Thus, the earliest forms of display in Europe can be traced to the sixteenth and early seventeenth century private collections of wealthy or royal classes in the form of the *Kunst* or *Wunderkammer* (Birkett, 2012: 7) where the European gentry "could reflect upon the strange wonders of the world" (Janes and Conaty, 2005: 2).

Public museums are connected to broader developments and adaptations to other collecting institutions (Bennett, 1995). Bennett (1995) further argues that the development of the museum cannot be viewed apart from a more general set of developments during the 17th and 18th centuries "through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power" (Bennett, 1995: 19). In Europe at the time, collections owned by the state were increasingly used for ideological purposes (Janes and Conaty, 2005), and the museum also became an important site for the regulation of social conduct and the behaviours of its publics.

The museum institution, its format and practices could also be understood as a key site of nationalism (Coombes, 1988) insofar as it buttresses the formation of national

identities, as rooted in the context of Western modernity. In this regard, Bennett (2005) argues that museums, galleries and exhibitions were central to the process of modern state formation and are “fundamental to its conception as a set of educative and civilising agencies” (2005: 66). As Bennet puts it:

Since the late nineteenth century, they have been ranked highly in the funding priorities of all developed nation-states and have proved remarkably influential cultural technologies in the degree to which they have recruited the interest and participation of its citizens (Bennett, 2005: 66).

In late eighteenth century Europe, the idea of a collection that belonged to the citizens of the democratic state came into being. Macdonald (2003: 1) argues that the emergence of the nation-state, the public, and the public museum in the late eighteenth century were intimately bound together. This turn in the way collections were amassed, stored, classified and exhibited began with the French Revolution as “collections belonging to the Crown, the Church and aristocrats who emigrated or were executed, became the property of the state” (Grasset 1996: 190). For Macdonald (2003) the French Revolution is a pivotal moment marking the onset of the nation-state era in Western Europe. It signifies a profound shift where the aristocracy gave way to the emergence of “a collective of equals”. After the revolution in France, the private treasures and collections of objects owned by the aristocratic classes were ‘democratised’ and made public. The revolution was a moment where what was deemed high culture could be brought to the masses, while also allowing an opportunity for the state to exercise pedagogic control. Thus, from the time of its emergence as a public institution, the museum is characterised by its double function: as an institution of cultural opening and enclosure at the same time (Rosenthal, 2021: 274).

In other European states, for example in Britain, the creation of a national collection began with the founding of the British Museum but access to the collections were restricted to those that were deemed acceptable to enter the museum building, like aristocratic men (Janes and Conaty, 2005). However, by the 1850s, the museum institution in Britain was seen by the gentry as a space of civil responsibility, with the ruling and aristocratic classes embracing the potential for the museum to become both a space of reflection and a civilising space which they assumed would lead to the reformation of the working classes. As argued by Bennett (1994), wealthy and aristocratic nineteenth century Western society saw the museum as a space of social benefit that was underpinned on the belief that shaping the intellect of the underclass would transform social behaviour. Similarly, Henrietta Lidchi argues that the thinking of the time was that “by contemplating cultural artefacts on display, the common man/woman would become receptive to their improving influence” (1997: 191).

George W. Stocking (1988) observes that the historical processes that led to the collection of objects in European museums are fairly recent: “they have to do on the one hand with the forces of economic development and nationalism that transformed Europe in the nineteenth century, and on the other with those of imperial domination” (Stocking, 1988: 4). Subsequent to conquering of large parts of Europe and North Africa by Napoleon and later the French colonial conquests in North America, Africa, South Asia and parts of the Caribbean, war booty was brought back to France and displayed in museums throughout the country.

Contemporary scholars that write critically about the museum’s origins (Karp et al., 1992; Bennett, 1995; Stocking, 1988; Coombes, 1988 & 1994; Conn, 1988; Penny, 2002; Boast, 2011; Golding and Modest, 2013; Richter and Kolb, 2017 et al.) have analysed and theorised the ways that the European museum institution is connected

to the global colonial project. Contesting the notion of European colonial benevolence, these authors and others show how the ethnographic museum developed alongside, and was used as a tool in the justification of colonialism and its practices of abduction and enslavement of people and the theft of land and material belongings. The museum's imperial entanglement goes back to the first public iteration of the institution in Europe. Dorothee Richter and Ronald Kolb (2017) point out that the very first public museum in Europe, the Fridericianum in Kassel, was connected to class struggles, colonial ideology and colonial battles. The Fridericianum was financed through the sale of soldiers to the British, many of whom who were unwillingly captured and shipped to the UK or to North Africa to fight against the rebellion for independence in the British colonies.

According to Ciraj Rasool (2021), who cites Dan Hicks (2020), our understanding of the ways that "museums were part of the weaponry of death" (2021: 339) are still in its early stages. Rasool argues that the interconnected histories between museums and the horrors of the colonial project are still under-analysed. Expanding on this idea, Shahid Vawda (2019) proposes a three-fold understanding of the violence embedded in museums. First, the colonial system included land conquest, takeover of governance systems, extraction of natural resources, subjugation, and forced migration of peoples. Second, within this system, material objects, human, plant, and animal life and remains were stolen, knowledge was extracted, and their social and historical context was abstracted in order to fit into a museum collection for research and display. Third, the extracted objects are then represented in stereotypical ways that justify colonial violence and that place them in an "othered" position (Vawda, 2019: 77).

The historical foundation of the museum is tied to notions of displaying the culture, power and progress of the nation state. National museums emerged in Europe in

the late eighteenth century and are one of the characteristic institutions that have come to exemplify the modern, democratic nation-state. The architecture of these institutions forged a visible, tangible presence and cultural identity for the nation and created new urban landmarks in many European capital cities. Similarly, the exhibitions found in national museums, both temporary and permanent, intentionally used technologies of representation to educate their publics and foster national consciousness. In the Netherlands, funds generated from the colonies via the VOC and state support helped to establish the Rijksmuseum as a symbol of national identity and meet its political mandate to make Dutchness visible through its architecture and displays, as will be addressed in the third chapter of this dissertation.

Constructions of Meaning, Knowledge, Identity

The museum can be thought of as a physical frame for objects, collections, exhibitions and programmes and an institution that frames particular perspectives, world views and interpretations on those things. Thus, museums are not merely neutral or passive repositories for objects, but rather active agents that shape and reflect the culture and society in which they exist. Anthony Shelton (2006) argues that museums communicate and disseminate public culture through a variety of methods, such as through their architecture, ornamentation, object arrangements, relationships with other institutions and sponsored rituals. Through their physical layout, aesthetics, and symbolism, the architecture and design of museums can convey cultural and societal values and particularities. In addition, museum institutions are not autonomous entities, but rather interconnected with other institutions and structural systems of power.

Scholars of critical museum studies (Stocking, 1985; Bennett, 1995; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Janes, 2007 et al.) are generally in agreement that the museum is

understood to be institution dedicated to the collection, preservation, exhibition, interpretation, representation and study of material objects that make up the archive of material culture. Museums typically create and transfer meaning and knowledge in efforts to engage visitors in issues that are relevant and significant to them and to their publics (Janes, 2007). In addition, museums are seen as key agents in creating meaning, producing knowledge and shaping identity (Janes, 2007: 135) and as institutions that generate a series of particular effects. As Peter Bjerregaard (2020: 1) argues, museums don't simply mirror the world, but construct new perspectives and ideas that are generated through the mechanisms and qualities that are particular to the institution.

Hooper-Greenhill (2000) contends that the meaning in museums is constructed in relation to the collections that the museum holds, and that the collections raise "questions about which objects have been collected and why, and what is known about them from which perspective" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 3). Moreover, meaning in the museum is constructed from the absences in the collection, what is and is not on display, silences present in museum narratives, the way objects are assembled, among other aspects that are the result of decision making processes based on particular collections of ideas and values (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). In a similar vein, Bennett (1995: 6) argues that the museum is involved in the process of "showing and telling—that is exhibiting artefacts and persons in a manner calculated to embody certain meanings and values". The values and meanings still in circulation in the museum have roots in the Western imperial project, as Bernadette Lynch and Samuel Alberti (2010:14) argue: "Western institutions continue to maintain borders and to privilege particular ways of knowing. Consciously or not, those who staff museums and galleries have been trained and socialised to think and know in those ways, and museums are not set apart from global economic injustice and the reality of racial conflict and prejudice". Lynch and

Alberti (2010) further argue that relationships and encounters between museum insider and those deemed outsider often mimic coloniser-colonised relations.

Museums are also involved in the production, application and dissemination of knowledge. As Nicholas Thomas (2019: 27) points out, the late twentieth century saw the emergence of several key discourses that “identified museums as hegemonic knowledge formations”. European museums have historically participated in producing, promoting and disseminating knowledges on subjects such as racial science and eugenics; hierarchies and binary classifications of objects such as art/ethnography; and on notions of citizenship, belonging and appropriate civic behaviour. Drawing from Michel Foucault’s notion that power and knowledge are always intertwined, Macdonald’s (2010) position is that the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge is always political, and politics, the “dynamic power play of competing knowledges, has ramifications throughout cultural life and social practice” (2010: 3). The formation of European museums, in particular its ethnographic, world cultures and history museums, are “closely bound up with the ways that Europe has come to define itself in relation to other parts of the world, to its Others outside” (Modest, 2019: 10). As Macdonald argues, the notion of knowledges that reside in the museum are not simply what is displayed or presented in exhibitions, “but the knowledges (including unreflected-upon assumptions) of different parties involved in exhibition making” (Macdonald, 2010: 3). Thinking, defining and framing the world, is thus central to the museum project.

Nineteenth century understandings of culture were as a “whole way of life”, and museums often collected objects that were meant to exemplify the way of life of particular social groups (Rose, 2001: 180). As argued by Duncan F. Cameron, 1971; Michael M. Ames, 1992; and Robert R. Janes and Gerald T. Conaty, 2005; museums often conveyed their understandings of social groups by means of their

ethnographic collections and material that was exhibited in a cross-cultural comparative manner which allowed publics to interpret a 'reality' of the world that was set up and constructed by the museum and the dominant classes to produce specific meanings, social values and associations. These practices, as Cameron (1971: 7) argues, transformed museums into temples of hegemonic society, showcasing its values, histories, and perspectives.

Advocating for the need for museums to consider the historiographic needs and historical perceptions of its local audience, Sheila Watson (2007: 160) notes that "recent research into the production and consumption of meanings in museums suggests that these institutions contribute significantly to the construction of personal and shared identities". The argument presented by Watson is specifically related to museums in Europe where countries have smaller populations and traditionally, a relative sense of homogeneity, although the social landscape appears to be shifting in many bigger cities like London, Amsterdam or Berlin. Patricia Davison (1998) is concerned with the ways in which museums institutionalise certain forms of knowledge. To subvert and challenge hegemonic representation practices, Davison (1998: 153) observes: "If public memory is to be more than a dominant mythology, new ways of evoking multiple memories will have to be found".

Epistemic Violence and Epistemic Injustice

In considering the museum's role in enabling epistemic violence, it is useful to consider literature on epistemic violence and epistemic injustice. In 2015, Pillay made the following argument to a crowded hall of students, activists, and supporters at Azania House, the University of Cape Town administrative building at the centre of the #RhodesMustFall occupation:

I want to make a distinction between three kinds of violences we confront in South Africa, that we inherited. The first is political violence, the second economic violence and the third epistemic violence. Each of these violences, political, economic, epistemic – carries with them demands for justice (Pillay, 2015: para 3 & 4).

Pillay (2015, para 5) further elaborates:

The history of state formation in South Africa is the history of settler colonialism. And at the heart of settler colonialism is the removal, decimation, alienation and dispossession of the population that was there by an external grouping. The magical trick that settler colonialism performs is to denaturalise the right to belong of the local population – to make them foreigners, while naturalising the foreigner as the person who has the right to belong.

Pillay's assertion applies to past and present settler-colonial occupations in recent global histories. There are familiar and identifiable strategies of aggression and control that are employed in different instances of settler colonial occupations, whether in the Dutch-seized Cape Colony of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries or in the contemporary Israeli-apartheid state. Pillay went on to explain, that epistemic violence is the most difficult one to confront, and yet, that it was the most important of the three acts of violences. In this regard, Pillay argues: "epistemic violence is about thought, and the political and economic effects of that thought" (Pillay, 2015).

Spivak defines epistemic violence as "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung and heterogenous project to constitute the colonial subject as other" (1988: 25). In addition, Spivak makes the point that it also involves "the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious subjectivity" (1988: 25). Because

epistemic violence is interwoven into almost every aspect of the neocolonial world, and is essential to the multi-layered scaffolding of the “colonial matrix of power” (Quijano, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2011), it must be addressed in order to move towards and attain the goal of epistemic justice. This is pertinent because epistemic violence authorises “thinking about Others in ways that enables political and epistemic violence to be enacted on the bodies of subjects” (Pillay, 2015)—particularly Black, women, queer, disabled subjects of the global south.

Haitian philosopher Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds us of the “many ways in which the production of historical knowledge involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production” (2015: 3). For Trouillot, compared to gunfire and political crusades, this power, which can be thought of as epistemic violence, is less visible but no less forceful. Similarly for Enrique Galván-Álvarez, “it is not only through the construction of exploitative economic links or the control of the politico-military apparatuses that domination is accomplished, but also through the construction of epistemic frameworks that legitimise and enshrine those practices of domination” (2010: 11-12).

In her seminal work, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Fricker (2007) emphasises that “there are some injustices done to the knower in her role as knower”, which she then defines as epistemic injustice. Fricker identifies two kinds of injustices as “distinctively epistemic” occurrences: “testimonial injustice created by prejudice in the economy of credibility” and “hermeneutical injustice produced by structural prejudice in the economy of hermeneutical resources” (2007: 1). In the case of the kinds of injustices that are produced by the museum institution as part of the systemic neocolonial order, and its historic position as an institution rooted in colonial violence, I want to focus on Fricker’s notion of hermeneutical injustice. As

Fricker puts it, hermeneutical injustice produces “a gap in collective interpretive resources that puts someone at an unfair advantage when it comes to making sense of their social experience” (2007:1). Hermeneutical injuries can affect the very core of one’s humanity, as meaning-making and meaning sharing are crucial to a dignified human life. In addressing the subject of hermeneutical injury, José Medina (2017) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) suggest that there are forms of hermeneutical injustice that are so damaging to the sense of self that they can result in “hermeneutical death” (Medina, 2017: 41).

Fricker’s contention is that hermeneutical injustices are epistemic wrongs that occur spontaneously, without perpetrators, due to constraints in a culture’s ‘collective hermeneutical resource’ (Fricker, 2007). Thus arguing that there are no concerns of agential responsibility, unlike in the case of testimonial injustice. However, Medina (2017) presents an opposing argument that centres agential responsibility as a fundamental aspect of hermeneutical injustice, arguing that hermeneutical injustice can apply to individuals, groups and communities. According to Medina, in the first instance,

an entire culture can be held responsible for not trying to understand a particular kind of experience or particular kind of subjectivity, and, more importantly, different groups and publics within a hermeneutically unjust culture can bear different kinds of responsibility for their hermeneutical neglect in certain areas and/or for their hermeneutical resistance to certain pressures or interpretative efforts (2017: 42).

Although Medina acknowledges that the social context in which an individual finds themselves may mitigate their epistemic responsibility, he nevertheless insists that it does not disappear altogether. Hermeneutical injustices are fraught with concerns of complicity, and further theorisation is required beyond Fricker’s argument denying agential responsibility (2017: 42). Medina writes:

When it comes to hermeneutical harms and injustices, the question is not simply whether or not there are expressive and interpretative resources available for meaning-making, and meaning-sharing, but how these resources are used, by whom, and in what ways. In this sense, when we recognise that a phenomenon or experience is not talked about or is poorly understood in a culture, and we think that a group of people is unfairly disadvantaged as a result, and we label it a hermeneutical injustice, this should be the beginning, not the end of a diagnostic process! (Medina, 2017: 43).

Building on the case for foundational and systemic causes for the omissions, silences, invisibilisations, and ambiguities, in post-colonial society, Polhaus Jr. distinguishes two ways in which the knower is epistemically significant: the first is “her situatedness insofar as the knower’s social position draws her attention to particular aspects of the world; and the second is her interdependence insofar as epistemic resources, needed to make sense of those parts of the worlds to which she attends, are by nature, collective” (2012: 716). Polhaus Jr. argues that a tension is brought about by the relationship between the knower’s situatedness and her interdependence that can lead to an “expansion of possible knowledge” (2012: 716). She warns us however, that the dialectic between the two within a socially stratified society can also lead to a distinct form of epistemic injustice that she refers to as “wilful hermeneutic ignorance” (Polhaus Jr., 2012). Articulating the notion of ‘wilful hermeneutical ignorance’ she describes instances in which, despite the availability of alternative conceptualisations put forth by marginalised knowers, “dominantly situated knowers nonetheless continue to misunderstand and misinterpret the world”(2012: 716). In the introduction of this essay, “when dominantly situated knowers refuse to acknowledge epistemic tools developed from the experienced world of those situated marginally, such refusals allow dominantly situated knowers to misunderstand, misinterpret and/or ignore whole parts of the world” (Polhaus Jr., 2012: 715). While privileged subjects may be

deprived of hermeneutic resources, oppressed subjects ultimately bear the brunt of the epistemic losses that result (Medina, 2017: 44). Medina further argues:

non-dominantly situated people often find their meanings and communicative contributions not taken seriously, improperly heard, deemed deficient, reinterpreted, distorted, and too quickly dismissed, and in these ways they are hermeneutically disrespected and harmed (2017: 44).

For Polhaus Jr. 'wilful hermeneutical ignorance' falls within what Charles Mills theorises as an "epistemology of ignorance", (1997: 18) to highlight the structural significance of this phenomenon. Further elaborating, "it is not in the immediate interest of the dominantly situated to acquire and maintain epistemic resources calibrated to the marginally experienced world, since doing so threatens to move epistemic power away from dominantly situatedness and can make clearer the injustices that maintain privilege" (Polhaus Jr. 2012: 722). Despite the obstacles involved however, it is not impossible for those in more powerful positions to acknowledge and make use of knowledge resources from marginally situated locations (Polhaus Jr. 2012), but rather, they choose not to, acting on a series of assumptions that are epistemically and politically situated.

All knowledges, according to Grosfoguel (2011), are epistemically located in power relations and are related to the notions of geo- and body-politics of knowledge. Among the multiple intersecting global hierarchies that Grosfoguel suggests the "European-capitalist-military-christian-patriarchal-White-heterosexual-male" settler colonialist enforced, is the aesthetic hierarchy of high art vs. naive or primitive art, in which the west is considered the producer of superior high art and the non-west is considered the producer of inferior expressions of art (2011: 11). Institutions of art, such as museums, art galleries, exhibitions and global art events (such as biennials or art fairs) are part of institutionalising this aesthetic hierarchy that Grosfoguel

refers to. The museum institution, is at the core of epistemic violence since its history is linked with colonial repression and the consequent epistemic stunting it enabled. Its primary practices of removing objects from their contexts and subsequently classifying, labelling, storing, and displaying them as representations of the Other are all violent acts, and thus the site is embroiled in epistemic injustice. Nonetheless, like the university, it has also been a locus of dissent, contestation, and innovation, and therefore one may argue that it could also be the space to confront its own past and contemporary injustices.

Medina (2017) advocates for interventions into hermeneutical injustice that goes beyond the conceptual, the diagnostic and its analysis, as it is important to acknowledge that there is something practical at stake. Thus, he proposes for the application of theoretical reasoning, to contribute to finding ways to “fight hermeneutical injustices, to prevent them before they occur, and to repair the hermeneutical practice and dynamics when they occur” (Medina, 2017: 45). However, practices cannot be transformed until an epistemological shift occurs; hence the continued relevance of large-scale public pedagogic projects, such as exhibitions, applied in conjunction with other forms of anti-colonial focussed projects and actions, that have the potential to initiate pedagogic and affective interventions into established epistemologies.

The New Museology and the Museum as Contact Zone

Critiques of the museum generally developed in from the 1960s onwards in the form of institutional critique where the museums role as an authoritative institution and its role in the establishment and maintenance of the colonial project came into question (Bjerregaard, 2020). Peter Bjerregaard (2020) contends that critiques of the museum had two fronts: the question of representation particularly where distant

cultures were represented as 'Other' by Western museums and secondly, the forms through which museums represented knowledge—thus, “shaping how to know something” (Bjerregaard, 2020: 3). These critiques took on various forms and, as Macdonald argues, led to:

a flourishing of work that sought to deconstruct cultural products within the institution, such as texts or exhibitions, in order to highlight their politics and the strategies by which they were positioned as “objective” or “true” and to probe the historical, social, and political contexts in which certain kinds of knowledges reigned and others were marginalised or ignored (MacDonald, 2007: 3).

Two developments in critical museum scholarship and that formed a part of the constellation of critique directed at the museum institution are the new museology and the concept of the 'contact zone'. Macdonald (2007) argues that concepts of the new museology and the contact zone first emerge in the 1980s as part of a broader development she calls representational critique. The key idea behind representational critique was about questioning the objective, value-free nature of academic disciplines and research practice, and the “move toward regarding knowledge, and its pursuit, realisation and deployment as inherently political” (Macdonald, 2007: 3). What was included or occluded from scholarship or exhibitions, from the curriculum or the canon was interrogated and it was argued that these representations “fed back into the world beyond the academy, supporting particular regimes of power, most usually the status quo” (Macdonald, 2007:3).

According to Robin Boast (2011) and Vawda (2019), post-colonial Western museums have commonly employed the notion of the contact zone, as theorised by Mary Louise Pratt (1991) and James Clifford (1997), and the new museology (ICOM, 1974; Varine, 1978; and Vergo, 1989) as the theoretical foundations for their turn to more

“inclusive” methods and activities. While the contact zone is presented as a site for collaboration, negotiation and the clash of difference, the new museology signalled a shift in the orientation of the museum as primarily a site for the conservation and display of objects to a site of discourse and pedagogy.

The multiple occurrences of ‘decolonial’ exhibitions in Europe over the last decade demonstrate how the concept of the contact zone and the notion of transculturation, as theorised by Pratt (1991; 2007), have been appropriated. In her article *Arts of the Contact Zone*, Pratt defines the concept as “a term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical power relations, such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (1991: 34).

Pratt’s (2007), *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* elaborates on contact zones as deeply asymmetrical, where a “dominant culture would provide for a ‘negotiated space’ for certain kinds of cultural exchange, negotiations and transactions necessary to the maintenance of the imperialistic programme” (Boast 2011: 57). Given the inherently inequitable power structure of the contact zone, (because by definition it was a meeting of centre and periphery) European museum scholars choose to maintain only a partial representation of the concept. Moreover, while the contact zone may have fostered an environment of collaboration and consultation in the museum, there is a “real concern that the neocolonial character of these contact zones may undermine the empowerment that it is intended to foster”, as Boast (2011) explains.

Shelton (2006) adds that the move towards the museum becoming a contact zone — a space of collaboration, discussion, and conflict resolution — and the willingness to consult with stakeholder voices by inviting them into the museum has become a

major justification within the museum community for their ongoing relevance and even the right to maintain their vast colonial collections. For Boast, the real lesson of the contact zone is that dominance always wins: “by placing the contact zone within the academy, as it always often is, especially when applied to the museum, we see how dialogue and collaboration are foregrounded, but the ultimate suppression of oppositional discourse is always effected” (2011: 64). The asymmetrical power structures of the contact zone that constitute the condition of the centre’s consistent appropriating of the other, is embedded in museum practice of collecting, documenting and displaying. While museums have advocated for a multivocal approach to the interpretation of material, the museum ultimately exercises intellectual control over these external contributions.

In the introduction to *The New Museology*, a collection of essays edited by Peter Vergo in 1989, he expressed that the old museology was too much about museum methods, and too little about the purposes of museums” (3). In contrast to the old museology’s focus on administrative, bureaucratic and conservation tasks, the “new museology”, a set of debates greatly influenced by a Foucauldian gesture (see Bennett, 2018), was proposed as a theoretical framework to rethink the role and purpose of museums in contemporary society, advocating for museums to become more dynamic, socially relevant, and inclusive. The new museology envisioned museums as institutions that actively engaged their audiences, were adaptive to societal changes, and employed new technologies of display to enhance the museum experience. The emphasis on situatedness and context (Vergo, 1989; Saumarez Smith, 1989) is one of the most prominent features of the new museology. Through his concept of the ‘reticent object’ Vergo (1989) contends that museums should consider the larger social, cultural, and political contexts of the objects in their collections. This requires analysing the historical and cultural narratives presented in museums and considering how they may be influenced by

power dynamics, colonial legacies, and social inequalities. The new museology proposed that museums should actively engage in dialogue and collaboration with diverse communities to ensure that multiple perspectives and voices are reflected in museum exhibitions and programmes.

'Decolonise' the Museum?

Museums in the contemporary are rapidly emerging as advocates for social change and sites of contestation. Recent developments in the expanded museological field have included activism, scholarship and exhibitions on the subject of 'decolonising' the museum. However, the groundwork of bringing issues of coloniality and decolonisation to prominence, comes from decades if not centuries of anti-colonial activism and scholarship the world over. Historically, the calls to decolonise the museum have frequently come from activists, artists, curators and scholars outside of the institution—this phenomenon is not restricted to a particular region and examples can be found in Europe, the Americas and Africa.

In response to the activism aimed at museums, one notable approach taken by institutions is to extend invitations to the dissenting actors themselves. These actors are invited into the museum, where they are typically tasked with assisting the institution to 'decolonise' its methods, practices, collections, and displays. In her now viral essay 'The Museum will not be Decolonised', Sumaya Kassim (2017) gives an account of her experience working as a co-curator on the exhibition *The Past Is Now*, at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Kassim's experience demonstrates that much of the labour involved in staging a 'decolonial' exhibition was about educating the museum institution on how "being invited as co-curators came at the price of having their own decolonial thoughts exploited" (Caradonna,

2021). While radical ideas are sometimes co-opted into exhibition and display narratives, the institution's use of language dilutes the significance of these concepts. Zeefuik sheds light on the selective framing of colonial histories within Dutch museums while reflecting on the impactful work carried out by the #DecolonizeTheMuseum movement in the Netherlands:

Some museums now use the term 'enslaved' but refuse to write new texts that convey what they consider to be an ongezellig [uncomfortable] perspective. I mean you can write 'enslaved' and still talk about slavery in a way that does not fracture Whiteness. You can scrap a word like 'disobedient', replace it with resistance and still not mention what was rejected — not an incident, but a system as something that continues to shape power dynamics today (2018).

In a *Paris Review* interview on the development of a diversity policy at Lancaster University, Ahmed contends that despite the critical language that she and her team brought to framing the policy about articulating racism in the institution, the university was able to use the policy that as an example of how good it was at race equality (Binyam 2022). Ahmed contends that even progressive and radical academics of colour can easily end up being interpellated: "it is not only that there's a gap between statements about inclusivity and diversity and what actually happens. It's also that we end up working to create what isn't the case" (Binyam, 2022: para 12). This is similar to what happens when artists, independent curators and scholars are drawn into a museum to co-curate parts of displays or to produce exhibitions that are intended to be revisionist or reformist. The currency that these invited guests bring into the museum does more to signal to museum publics that the institution is addressing its colonial pasts or that it is decolonising, without the institution itself having to do the tough and uncomfortable work that decolonisation requires. Ahmed uses the phrase "institutional mechanics" (Binyam, 2022) to describe the tools and strategies used by institutions to reproduce themselves.

Bennett (2018) argues that it is difficult not to be aware of just how much difficult heritage there is in Europe: “the Intersections of racial, national, imperial, religious and ethnic fault lines within Europe mean that there are few places where there are not difficult pasts to be negotiated” (85). These include the holocaust, the persecution of Romany peoples and the histories of colonisation that have yet to be addressed. To date, there are multiple examples in the Netherlands, France, England, Belgium and Germany among other European states, where, as Bennett (2018: 85) contends, “the museum/nation/people nexus is currently being refashioned in the context of difficult colonial legacies that still inform the collections and exhibition practices of many European Museums”. Bennett’s argument is that “these refashionings are largely being prompted by “organised transnational communities of action in calling for the reordering, reclassification, or repatriation of cultural materials that have been in transit across fluctuating national boundaries with and within, Europe” (2018: 85). While it is true that many calls to decolonise the museum come from activist groups outside of the institution and outside of the European continent, it is also true that the reconfigurations of European museums are the result of the internal frictions faced by a post-colonial Europe, fraught with racialised notions of belonging (who is regarded as European) and colonial practices and assumptions based on racial hierarchies still deeply embedded in European society.

Markus Balkenhol and Wayne Modest (2020: 173) argue that the colonial past is regarded by many in the Netherlands to be a thing of the past that has little relevance for contemporary Dutch Society. Despite this, a growing number of exhibitions have begun to address slavery and colonialism in some of the Netherlands’ most prominent museum institutions and museums continue to grapple with how to include the histories of slavery and colonialism in their narratives in the present.

For Modest the museum site (here he refers to the ethnographic museum), is favourably positioned as a central space to work through the conditions of the postcolonial present and the fashioning of other futures: “it is precisely these entangled relations with the colonial past—of extraction and violence, of appropriation and misrepresentation” that make the museum institution a powerful site for “thinking through colonial entailments in the present” (2019: 12). Other Dutch scholars and activists disagree. Mitchell Esajas for example, in reflecting on the Tropenmuseum’s *Afterlives of Slavery* (2017) exhibition, in particular the collaborative engagements between The Black Archives²² and the museum, where the museum borrowed several items from the organisation, asks can the former colonial museum truly be decolonised? (Esajas, 2018). Esajas argues: “what does it mean when such a museum holds an exhibition on the legacy of slavery when items—including human remains—which were appropriated under colonialism remains hidden in its depot?” (2018: np). Like the Tropenmuseum, many European museums are grappling with how to deal with their colonial afterlives, but Vittoria Caradonna points out, “fewer are reasoning in terms of coloniality from within, through which the institution produces and replicates structural inequality. And yet the terms ‘decolonial and ‘decolonise’ are increasingly being adopted from within the walls of the institution” (2021: 59).

The calls and efforts for the ‘decolonisation’ of the museum may present an opportunity for the urgent restitution of African cultural objects, collections and human remains but it also presents an opportunity to rethink what we mean by ‘museum’ entirely. In this regard, Rasool argues: “it is in these restitution claims, consultations and negotiations that the new concept of the museum process will be

²² The Black Archives is located in the building of Vereniging Ons Suriname (VOS), an association established in 1919 by early Surinamese migrants in Amsterdam, and now run by the New Urban Collective (NUC) and Miguel Heilbron.

found, as a way of settling the dilemmas of the unsettled objects in the modern museum of coloniality” (2021: 339). Vawda (2019: 78) imagines a decolonial museum that is “collaborative, dialogical, sympathetic to other views and different perspectives, and also provides a framework for discussion, debate and decision making that is just, equitable and humane to producing both knowledge and displays through co-curation and exhibition”. While these arguments have their merits, scholars like Ivan Muñiz Reed (2015: 15) question whether it is “even possible for museums to restructure knowledge and power to return agency to those who have lost it?”. As Reed points out, the question over whether the museum can be decolonised is imperative and must be part of decolonial debate. As epistemic spaces of representation, museums can restructure knowledge and power to empower those who have historically been marginalised or excluded by adopting innovative practices and discarding practices and forms of knowledge that perpetuate epistemic violence²³.

Early efforts to decolonise the museum began after geopolitical decolonisation following WWII, mostly at the initiative of indigenous groups seeking to reclaim ownership of their ancestors and cultural objects that had been stolen and seized by colonisers. A local South African example of this is the remains of Sara Baartman, repatriated to the Western Cape from France in 2002 after the interventions and negotiations led by South Africa’s Department of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology (DACST). Until as recently as the 1990s, a full body cast of Baartman was displayed in the Musée de l’Homme and her complete skeleton was displayed in the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle, both in Paris. Thus, the early notion of

²³ A notable example is the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. In 2017, this museum embarked on a project called Internal Review on Displays and Programming from an Ethical Perspective that involves re-evaluating the museum’s collections and displays with a focus on acknowledging the colonial histories of certain objects in its collections and engaging with source communities to address issues of provenance and representation. The museum has taken a transparent and critical self-reflexive approach to its practices that go beyond just exhibition display. See: <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/critical-changes#collapse2260301>.

decolonising museums was based on Western ethnographic museum collections and centred on restitution (Ariese, 2019)²⁴. Beyond the restitution of objects and human remains, the focus in subsequent decades soon turned to the representation of “ethnographic” objects to draw attention to the colonial subjectivities that museums produce and the ideologies of White supremacy that they promoted and maintained. In recent decades, particularly over the last 15-20 years, the struggle for decolonisation in the museum “has become broader to encompass a myriad of practices and processes”(Ariese, 2019: 2). These include the transformation of museum staff demographics, the addition of multivocality to museum exhibitions; or efforts to include more self-critique (Ariese, 2019: 2).

Despite institutional efforts at decolonisation, the museums’ lingering colonial attributes stubbornly and continually adapt to a “neo-colonial positioning of the ‘new museum’ in relation to the ex-colonial other” (Boast, 2011). These institutional efforts can sometimes come across as ‘moves to innocence’ (Tuck and Yang, 2012) or ‘decolonial fronting’ in the museum—the appropriation and performance of decolonial language, ideas and aesthetics. Thus, in reflecting on Audre Lorde’s (1984) essay ‘The Masters tools will never Dismantle the Master’s House’, an unreflexive and uncritical museological and curatorial practice becomes the master’s tools when it dresses up in the language of decolonisation without actually addressing the ways it is complicit in and upholds the colonial afterlife:

For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change...I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that

²⁴ As demonstrated by the Sarr & Savoy report commissioned by Emmanuel Macron in 2018, issues around the restitution and repatriation of looted objects held captive by European museums remains as a pressing focus.

lives here. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices. (Lorde, 1984: 111)

Chapter 3: *Goede Hoop*: Visualising Colonial Pasts

In February 2017, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam opened the exhibition *Goede Hoop, Zuid Afrika en Nederland vanaf 1600 (Good Hope: South Africa and the Netherlands from 1600)*. It was described as the “first major exhibition about the relationship between South Africa and the Netherlands” and sought to show “400 years of emotive history in 300 items, most of which come from South Africa” (Rijksmuseum, 2017). The exhibition ran until May 21, 2017, and formed part of the Rijksmuseum’s “Country Series” of exhibitions and publications. South Africa was one of the nine countries and former Dutch colonies identified by the museum’s History department to have had a special historic relationship with the Netherlands in addition to Indonesia, Japan, China, India, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Surinam and Brazil. *Goede Hoop* was the first curated exhibition in the Country Series initiative, which had been publication-based up to that point (Valley, 2021).

Holtrop, Junior Curator of History at the Rijksmuseum and member of the *Goede Hoop* curatorial team, notes that the museum was closed to the public from 2003 to 2013 for reconstruction and refurbishing. Subsequent to the re-opening of the museum, Gosselink, former head of History at the Rijksmuseum, established the “Country Series” to address the History department’s dissatisfaction with how the Netherlands’ colonial history was displayed prior to the renovation. The curators in Gosselink’s department were thus entrusted with investigating the relationship between the Netherlands and each of the selected countries in the “Country Series”. Gosselink aimed to make explicit the gaps in the Rijksmuseum’s collection, which she referred to as “what we cannot show”. By this, she implies that due to size and word limit restrictions, the museum labels cannot convey all the aspects of how the collection is connected to the Netherlands’ complex and violent colonial history.

In a short documentary on the Rijksmuseum's YouTube channel, *Museum TV* (2017), Gosselink discusses the effects of the Dutch colonial occupation on contemporary South Africa, implying that *Goede Hoop's* curatorial team set out to expose the Dutch colonial past and the crimes (as referred to in the curatorial text) of their 'distant cousins,' the Boers and Afrikaners, descendants of Dutch colonial settlers. In a similar vein, the promotional material for *Goede Hoop* suggests that the exhibition was a move towards a reassessment of the museographic treatment of colonisation and a reframing of the History of the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company), also known as the VOC²⁵. The economic success of the VOC in the Dutch colonies enabled the Netherlands to become one of the world's wealthiest and most influential countries. Much of the wealth of the Golden Age was generated through human abduction and trafficking, as well as forced unpaid labour. During the 250-year Dutch Golden Age, the Netherlands enslaved and exploited more than 600,000 people from Africa and Asia²⁶.

A popular trope in constructing the imagined community of the Netherlands is to evoke the VOC efforts in establishing the prosperous seventeenth-century period of imperialism in the Netherlands. Thus, an attempt to reframe this history is crucial because the VOC maintains a dominant presence in the collective popular imaginary of the Dutch. This is broadly evident across public life: in the media, such as in Dutch television shows; tourism products such as city tours; museum displays and in artefacts of popular culture, such as board games. According to Gloria Wekker (2016), the popular, state-sanctioned historicising of De Gouden Eeuw is essential to the Dutch sense of self and other. These ideas of self and other as they manifest in the Netherlands is discussed in chapter 4.

²⁵ Vereenigde Landsche Ge-Oktroyeerde Oostindische Compagnie, better known to the Anglophone world as the Dutch East India Company or as the VOC. The executive directorate of the VOC was called the Heeren Sewentien, or the "Lords Seventeen". The Company had a federal character, comprising six chambers. Available: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/dutch-east-india-company-deicvoc> [2018, October 16].

²⁶ See: <https://www.ascleiden.nl/content/webdossiers/dutch-involvement-transatlantic-slave-trade-and-abolition>



Figure 2: *De Gouden Eeuw* Boardgame photographed at The Black Archives, Amsterdam. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

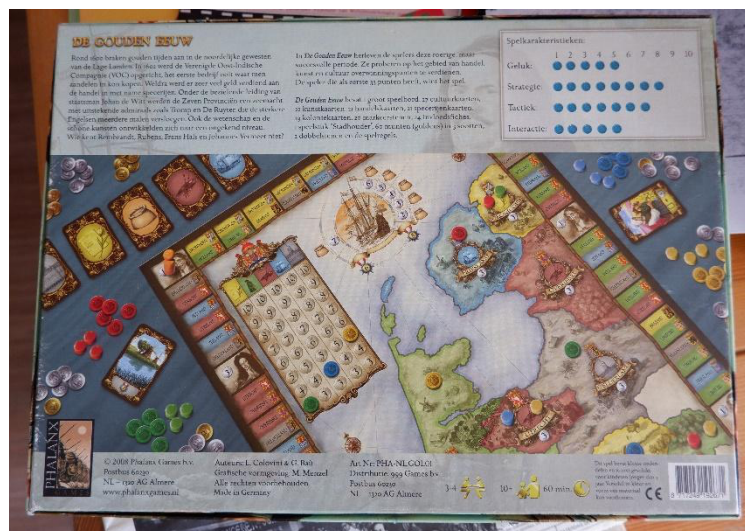


Figure 3: *De Gouden Eeuw* Boardgame photographed at The Black Archives, Amsterdam. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

The *Goede Hoop* exhibition in 2017 marked the beginning of the Rijksmuseum’s critical look at the Netherlands’ history of colonialism and the beginning of a series of exhibitions that would investigate this topic. It was also the first exhibition on the subject of colonialism at the Rijksmuseum in 15 years (Holtrop, 2019). In the foreword to the catalogue for *Goede Hoop*, the Rijksmuseum’s director, Dibbitts writes that “the historical relationship between the Netherlands and South Africa shares much with other colonial relationships in other countries, and to an extent, *Goede Hoop* can be seen as an account of colonial rule in a more general sense”

(2017: 13). The ambitious nature of the project and its potentiality to reach various spheres of the Dutch public is exemplified in the seven-part television series inspired by the exhibition, also called *Goede Hoop*.²⁷ It was aired by Dutch public broadcaster, NTR. This documentary series follows a similar structure to *Goede Hoop*, beginning with a precolonial history of the Western Cape Region and ending with a look at life in the post-1994 South Africa (the Regenboognatie (Rainbow Nation) as it is referred to by the show's producers).

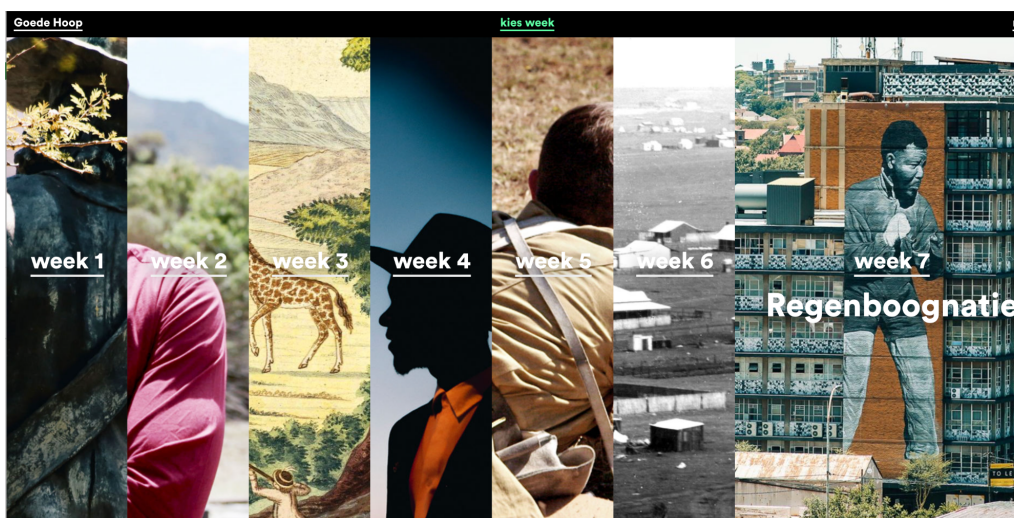


Figure 4: Screenshot of the webpage for the NTR-produced television series, *Goede Hoop*. Screenshot by Greer Valley. 2019

A Museum of Art and History

The Rijksmuseum is the national museum of the Netherlands. It is situated in Museumplein in central Amsterdam close to other major art museums such as the Van Gogh Museum and the Stedelijk Museum. It is the largest art museum in the country and presents itself as the most important museum for the art and history of the Netherlands. It differs from other national museums in Europe in the sense that it was always intended to be museum for both art and history. However, the largest part of the collection consists of Dutch masters from the seventeenth century. The

²⁷ <http://archieff.ntr.nl/goedehoop/index.html> [2023, March 20].

Rijksmuseum's history can be traced to 1800 when the first state museum Nationale Konst-Gallerij (National Art Gallery) opened in Huis ten Bosch near The Hague. As the ancestor of the future Rijksmuseum, the vision for its establishment was to restore the sense of Dutchness that arose from the seventeenth-century economic success of the Netherlands. This was to be done through a showing of objects that would reinstate a sense of pride and national identity as a means of underlining the common culture of the United Provinces²⁸. Dutch History has been an integral aspect of the museum since its inception, and this is reflected through the art that was chosen for the museum. Paintings displayed in the museum consisted of portraits of the house of Orange and the important statesmen in the Batavian Republic²⁹. The portraits were accompanied by the display of objects that belonged to the individuals in the paintings. Paintings by painters of the Dutch Golden Age are featured prominently in the museum. According to Felicity Bodenstein, "Dutch painters from the Golden Age were highly regarded for their ability to document their own present time, a past that came to be considered as exemplary, making these paintings important as artworks but also as archival documents" (2011: 599).

In 1808, the Nationale Konst-Gallerij was moved from The Hague to the Royal Palace (formerly the City Hall) in Amsterdam by the King of the Netherlands, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the younger brother of Napoleon I, an early patron of the museum. It became known as the Koninklijk Museum (Royal Museum) in 1810 and housed "paintings, drawings, various statuary and chiselled work, cut stones, antiquities, art objects and rarities of all sorts" (Bodenstein, 2011: 599). Bonaparte

²⁸ The establishment of the United Provinces between 1588 to 1598 was the earliest manifestation of the modern Dutch State.

²⁹ The Batavian republic (Bataafse Republiek) was the successor of the United Provinces Republic. It was established in 1795 following the French invasion of the United Provinces and dissolved in 1806 with Louis Bonaparte's ascent to the throne of the Kingdom of Holland.

personally approved all the museum's acquisitions that were financed by the government. When Willem I ascended the throne in 1814, the museum moved again to Trippenhuis in Amsterdam (since 1887, it has housed the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences) and opened as the Rijks Museum, a state museum administered by the government. It remained there until the completion of the new building, designed by the architect Pierre Cuypers in 1885. Although there were rooms filled with portraits in the Trippenhuis, there was no room showing a systematic overview or reflecting a master narrative of Dutch history. At this time, the museum's core function was to show the History of the Netherlands through the display of its art.

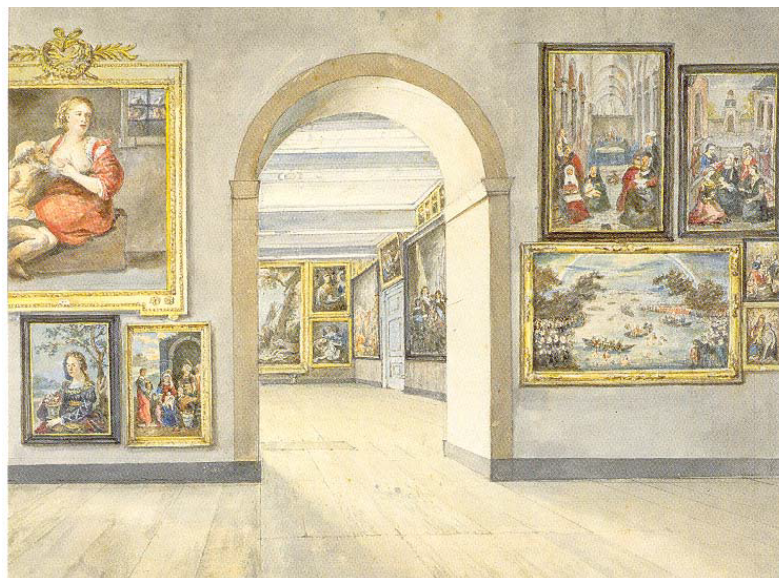


Figure 5: Interior of the Rijksmuseum at Trippenhuis by Gerrit Lamberts, circa 1838. Watercolour on paper, Municipal Archive, Amsterdam (Aske, 2007: 42).



Figure 6: Photograph of the new Rijksmuseum building completed in 1885. The museum opened to its publics on 13 July 1885. (Rijksmuseum.nl, 2020).

By the eighteenth century, European culture had become part of a modern complex of ideas around civilisation, including education in the broader sense. In the Netherlands, rapid economic growth coupled with a new national awareness for heritage, led to changes in Dutch government policy. By the 1870s, the government had finalised its first cultural policy. Victor de Stuers, who published the article 'Holland On Zijn Smalst' (Holland at its tiniest) in 1873, advocating for an overhaul of the Netherlands' cultural policy, played a pivotal role in the establishment of what would become the Rijksmuseum. De Stuers stated in the article that a museum displaying Dutch art and history would benefit tourism. He also emphasised the significance of appropriate curation and archiving of collections of Dutch art and valuable cultural objects in assisting the formation of a national identity. The article proved extremely popular, placing pressure on the government at the time to honour its commitment to build a new national museum.

King Willem II famously refused to enter the newly finished Rijksmuseum building on July 13, 1885, referring to it as the 'Catholic Cathedral' (Bouquet, 2015). According to Mary Bouquet, many people in the Netherlands were outraged by the new national museum building, that featured a hybrid of Dutch Renaissance and late

Gothic forms, an exuberant decorative programme, towers, and stained-glass windows. The new structure was an architectural statement of the redefining of the Netherlands as a nation in which groups such as Catholics were now viewed to be included. The museum was designed by Cuypers (1827-1921) in accordance to the City government of Amsterdam's specification that the structure should resemble a city gate (Bouquet, 2015: 152). The new Rijksmuseum building, which opened in 1885, was built on the city's outer limits, with the privately developed Concertgebouw (1888) and the municipal Stedelijk Museum (1895) joining it, followed by the Vincent van Gogh Museum in the next century (1973). Cuypers was tasked with creating a unifying Dutch identity in his design and took inspiration from a variety of architectural sources. The general neo-gothic architectural style reflected the catholic church's strengthened influence in the Netherlands since its reorganisation in 1853. The architectural plan was influenced by the historic town hall of Amsterdam, while the elevation was inspired by the Dutch Golden Age. When it was completed in 1885, the Rijksmuseum was the largest building in the Netherlands (Bouquet, 2015).

The Rijksmuseum was closed from 2003 to 2013 for an ambitious refurbishment project for which it received the European Museum of the Year award in 2015, despite the fact that it had re-opened more than two years prior. Its makeover was part of Amsterdam's rebranding efforts, which aimed to improve the city's reputation as a theme park devoted to sex and drugs. The city government's justification for the refurbishment had been that it wanted Amsterdam to be recognised as one of Europe's cultural capitals (de Waard, 2012: 143). Since the late eighteenth century, museums have had a significant impact in establishing a Modern approach to time: i.e. the past as distinct from the present, yet with the selective bringing forward of valued cultural objects and sites into the present for transmission into the future. The grounds for the revisiting of the displays and

interior architecture of the building were that its installations were deemed to be illegible, opaque, labyrinth-like, and inhospitable, thus in need of repair.

Since the opening of The Rijksmuseum in 1885, there had been many additions to and revisions to the original building. However, what distinguishes the 2003-2013 revamp is the museum's decision to return to the architectural language of Cuypers' original design which led to the demolition of some of the added historical layers such as the buildings over the interior courtyards traced back to the 1960s and 1950s. The building was built in 1885 by Cuypers was wholly refurbished, and this was based on extensive historical research into the original architectural design. The refurbishment also saw the rearrangement of the museum from a departmental arrangement (sculpture; painting; etc) to a chronological arrangement—objects were now displayed according to the century in which it was made. The museum's colonial collection had historically consisted of items from the cabinet of curiosities that had become part of the Museum of Art and History in the Hague before it moved to Amsterdam and this collection was displayed in a separate section. At the time of the reopening, the Rijksmuseum was organised into distinct chronological sections, which is how it was still arranged when I visited the *Goede Hoop* exhibition in 2017. Starting on the ground floor are the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Special Collections such as Fashion as well as the new Asian Pavilion that seems to float outside the walls of the main building. The first floor houses the Eighteenth-century collection arranged around a courtyard on the left-hand side, while the Nineteenth-century collection is arranged around the courtyard on the right-hand side. Other notable additions included the new entrances and public reception area and the twentieth-century galleries on the third floor.

The queen of the Netherlands opened the New Rijksmuseum in 2013, and this was one of her last public appearances before she abdicated. This reflects the history of

the Dutch state: “the tension between the loose federal structure of the united provinces or Dutch Republic (1779-1795) and the defacto dominance of the province of Holland” (Bouquet, 2015: 152). Bouquet argues that the queen’s presence at the opening “can be seen as part of the ongoing realignment between the state and the modern, constitutional monarchy, which attempts to stand above past divisions and to represent the ambitions of the contemporary state—both nationally as a symbol of unity and internationally as a reliable trading partner and desirable tourist destination” (Bouquet, 2015: 152).

The Rijksmuseum represents the deep past of the Dutch state and national identity as they were conceived at the end of the nineteenth century. The contemporary Rijksmuseum fulfils a double function by preserving the objects in the collection and preserving the idea of the museum itself and what it represents in terms of national identity for the Netherlands. This double function of the museum resonates with Bal’s (1992: 560) concept of the “museum of a museum” or “metamuseum” as “a preserve not for endangered species but for an endangered self”. Bal argues that this is “the museal preservation of a project ruthlessly dated and belonging to an age long gone whose ideological goals have been subjected to extensive critique” (1992: 560). Her critique is that this phenomenon speaks to the institution’s complicity in practices of domination while it continues to pursue an educational project that, having emerged out of those practices, has been adjusted to new social paradigms and pedagogical needs.

Imagined Pasts, Redemptive Futures

The layout of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition replicates the refurbished chronological rearrangement of the Rijksmuseum. Much like the way the Rijksmuseum is

structured, the exhibition concluded at the end of the 20th century, post the release of the former president of South Africa and political prisoner of the apartheid government, Nelson Mandela. This approach to exhibiting naturalises the notion of linear and continuous notions of time. As Stacy Douglas (2017) contends, “conceptions of time become central in orienting the relationship between an imagined past and an imagined future by telling a narrative from which political projects, communities and subjects are imagined, rendering the messiness of political community into an ordered whole. In this way, time functions as an anamorphic orientation at work in the museum” (Douglas, 2017: 64).

The exhibition occupied the ten galleries of the Rijksmuseum’s Phillips Wing. It was designed to begin with the arrival of the first Dutch ships in the Cape Region in 1600 and end with Mandela’s visit to Amsterdam in 1990. The first part of the exhibition is divided into distinct historical periods starting with 1600 to 1652 (Pre-colonial South Africa), 1652 to 1700 (Confrontation in the Cape), 1700 to 1800 (I am an Afrikaner), 1800 to 1900 (South Africa in the Nineteenth Century) and 1899 to 1902 (The Boer War). The second part of the show focuses on the twentieth century, including the two World Wars, South African apartheid, and 1994 and beyond. The selected historical periods are portrayed in discrete rooms or galleries, each with a distinct entrance and exit so that the viewers are aware when they enter and exit a particular time period. As a result, visitors experience this exhibition as a chronological journey through South Africa’s Dutch colonial era. Hence, the show’s architecture is employed here to have a significant impact on how South Africa’s historical relationship with the Netherlands is understood.

The curators structured the exhibition around three key figures they identified as critical to the story of the two countries’ shared history. The three individuals selected to represent the three eras of Dutch influence in South Africa are Jan van

Riebeeck, Paul Kruger, and Nelson Mandela. The figure of van Riebeeck represents the arrival of the Dutch on South African land. Kruger symbolises Dutch-Afrikaner kinship during the Anglo-Boer War and South African support for the Netherlands after WWII. Mandela exemplifies the anti-apartheid activism in the Netherlands as well as the advent of South Africa's democratic process. This episodic historical approach is a standard curatorial device that has been extensively criticised for its shortcomings. As Shepherd and Ernsten point out, "one of the consequences (of this approach) is that as we enter each new room, we leave the things of the previous room behind us. Time becomes a line marked by many breaks, and what we experience in an embodied way is the discontinuity between periods, presented as discrete historical episodes" (2017: 2). The ordering of the exhibition through these three paternal figures, suggests that the idea of the nation can only be imagined through a paternal figurehead, and is reminiscent of apartheid nationalism's ideas of Die Vaderland (the fatherland).

On entering the exhibition, the viewer encounters the *Goede Hoop* curatorial statement. Adjacent to this is the board 'Thanks and Acknowledgements', that listed all the stakeholders involved in realising the exhibition. Under the heading 'Curators', I expected to see some collaboration with South African curators, artists, scholars or researchers, but none are listed. This text set the tone for the experience that would follow as I moved through the exhibition from room to room during my visit in May, 2017. I wrote of the experience in an article published in the online publication, *Africa is a Country* (2017):

My immediate impression is that the experience is like walking through a hall of mirrors—what's reflected feels familiar, but the image has been distorted and obscured. [...] Under 'Curators' I expected to see some collaboration with South African curators, artists, scholars or researchers, but there are none. Surely an exhibition looking at contemporary South Africa would involve at least one South

African curator, especially now, in this “post-postapartheid” moment. Who is telling the story is as important as what story is being told and the omission of South African voices at the onset is deeply problematic. From this point onwards, as I walk from room to room, representing the different periods in ‘history’ I become conscious of an internalisation that in this exhibition my voice doesn’t matter and that perhaps this exhibition is not for me to look at, at all.



Figure 7: Thanks and Acknowledgments. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

Every room in the exhibition dealt with a particular period as defined by the curators. For each period, the curators asked a set of questions that acted as the rationale that precedes the design of the room. For the design of the first gallery representing the period 1600 to 1652, the curators ask the following questions: “What did South Africa look like before the arrival of the Westerners?; What was the

first contact between the Dutch and Cape of Good Hope like? And, who lived in the country at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese and VOC?" (Rijksmuseum, 2017).

The first room of *Goede Hoop* intended to address the world the Dutch invaded: precolonial South Africa—the world that was inhabited by Indigenous Khoekhoe and San people of the Western Cape region. A panoramic ink and watercolour image of Table Bay that is assumed to have been painted by Johannes Schumacher but has previously been attributed to Jacob Gordon, fills the walls of the room. The textual information and objects on display are minimal. In the centre of the room, are six pieces of rock: three with drawings made by the San while the other three have Portuguese and Dutch inscriptions. Also displayed are drawings by the San of people and animals in the region and depictions of ships on rocks that date between 1600 and 1800. During the early time of colonial exploration, European sailors made inscriptions on large stones that would contain letters. They were mostly carved in capitals and stated when a crew had arrived, the name of the ship and the date of departure. These stones would often contain important information about potential dangers or difficulties experienced by the ship's crew. When new ships arrived, crew members would check for letters left by their countrymen. Many of these stones are preserved and inscribed in Portuguese Dutch, French and English text, and provides evidence of the various groups that sailed and docked their ship around the Cape's coastal region.

By juxtaposing these two early forms of communication by the indigenous inhabitants and European sailors, the curators are making a statement about life at the Cape at the time and the contact the indigenous peoples had with the Europeans. Through this approach, the curators counter the fictitious apartheid-era narrative that the Dutch "discovered" and settled on empty land. It also shows that prior to 1652, (when Jan van Riebeeck was tasked by the VOC to set up the

refreshment station in the Cape) there had already been meetings between Europeans and indigenous Africans in the region.

The display in this room sets up the notion of shared history — the conceptual idea that *Goede Hoop* is premised on. Centring this exhibition on the concept of a shared History presents one of the problems with how colonial histories are often dealt with in European museums, as the notion of ‘sharing’ denotes the existence of harmonious, consensual and equitable interactions between Africans and Europeans. Further, it homogenises and depoliticises the interactions between the groups that were involved in a deeply asymmetrical colonial encounter that lasted centuries.



Figure 8: Gallery 1 installation representing the pre-colonial Cape region. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

The second room in the exhibition deals with the period 1652 to 1700, and this marks the start of the Dutch colonial period in the Cape. The museum states that “it was during the first ten years, the era of the first commander, Dutchman Jan van Riebeeck, that the foundations were laid for future relations between the Netherlands and South Africa” (Rijksmuseum, 2017). The key question this section is

meant to address (also mentioned in the exhibition preview video³⁰) is: “what happens when White folks come to live in a Black country?” (Rijksmuseum, 2017). Shepherd and Ernsten (2017) argue that it is unlikely that the Dutch in the early seventeenth century thought of themselves as White, just as it is unlikely that South Africa was considered a ‘Black country’ at the time. The concept of a White or a Black race only came into existence in Europe in the late seventeenth century, and it was not universally accepted at first. They offer instead that “surely, the story here is about the “historical coming into being of ideas of “Whiteness” and “Blackness” as a result of colonial institutions and apartheid, rather than a retrospective projecting of such identities back in time?” (Shepherd and Ernsten, 2017).

This point is critical, as this question reveals the dominant way that race is understood in the Netherlands in the present. In her seminal work *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*, Wekker (2016) offers an analysis of the concept of ‘White innocence’ as a persistent cultural and historical construct in the Netherlands. According to Wekker, this idea is rooted in a refusal to acknowledge the persistence of structural racism and violence inherited from the Dutch colonial past. As Wekker points out, in a Dutch context, Whiteness is not acknowledged as a racial, ethnicised positioning, but is generally seen as the default and as devoid of meaning. The Rijksmuseum is integral to fostering a sense of Dutchness in the Netherlands and positioning that identity as binary to those it considers other. The continuity of coloniality means that the boundaries between self and other are never entirely erased. As Wekker argues:

The construction of the European self and its others took place in the force fields of conquest, colonisation, empire formation, permanent settlement by Europeans, nationalist struggles by the colonised, and selective decolonisation. Contemporary

³⁰ see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4JT55yusvI&feature=emb_logo [2023, March 4].

constructions of “us”, those constructed as belonging to Europe and “them” those constructed as not belonging, vary over time” (Wekker, 2016: 21).

The exhibition’s curatorial team failed to address the ways that Whiteness and its intersections with other structural systems of power is an integral part of the colonial afterlife, not just in terms of the Dutch settler colonial presence in contemporary South Africa, but also in the Netherlands.

Drawings of Khoekhoe cultural objects used in daily life, oil paintings and sketches of Dutch ships, and seventeenth-century maps prepared by the VOC are on show in the second room. While the pre-colonial social lives in the Cape region had been characterised by a number of complex and interconnected trade relationships, the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck and the VOC sets in motion the start of a period of conflict marked by land dispossession, murder and genocide as experienced by the pastoralist Khoekhoe and hunter-gatherer San communities. However, *Goede Hoop* does not address the violence of colonial oppression and dispossession nor the acts of resistance characteristic of this period. Yet, it marks this time as significant by including Jan van Riebeeck’s figure and framing it as critical to the narrative of the history it claims to represent (Fig. 9). The centrality of Jan van Riebeeck as a significant historical figure in mythologising Afrikaner nationalist history is another omission, and an issue unpacked in a later chapter of this dissertation. This aspect of the colonial history of the Cape Colony is important to show, because the story of van Riebeeck’s landing was fundamental in historicising Afrikaner nationalism, its claim to a European identity (and thus, superiority) and claims to land.



Figure 9: Gallery 2 display, showing the portrait of Jan van Riebeeck. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

On the charcoal-coloured walls of the second room, the Dutch word 'Ingepikt' (Stolen) (Fig. 10) is painted in white paint resembling the style of lettering used on a protest placard. Words and phrases drawn in this style appear on the walls throughout the exhibition, mostly positioned above the object displays. This text could be read as representing the insurgent voices of South Africa at particular moments in time — those of dissenting indigenous groups, enslaved people or anti-colonial and anti-apartheid activists. On the surface, these statements appear to be subversive, but while they may counter popular Dutch perspectives of colonialism, they appear disjointed from the rest of the exhibition with its sombre colour palette, vitrines and tomb-style labelling. Moreover, this gesture reads as an aesthetic insertion, rather than as an intervention meant to signal a meaningful or radical engagement with Dutch colonial history. As Tuck and Yang (2012) point out, the wide-ranging, uncritical and unreflexive appropriation of decolonial language, aesthetics and subject matter by museums and other cultural and educational institutions translates not as decolonial practice but as elaborate subterfuge. Because museum institutions like the Rijksmuseum are still operating along the

same logics they contest, the affective message of these statements become unclear.



Figure 10: The text “Ingepikt” (Stolen) painted on the walls in Gallery 2. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

The accumulation of land and wealth by colonial settlers came at great expense to the indigenous inhabitants of South Africa and this has impacted on the lived experiences of South African people, centuries after the first colonial occupation. Colonisation led to the dispossession of Black South Africans’ land, property and livelihoods that began in the seventeenth century when the first free Burgher, Jan Hendrik Boom, began farming a plot of land previously used as grazing pastures by the Khoekhoe. The 1913 Natives Land Act of South Africa further legislated the theft of land that occurred over centuries and further established a policy of forced removals entrenching the dispossession of land and suppressed the emergence of a class of Black landowners. Thus, the issue of colonial land dispossession must be addressed in an exhibition that attempts to show the post-colonial conditions of South Africa in the present. However, while the statement Ingepikt can be read as provocative, the exhibition text and objects displayed in the room do not go into detail on the idea of colonial theft. Curiously, *Goede Hoop* shied away from this issue, showing how exhibition practice cements a partial and limited visual legacy.

The display in the next room ushers the audience into the eighteenth century. Audiences are met with the slogan 'Ik ben een Afrikaander (I am an Afrikaner)' (Fig.11) painted in the same style as Ingepikt. The word 'Ik (I)' is underlined here. This could be interpreted as the curators problematising the subjectivity 'Afrikaner' or 'Afrikaander' and is reiterated by the exhibition label "Genesis of the Afrikaner or Afrikaander". This label does not explain the historical complexity of the terms Afrikaander or Afrikaner, or the politicisation of the term. Instead, it reinforces narrow understandings of who this group of people are, and thus omits a large portion of their history. Due to the apartheid nationalist project, the true history of Afrikaners, or Afrikaans speaking people in South Africa remains repressed and invisibilised. For decades, the creole history of the Afrikaans language was hidden from mainstream South African history as it contradicts and troubles 'White' and 'European' South African identities and debunks apartheid-era constructions of racial purity. In fact, the first people who identified as Afrikaanders were African or of both African and European descent.

The history of the word 'Afrikaner' can be traced to the mid-eighteenth century when emancipated slaves and enslaved peoples born in the Cape Colony were known as 'Afrikaners' or 'Afrikaanders'. Klaas Afrikaner and his son Jager Afrikaner were members of the Oorlam community that formed part of the broader Khoekhoe society. At the time, settlers of Dutch descent referred to themselves as 'Boere', 'Christene' and 'Nederlanders'. At the end of the nineteenth century, the forced Europeanisation of the Afrikaans language started as an ideological project by the group Die Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners (the Association of True Afrikaners). This group sought to nationalise the Afrikaans language after it found that fewer people of Dutch descent were speaking pure Dutch and were speaking the creole language Afrikaans in increasing numbers.



Figure 11: The text “Ik Ben Een Afrikaander” painted on the wall in Gallery 3. Photograph by Greer Valley, 2017.

In the eighteenth century, the Dutch East India Company continued its expansion and left its mark on South Africa. Dutch gabled architecture appeared in towns all over the Western Cape and grapevines were planted by the Huguenots (French protestants that arrived in the Cape via the Netherlands). The Dutch expanded into territory once occupied by the Khoekhoe, driving them away with ecologically damaging farming practices. Soon the VOC needed labour on the farms they established on the land seized from the Khoekhoe, and in 1658 the first enslaved peoples were forcibly imported into South Africa from present-day Angola (SAHO, 2017). Enslaved people from other parts of Africa, Madagascar, India and Indonesia were brought into South Africa from 1658 onwards. They brought with them their cultures, languages and religions, contributing to the cultural diversity that would later characterise contemporary South Africa. The text on display in this room, ostensibly explaining the diversity of the Cape Colony’s inhabitants, reads: “sexual relations between Khoekhoe, enslaved, free- and European colonists were for a long time considered completely normal” (Rijksmuseum, 2017).



Figure 12: Slave Bell positioned in front of the text “Ik Werk Altijd, Ook Ik moet Rusten” (I am always working, I too need to rest). Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

Also Installed in this room, were displays of what is known as Cape furniture (with Dutch, Cape and Javanese influences), drawings of eighteenth-century Cape townships and portrait paintings of prominent Dutch colonial families and their grandiose belongings. Juxtaposed to these items, are paintings showing enslaved people, slave yokes and a slave bell. These objects represent the power structures that would characterise the socio-political landscape of South Africa over centuries with its wealthy White settler and Black labouring classes.

This section of the exhibition addresses the colonial Cape region, but noticeably absent is any information on or representation of the network of colonies in the Indian ocean of which Cape Town became part of from 1652 to 1795. In any representation of the Dutch colonial condition, it is critical to demonstrate the global colonial impact of the Netherlands since it contextualises the country’s relationship with its other former colonies. The Rijksmuseum may have considered leaving this for their then-forthcoming show on slavery (*Slavernij*, which opened in 2021) but the omission represents yet another missed chance to investigate how

slavery and slave history affected present day South Africa, and how the psyche of the Western Cape, in particular, is still profoundly anchored in master-slave relationships.

A seven-metre-long print of an 18th-century panoramic depiction of Table Bay, likely painted by Johannes Schumacher in 1778, stretches across the wall facing the words 'Ik ben een Afrikaner'. This print leads us to *Goede Hoop's* largest gallery and the second section of the eighteenth-century display. This room contains a display of meticulously detailed ethnographic drawings, paintings and texts made by Robert Jacob Gordon³¹ (1743-1795). This exhibition featured the Rijksmuseum's Robert Jacob Gordon collection, which includes personal journals containing writing, maps, and paintings depicting the terrain, wildlife, flora, meteorology, geology, and inhabitants of South Africa. Gordon was a Scottish-born Dutchman who led multiple scientific missions into South Africa's interior. On his expeditions, Gordon drew numerous sketches of the country's inhabitants, flora, and fauna, as well as various panoramas of the area, some of which were over seven metres long.

³¹ Robert Jacob Gordon was the last Dutch governor of the Cape Colony and his writings are held at the Brenthurst Library in Johannesburg, while the Rijksmuseum hold his sketches, maps and paintings. The full Gordon collection has been digitized and can be viewed at <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/>.



Figure 13: Ethnographic studies by Robert Jacob Gordon. This is the display that Rijksmuseum had planned on installing at the IZIKO South African Museum. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017

The accompanying exhibition text claims that Gordon is the first person to make a detailed study of the country and its inhabitants:

During his journeys, he negotiated between the colonial farmers and the Khoikhoi, San and Xhosa. Even the giraffe skeleton is on display that Gordon sent to Stadtholder Willem V, which is usually on view in the Museum Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, and which has now been reconstructed here bone by bone. (Rijksmuseum, 2017).



Figure 14: Skeleton of a Giraffe, reconstructed for Goede Hoop. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.



Figure 15: 18th century panorama watercolour drawings of Table Pay attributed to Robert Jacob Gordon. Above the drawings, the text reads “Wat doen je op m'n land?” (What are you doing on my land?). Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

As one entered the room that put the nineteenth-century on display, there was a sense that a shift in power was imminent in the narrative presented to the viewer. This display signalled the end of Dutch rule in South Africa and the transition is marked by the exhibition label: “1806: British Empire Annexes the Cape”, which describes the British invasion of the Cape Colony. The text subsequently acknowledges that the Dutch descendants, then known as ‘Boeren’ (Boers – South Africans of Dutch, German, or Huguenot origin) and frequently referred to as the ‘distant cousins’ of the Dutch throughout the exhibition by the museum, maintained a presence in South Africa when Dutch sovereignty ended (Rijksmuseum, 2017). The text then briefly mentions Afrikaner support for Nazi’s during the Second World War and that a number of Dutch Social Nationalists moved to South Africa after the war. The display shows how the Boers founded their republics, the Orange Free State and Transvaal. Flags of multiple metres in length, bibles and embroidered bonnets symbolise the ‘Dutch’ South Africa that the English encountered when gold and diamonds were discovered. Nineteenth-century photographic portraits show the descendants of the Dutch settlers in South Africa with surnames such as Waterboer, Potgieter and Kok, flanked by with portraits of unnamed local Indigenous people.

Landscape paintings by Dutch-South African artist Jacob Hendrik Pierneef, a member of the Afrikaner Broeder-Bond who was also called a “card-carrying racist” in a *Mail and Guardian* article by the journalist, Robyn Sassen (2015) were also on show. Pierneef was greatly influenced by Afrikaner nationalism and its determination to carve out a distinct identity following the Anglo-Boer conflict. The artist has received widespread criticism by art critics and scholars for painting desolate landscapes devoid of indigenous South African homesteads and the failure to depict life outside that of the Afrikaner. Pierneef’s illustrations for magazines like *De Huisgenoot*, which is also connected with the burgeoning Afrikaner Nationalism of the time, were drawn from the Afrikaners’ mythical canon, such as the Great Trek. During apartheid, art was employed to remind Afrikaners of their Dutch ancestors, to instil a sense of history and cultural legacy, and to connect the Afrikaner to a European identity. Thus, to cement their claims to Whiteness and racial purity, with the aim being to foster superiority over the indigenous African populations. Curiously, *Goede Hoop* does not address the formation of an Afrikaner nationalist identity based on an imagined Dutch past and Pierneef’s part in this.



Figure 16: Bust of Paul Kruger. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

In this section of the exhibition addressing the nineteenth-century, we are introduced to the president of the Transvaal republic (one of the republics established by the Boers), Paul Kruger, or 'Oom Paul' as he was affectionately referred to by both the Dutch and Dutch descendants in South Africa. Kruger represents the second phase of the Dutch presence in South Africa. He was a popular figure in the Netherlands throughout his tenure and was regularly received by the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina in her palace. Souvenirs, prints, busts and other memorabilia celebrating the man were on display, demonstrating his immense popularity in the Netherlands.

The display occupying the final two rooms of *Goede Hoop* deals with the twentieth century and is introduced with the wall text: "The 20th century was the century of apartheid in South Africa" (Rijksmuseum, 2017). This section of the exhibition has two parts, namely: apartheid and post-1994 South Africa. The photographs, posters, sculptures and exhibition text on display begin to weave together a story of apartheid in South Africa, explaining spatial segregation, race-based laws and the societal relationships between White and Black South Africans. To illustrate the latter, documentary photographs by the Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken made between 1958 and 1968 (Fig. 17) depict the absurdity and the tragedy of apartheid social relations.



Figure 17: "Rights not Riots" painted above a display of documentary photographs by the Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken. Photograph by the Rijksmuseum. 2017.

A park bench bearing the sign "Net Blankes / Whites Only" speaks to the way segregationist laws were enforced in public. Mounted above the park bench are the signs that would have permeated everyday public life, including those on entrances to public buildings, in busses and on trains as well as on public benches and restroom doors (Fig. 18). The brutality, violence and humiliation of apartheid is represented in this section of the display, as is the resistance struggle led by Black South Africans. With regard to the resistance movement in South Africa, the exhibition highlights the Sharpeville Massacre and the Soweto Uprisings.



Figure 18: Display of apartheid state segregationist signage on the wall behind a public bench bearing the sign "net blankes" (whites only). Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

Notably, the focal point of this part of the show is the anti-apartheid campaign in the Netherlands (Fig. 19). Anti-apartheid posters include those of campaigns that held Dutch companies like Shell accountable for refusing to divest from South Africa and thereby supporting the apartheid government. There is another conscious attempt in this section to distance the Dutch from Afrikaner nationalists (the word “distant cousins” appears again), and no connection is made between apartheid and colonialism, implying that apartheid was purely the responsibility of the Afrikaner nationalists. During apartheid, open support for the South African government was deemed inappropriate in Dutch society. The trauma of the Second

World War was still vivid in the Dutch public's mind, and thus many Dutch citizens viewed the apartheid regime as abhorrent³².



Figure 19: A museum visitor views the display of Dutch anti-apartheid campaign posters positioned below the text "To hell with Afrikaans". Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017

The Netherlands' refusal to sign the final declaration of the International Conference for Action Against Apartheid, held in Nigeria from 22-26 August 1977, is a notable omission in this section of the exhibition, intended to examine the Dutch relationship with the apartheid state. The Foreign Affairs Secretary at the time, P.H Kooijmans did not agree with the section of the Declaration that apartheid in South Africa is based on the "expropriation, looting, exploitation and social exploitation of the African people since 1652 by colonists and their offspring"³³. The minister held the view that it was unjust that the entire Dutch community in the then present, should be judged by the events of colonialism, which he viewed to be in past, and

³² However, there were parts of Dutch society that called for an understanding of the policies of the South African 'brethren people'. Editor of the weekly 'Haagse Post', G.B.J Hiltermann, described apartheid as an acceptable solution to the "race problem" (Muskens, 2017: 301).

³³ see: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000048045> [2023, March 20].

not reflective of contemporary Dutch values. In the contemporary, there is still broad consensus for this view in the Netherlands (Boelsma, 2019).

The second part of this room addresses the post-apartheid and contemporary South Africa. This section starts with the photograph of Nelson Mandela and Nomzamo Winne Mandela in the public square Leidseplein, during their visit to Amsterdam in 1990, subsequent to Nelson Mandela's release from prison. In the three-figure meta-narrative of *Goede Hoop*, Nelson Mandela's figure represents the third and final phase of Dutch History in South Africa. As such, Nelson Mandela is deified as the representative of both struggle and freedom and most-importantly, reconciliation and forgiveness.



Figure 20: A large-scale photograph of Nelson and Winne Mandela hangs above the threshold to the third and final section of the exhibition. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

Post-1994 life in South Africa is reflected through the work of two prominent South African artists: Marlene Dumas and Pieter Hugo. The South African photographer, Pieter Hugo's *1994* series is on display in the final gallery in the exhibition. *1994* is a series of portraits of children born after 1994 in South Africa and Rwanda. This work

acknowledges that major political events took place in these countries in 1994, namely the end of apartheid and the first democratic elections in South Africa and the death of the Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, which sparked the Rwandan genocide. According to Hugo's gallerist, Stevenson Gallery, Hugo's series "depicts a generation of children growing up in a post-revolutionary era, when the possibility of change was definite while its realisation remains uncertain" (Stevenson, 2016). Hugo's intensely stylised images of Rwandan and South African children against a backdrop of natural surroundings evoke a sense of youth, innocence, and optimism. But despite their youthful exuberance, the children in the portraits seem to be haunted by something. Perhaps this is an aftereffect of carrying the weight of their countries' history in the present. Hugo's work has garnered both acclaim and derision. The manner in which his images exoticise their subjects is contested by critics, who accuse the photographer of recreating the anthropological gaze that is part of the colonial apparatus of looking. It is perplexing that the show's curators did not consider Hugo's positionality as a White South African man here. The inclusion of Hugo's photographs in this exhibition to represent the Black experience and illustrate contemporary, post-colonial South Africa is a peculiar curatorial choice. Particularly in light of the critiques his work has received and considering that there are a multitude of other South African photographers and artists from historically marginalised groups whose work addresses the legacies of colonialism in a nuanced and sensitive manner.



Figure 21: Pieter Hugo's 1994 series. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

This section of the exhibition represents South Africa in the contemporary, a country burdened with and affected by the inherited injustices of colonialism and apartheid. In this part of the exhibition, the curators had the opportunity to demonstrate how colonialism functions in the present, yet failed to do so. The curators were also presented with the opportunity to include the work of Black, women or queer artists from South Africa, particularly after #RhodesMustFall's impact on shifting the public discourse on the intersections between colonialism, race and gender. Consultations with art historians, curators and scholars from South Africa could have altered the way the exhibition was presented and perceived. Hayden Proud, who at the time, held the position of Curator of Historical Collections of Painting and Sculpture at Iziko South African National Gallery, was questioned via email on the decisions around the contemporary art selected for the exhibition and responded:

I tried to push for the idea of the inclusion of a number of contemporary South African artists who had worked with or referenced the art of the Dutch Golden Age

and the Dutch colonial adventure in their work (Phokela, Putter and Starcke), but they were not interested in this at all. They then admitted that there was pressure from 'on high' to commission a special work/installation by Kentridge as the final statement in the last room of the exhibition. I heaped scorn on this idea and asked what connection this artist had ever had with the Netherlands (I am not a Kentridge fan, it has to be admitted...). As it turned out the Kentridge plan never unfolded...as you will know if you saw the show (Proud, 2018).

As Proud notes in the email exchange I had with him, several South African artists have long been thinking about the connection between Dutch colonialism and South Africa. For example, among others, Bronwyn Katz, Andrew Putter and Johannes Phokela use Dutch colonial references in their work. Phokela subverts, satirises and exploits the works of old masters to comment on power relations in the past and present. Katz's early work focusses on exhumation and its connection to the dispossession of land in South Africa. Her solo exhibition, *Groenpunt* (2016) problematised the notion of forgetting and the erasure of memory, instead looking to traces and residue of memory as an archive.

Putter's work mines early colonial history at the Cape. For example, his *Secretly I Will Love You More* (2007) revisits the relationship between Maria Della Quellerie, wife of Jan van Riebeeck, and Krotoa, daughter of a Cochoqua chief. Krotoa was taken into the van Riebeeck home, as a servant to the van Riebeecks and later became an interpreter between the Dutch and the Khoekhoe. Putter's works ask us to reconsider the way historic relationships have been cast in history textbooks by intentionally blurring the boundary between what is considered historical fact and fiction.

Both Putter and Phokela use humour to reflect the absurdity of the racial violence embedded in this history. Further, the cross-disciplinary artist Senzeni Marasela could also have been approached to reflect on the work she produced for the

Upstream Public Art project (2002). The Upstream Public Art project was an international art event that commemorated the 400-year anniversary of the founding of the VOC. The Upstream art route took place along several locations in Amsterdam and the town of Hoorn from which the VOC ships had set sail for colonial voyages. Marasela's work *Rainbow Stories* at the Hortus in Amsterdam refers to the way that history is documented, particularly that of the Afrikaners. In *Rainbow Stories*, Marasela reflected on her childhood, growing up in an extreme right-wing, White Afrikaans suburb in South Africa. Engaged in deeply political art practice, the artist often works with cotton thread as a metaphor to make objects that work to insert her history into a past that omitted the stories of Black South Africans, particularly those of Black South African women.

The *Goede Hoop* curatorial team had initially compiled a list of 10 artists they wished to include in this gallery, including Mary Sibande and Zanele Muholi, and in a conversation, Holtrop makes it clear that the curatorial team "wanted a (South African) woman, preferably of colour" (Holtrop, 2019). In spite of this, the Rijksmuseum board of directors chose the most "well-known" (Holtrop, 2019) names to them on the list: namely, Pieter Hugo and Marlene Dumas. The influence exerted by the Rijksmuseum board shows how the "hidden" hierarchies of power work within the museum to influence curatorial decision-making.

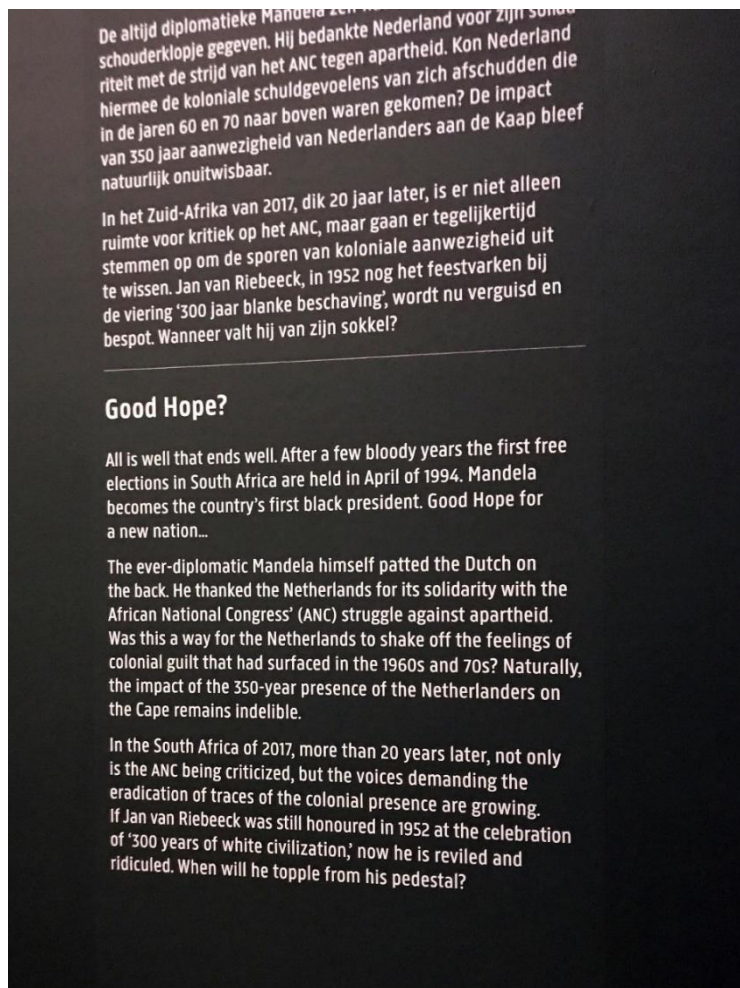


Figure 22: The remaining panel of text at the end of the exhibition ends with the question: “when will he (van Riebeeck) topple from his pedestal?”. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

As the visitor departs the exhibition, there is a small and ill-considered display of posters collected by the Rijksmuseum team from a #FeesMustFall demonstration in South Africa in 2016, when the team was conducting research. Ignoring the ongoing struggle at South African universities over epistemic violence and economic exclusion would have been a callous omission, and yet this exhibit felt like an insignificant footnote on the way out and points to the extraction of anti-colonial resistance narratives and objects by institutions of the global north. The national #FeesMustFall protests occurred two years ahead of the scheduled opening of *Goede Hoop*, and a meaningful engagement with this movement may have countered the neat narrative of the post-colonial relationship between the

Netherlands and South Africa that the Rijksmuseum presented to Dutch and international audiences.

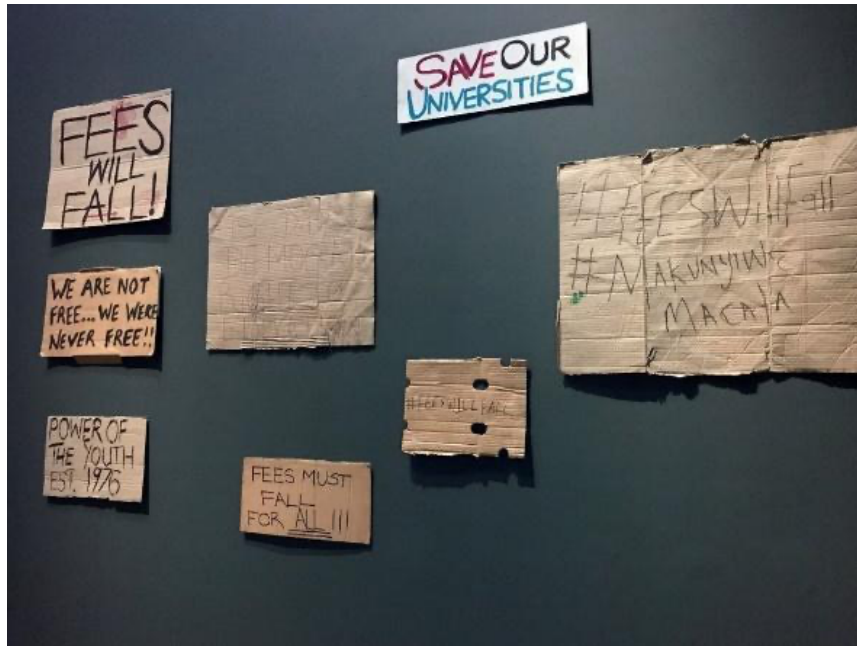


Figure 23: The small display of "Feesmustfall posters mounted next to the exit doorway of the show. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

Curating a "Shared History"

The curatorial statement on the Rijksmuseum website describes *Goede Hoop* as intending to explore "what took place between 1652 when van Riebeeck landed at the Cape and Mandela's visit to Amsterdam in 1990"³⁴. It framed the display as a showing of the historical "relationship" between South Africa and the Netherlands. Given the current wave of renewed interest in decolonial scholarship and practice, particularly in the European museum sector, I understood the revisiting of the relationship between the two countries to be a collaborative and critical undertaking. Before seeing the exhibition, I anticipated that the Rijksmuseum curators would have collaborated with South African partners like IZIKO Museums of South Africa to portray the story of a shared and complex history. My personal

³⁴ See: <https://vantilt.nl/boeken/good-hope/> [2018, September 6].

experience as a visitor to the exhibition suggested otherwise and these sentiments were later confirmed by Hayden Proud. While there were some engagements (including visits by members of the *Goede Hoop* curatorial team to South Africa) between the curators and management of the Rijksmuseum and curators at IZIKO South African National Gallery (ISANG) in Cape Town, these did not materialise into a generative collaboration between the two institutions. Proud explained that the initial idea was that only the Robert Jacob Gordon collection exhibit was to travel to ISANG, as a sequel to the King's Map exhibition shown at the IZIKO South African Museum (ISAM) in 2012. While ISANG was expecting *Goede Hoop* to travel to South Africa, the Rijksmuseum decided to withdraw from these plans and postpone it indefinitely. Proud elaborated that he felt that it was likely that the Rijksmuseum's curatorial team were responding to the political climate at the time, where the student movement #RhodesMustFall had brought discussions on decolonisation and representation to prominence in the public discourse.

With the emergence of the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements, the terms of engagement in South Africa had shifted. It became possible for marginalised groups like Black students at former White universities to publicly voice their grievances about the structural challenges they experienced at those institutions. These movements were critical of colonial institutions like the university and the museum and provided a rare opportunity for public engagement and critique on how issues of race, class and gender inequity intersect with the past and present practices of these institutions. Given the weight of the post - #RhodesMustFall moment, *Goede Hoop* was a missed chance to deal with the Dutch colonial presence in South Africa in the present.

Proud's opinion is that given the context of the political climate, it was likely that the Rijksmuseum decided that they did not want to put the valuable items in their

collection at risk. Particularly as security concerns are generally an obstacle when negotiating for objects to be loaned to South Africa:

In terms of security and other issues, South Africa ranks very high on the list of countries regarded as 'dangerous' and unstable by museum professionals worldwide. Pre-1994, aside from the cultural boycott, it was a dangerous destination to lend artworks to on the apartheid era, and ironically, despite a brief spate of exchanges, not much has changed post-1994 (Proud, 2019).

When questioned on the curatorial inputs into *Goede Hoop* from museum curators at Iziko Museums, Proud responds that there was no real collaboration between the two institutions or "not in the sense of a positive relationship on an equal footing" (Proud, 2019). He clarifies:

It was made pretty clear from the start that they did not want our opinions or any partnership with us – they merely wanted our ideas to pick and choose from, and they wanted objects on loan. Their argument was that this was an exhibition for a Dutch audience, not a South African one. Hence the major focus on Oom Paul Kruger in one room – since he is well-known in the Netherlands, having so many streets there named after him since the days of the Anglo-Boer War. They liked my idea that they use film footage of the kitsch recreations in Cape Town of ships, landings and Dutch architecture from the van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival in 1952, which they subsequently used.

In response to the question of the Rijksmuseum's engagement with ISANG, Holtrop responded that consultations were held with IZIKO Museums through informal curatorial meetings (and according to Proud, these meetings happened off-site when he was present). Holtrop offered the example of the team presenting the

Rijksmuseum's idea to begin the exhibition with a 'sarcastic' comment about the Dutch arriving in an empty land when the first Dutch explorers encountered South Africa. IZIKO curators advised the Rijksmuseum of the problems with this and that this opening statement would likely be taken the wrong way. The *Goede Hoop* curators heeded this advice. While this example provided by Holtrop is a limited and informal account of an exchange between curators at the two institutions, it gives some insight into how an intentional and engaged dialogue with South African curators might have contributed to a better understanding of the embedded cultural nuances in showing the history of the two countries. Holtrop agrees with the critique that one of the failures of *Goede Hoop* is that there were no South African curators or researchers on the exhibition team. She feels this critique is "well deserved" and says the museum has addressed this "blind spot" in the follow-up exhibition to *Goede Hoop*, the show *Slavernij* (2021) centred on Dutch slave history more broadly.

A takeaway for the museum after *Goede Hoop* was that they need to "organise diversity in their curatorial team on time", and Holtrop seems confident that this has now been addressed when she adding: "we now have a curator with Dutch-Caribbean roots" (Holtrop, 2019). Here she refers to the appointment of the Black Dutch curator Valika Smeulders who eventually became the head of the history department when Gosselink resigned. However, at the same time, Holtrop also gives like what seems to be the prepared standard response that *Goede Hoop* was an exhibition on colonial history from a Dutch perspective, for a Dutch audience and that the curatorial team did not anticipate the international interest received for *Goede Hoop*. This response (or a version thereof) appears in many interviews³⁵ with the lead curator Gosselink and seems to be the museum's official stance when faced

³⁵ For instance, see the interview with Gosselink in the Dutch newspaper, NRC Handelsblad: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/09/22/schaamte-is-mijn-kompas-daar-vaar-ik-op-13117614-a1574533>

with critical questions about representation in the curatorial team or in the exhibition at large.

While it was clear from the onset that the exhibition was designed for a Dutch audience, it is implausible that the Rijksmuseum did not anticipate the number of international visitors and interest that it received, as Holtrop suggests. Given the expansive global reach of Dutch imperialism, it is difficult to imagine that an exhibition on colonialism in Amsterdam would only interest local Dutch audiences. Moreover, the Rijksmuseum is among the most important cultural institutions in Europe and is located in a city that attracts thousands of international visitors every year. Further, visitor statistics as recorded in the Rijksmuseum's annual report for 2017 indicate that the museum was visited 2,148,304 times that year. The ratio between the national and international visitors was 37% / 63% and estimated at 45% / 55% (Rijksmuseum, 2017: 254). In the 2017 annual report for the Institution, the museum states:

With its exhibitions, the Rijksmuseum aims to offer an international perspective on Dutch art and history and to address socially relevant themes such as slavery and religion. The Rijksmuseum wants to fulfil a social role in this: to initiate a dialogue by using art to make people think differently about certain themes, which is relevant in these times of fragmentation and polarisation. After the announcement that the Rijksmuseum will organise an exhibition on slavery in a few years' time, the museum received many (almost exclusively positive) reactions from the public.

Goede Hoop can be mentioned as an example of an exhibition that puts the Netherlands in an international perspective: the first major exhibition about the relationship between South Africa and the Netherlands, four hundred years of eventful history in three hundred objects, mainly from South Africa.

The statement addresses why the Rijksmuseum curated *Goede Hoop* at the time and why the exhibition happened in a Dutch art museum. The 2017 Museum Report

communicates the museum's vision of a future beyond being a museum for the art collections of the Netherlands and the history of the Golden Age. The report also shows that the Rijksmuseum imagines itself becoming an institution that addresses the social issues of the contemporary, which given the sizeable population of afro or Black Dutch inhabitants as well as many others who are not of a White Dutch background, is imperative to the museum's future relevance. Additionally, the shift in how it sees its societal role could be a response to the heightened debates on decolonisation in museums. Decolonisation is now on the agenda for museums in Europe and is increasingly the subject of museum presentations and exhibitions. The British Museum, United Kingdom (2016), the Africa Museum Tervuren, Belgium (2018) and the World Museum, Vienna (2018) are examples of large museums in Europe that have staged temporary exhibitions on colonialism or that are radically rethinking their colonial displays. These interventions are entangled with the resurgence of calls to repatriate colonial-era objects in European museums to their communities of origin.

Concluding from the Rijksmuseum's annual report, it appears the museum is cognisant of itself as an institution connected to Dutch imperialism. In an attempt to reposition itself in the contemporary, it is thus experimenting with curatorial strategies and methods to include interpretative colonial narratives that intervene in the displays of its collections. The *Goede Hoop* exhibition was an essential step in addressing a past that is still not openly acknowledged and spoken about in the Netherlands. However, the positioning of the exhibition is unclear as it presents a simplistic and palatable take on the complex subject of colonialism for Dutch and other Western audiences. Although European national exhibitions on colonialism might be read as an attempt at symbolic redress to educate their publics on colonial pasts, the exhibitions themselves often fall short by resorting to historical and representational tropes. Thus, they reinforce epistemic injustices through curatorial practices that enact forms of silencing and erasure.

Chapter 4: Object, Subject, Nation — the Myth of the Benevolent Empire and the Dutch Sense of Self

Despite recent institutionally-sanctioned to reveal the nature and extent of Dutch history and its violence, the absence or omission of this history, or when it is made present, its ability to present historical accounts and perspectives that contradict the tolerant and benevolent image of the nation remain. This is evident in Dutch public institutions, history textbooks, popular media, and other sites where the nation is imagined. Nations are historically specific constructions in that their traditions are invented and “imagining the nation in Europe, works through processes of ‘silencing’ or selective remembering, often ignoring the formative role of the colonial past in shaping the plural polities that characterise much of Europe today” (Balkenhol and Modest, 2020: 178). Attempts at framing the Dutch sense of self is evidently at play in the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, and will be addressed in this chapter.

Wekker (2016) contends that the Dutch sense of self is based on notions of innocence and tolerance. According to Wekker, the mainstream rhetoric circulating in the Netherlands implies that the Dutch have always been colourblind and anti-racist and that the Netherlands has demonstrated “exceptional hospitality and tolerance towards the racialised/ethnicised other” (2016: 1). This outwardly progressive and liberal sentiment is commonly expressed during public appearances and remarks by Dutch politicians. On 3 April 2008, Rita Verdonk, a former politician of the liberal rightist party, the VVD, launched her political movement *Trots Op Nederland* (Proud of the Netherlands) with a public address that included the following statement:

[Dutch] culture, our traditions, our uniqueness, that's what we are proud of. That's the Netherlands! [...] Dutch people simply do not have it in them to discriminate! We have been a hospitable people for centuries (Verdonk, 2008).

While Verdonk's *Trots Op Nederlands* movement only lasted a year before becoming a political party in 2009, and she herself resigned from active politics in 2011, the views she voiced are widespread and continue to influence the political and social life of the Dutch in the contemporary.

The notion of the supposed inherent attributes of Dutchness, such as benevolence and tolerance, as emblematic of the national character, elicits Benedict Anderson's description of the nation as an "imagined community"³⁶. This concept is most prominently expressed in the global imaginary of the Netherlands as an adjudicator of international conflicts, as the Hague has been the seat of several international courts of justice, and the *polder model*³⁷ of political negotiation employed in the country. This political positioning augments the idea of the Netherlands as an enlightened, modern European country built on self-congratulating values of fairness, benevolence and justice.

In populist nationalist narratives of the country like those found in documents targeted at welcoming and assimilating immigrants into Dutch culture, and in the tourism discourse employed in tours of the city, including a walking tour I took in Amsterdam in 2018, the *Absolutely Amsterdam Walking Tour* run by *Dam Tours*, the emphasis is on historic religious diversity being the foundation of the supposed national quality of "perpetual tolerance" (Kešić and Duyvendak, 2021). Josip Kešić

³⁶ Anderson argues that the nation as a community is "imagined" since it is an abstract concept that is not based on biological or familial relationships but rather is socially constructed via shared feelings of belonging to a specific community or nation (Anderson, 1991).

³⁷ The Dutch *polder model* emphasises the significance of dialogue, compromise, and mutual trust in establishing solutions to social and political problems, representing the Dutch commitment to pluralistic Dutch cultural values. However, the *polder model* has also been criticised for being inefficient and slow, as well as for favouring certain interest groups over others.

and Jan W. Duyvendak argue that the notion of the tolerant Dutch nation is rooted in the seventeenth-century idea of Amsterdam being a safe haven for people of multiple religions. The Dam Tours tour guide claimed that anyone was welcome in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century as long as they contributed to the development of the Dutch economy, bizarrely implying that money is unattached to politics. Thus, the nationalist discourse emphasising the harmonious coexistence of multiple religions, and therefore, multiple perspectives and values in the country's history, reveals a "liberal attitude deemed to be an essence of Dutchness" (Kešić and Duyvendak, 2021: 159).

Balkenhol writes that "the Dutch Nation, personified, becomes both the object and the subject of compassion". The Netherlands is the object of compassion because it portrays itself as a small country in need of protection and "the subject of compassion because the Dutch Nation, identity and people are presented as compassionate" (2016: 279). Balkenhol refers to this as a national 'politics of compassion': the political mobilisation of a particular emotion in negotiations over the nation, citizenship and belonging (2016: 279). The 'politics of compassion' that Balkenhol refers to here is often mobilised and enacted in public sites of national identity where the national project is [re]produced: the political arena, sites of representation, educational sites, the built environment, among other locales.

Despite the ongoing national drive to promote the idea of benevolent tolerance, the current political climate of far-right populism based on immigrant and anti-Islamic sentiment in the Netherlands (like elsewhere in Europe) is paradoxical. Over the last few decades, the right-wing, populist view that Islam is opposed to Dutch values has gained traction in the Netherlands. For example, Pim Fortuyn, leader of Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), which gained popularity in the late 1990s and early 2000s, was the first politician to frame and justify anti-Islamic xenophobia as 'protecting Dutchness'. Fortuyn, an openly gay man, mobilised the presumed 'sexual tolerance'

of the Netherlands and manipulated his publicly gay identity to highlight, in his view, the 'intolerance of immigrants' towards homosexuality. Mobilising notions of compassion and tolerance to point out the supposedly superior, progressive nature of the Dutch nation, his argument then became that immigrants are intolerant and therefore do not fit into Dutch society. Repudiating accusations of racism, he subsequently publicly declared on several occasions that he was not racist, infamously proclaiming in an interview, "I don't hate Arab men — I often sleep with them" (Kolbert, 2002: para 3). This idea of a people under threat points to a broader populist discourse circulating in the Netherlands which frames postcolonial critique as a threat to the nation (Balkenhol and Modest, 2020: 177).

Fortuyn was assassinated by Volkert van der Graaf, a left-wing environmentalist and animal activist in 2002, a week before the Dutch elections in May. Fortuyn stood as the frontrunner for the role of Prime Minister (Kolbert, 2002), and in the years after his assassination, his house became a shrine, where followers would leave flowers and other gifts. Fortuyn's popularity seemed to be rooted in the following publicly expressed sentiments: that the Netherlands was a geographically small country worthy of protection and not able to accommodate an influx of immigrants, the emphasis on national pride, and the position that the Netherlands was somehow a superior society because of its national values of tolerance and rationality. In a more recent display of right-wing bigotry in the Netherlands, racist messages were projected onto Erasmus Bridge in Rotterdam during the 2022 New Year's eve celebrations. Phrases projected on the bridge included: 'Vrolijk Blank 2023' (Happy White 2023) and 'Zwarte Piet Deed Niets Verkeerd', which translates to Black Pete did nothing wrong.

In 2001, the Netherlands became the first European country to legalise same-sex marriage. Jasbir Puar (2007) develops the term "homonationalism" to address the association of right-wing, nationalist ideologies with the support of LGBTQI rights,

where acceptance and tolerance, in this case especially as an orientation to the benevolent community of Dutchness, expresses itself not only as exceptional; but relies on the orientalising techniques. The hyper-sexualisation of Muslim men is concurrent with a systematic Islamophobia within this formulation of the body politics of a modern nation-state. In 2013, Puar responds to the circulation of this concept, writing:

Homonationalism, thus, is not simply a synonym for gay racism, or another way to mark how gay and lesbian identities became available to conservative political imaginaries; it is not another identity politics, not another way of distinguishing good queers from bad queers, not an accusation, and not a position. It is rather a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality. (337)

The body politic is further analysed in this dissertation as it relates, not only to the maternal/ paternal and familial metaphors of an intimacy between South Africa and the Netherlands; or the evolution of the Netherlands as a modern, and European nation-state. The following chapter elucidates on the ways that Dutchness is imagined and how conceptions of racial hierarchy and ethnicity, stranger and citizen, are entangled with national identity and a sense of belonging in the Netherlands. As Balkenhol and Modest (2020: 178) argue,

The populist engagement in postcolonial memory politics adopts a restricted and nativist notion of 'Dutchness', of 'the people' that is homogenous and timeless, threatened both by outsiders and the elite who, blinded from reality continue to celebrate the multicultural society. Within this nativist narrative, the colonial past is part of the glorious history of a presumed real people, who have become a minority in 'their own' country.

In addition to considering how popular notions of nationalism, nativism, race, and ethnicity are incorporated into the curatorial practices of the Rijksmuseum, I discuss how this emerges in the *Goede Hoop* exhibition as a curatorial grammar of ignorance, evasion, omission, and denial.

The White Dutch Sense of Self

According to Wekker (2016), the discourse of White innocence and benevolence that is prevalent in the Netherlands is part of a paradox in which issues of race elicit “passion, forcefulness, and even aggression” from the White Dutch population, while “reactions of denial, disavowal, and evasion reign supreme” (Wekker, 2016: 1). She argues that one of the key sites where this paradox is operative, is the White Dutch sense of self. Her main thesis is that an “unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and affects based on four hundred years of Dutch imperial rule plays a vital but unacknowledged part in dominant meaning-making processes, including making of the self, taking place in Dutch society” (Wekker, 2016: 2).

Wekker mobilises Edward W. Said’s (1994) concept of the ‘cultural archive’, to refer to a “racial grammar, a deep structure of inequality in thought and affect based on race, was installed in nineteenth-century European populations and that it is from this deep reservoir, the cultural archive, that among other things, a sense of self has been formed and fabricated” (2016: 2). These conceptions of self and other materialise in Dutch society through the national administrative and social designations of *allochtoon* (of foreign birth) and *autochtoon* (native-Dutch)³⁸. In the

³⁸ The Netherlands categorises its population “using birthplace — one’s own or one’s (grand-) parent’s — as the surrogate determining factor. The contemporary operative taxonomy has until recently been binary: *autochtoon* (of Dutch heritage) and *allochtoon* (of foreign birth). Used earlier at the provincial level in respect of internal migration, the taxonomy was expanded in 1999 to demarcate between ‘Western’ *allochtoon* and ‘non-Western’ *allochtoon*, with the latter being further subdivided into first and second generation” (Yanow, D and Van de Haar, S: 2013: 1).

Netherlands, the terms “allochtoon” and “autochtoon” are frequently used to define the identities of individuals depending on whether they or their ancestors were born in the Netherlands. This terminology is used to distinguish ethnicity within the context of Dutch national identity (see Essed and Trienekens 2008).

The overt constructions of a Dutch national identity of tolerance and benevolence is embedded in notions of White innocence, as put forward by Wekker (2016). As Wekker contends, White innocence “shows up in the fashioning of the national identity of the Netherlands in several ways and “thickly describes part of a dominant Dutch way of being in the world” (2016: 17). This proposition offers an interesting approach to thinking about postcolonial constructions of Whiteness in the Netherlands “because it fits in with a chain of other associations that the Dutch nation strongly resonates with” (Wekker, 2016: 16). One example of the extended associations with White innocence is the concept of innocence as a desired condition of being in Christianity – Christian religious principles of piety and compassion are represented by the White figure of Jesus. At the second level, the innocence implied in the Netherlands’ articulates an individual/collective form of self-identification of a small, vulnerable country. The third level makes allowances of racist utterances, while claiming that what was said was a joke or was not meant to be racist. The speaker may claim to have a privileged relationship with the Black person being insulted and hence feel justified in making such a comment (Wekker, 2017: 17).

The unwillingness to address this history that is glaringly obvious, is what Anne Laura Stoler (2013) refers to as ‘aphasia’, invoked in Wekker’s (2017) concept of innocence as both ‘not-knowing’, but ‘also wanting to know’. Aphasic histories are histories that are in an impaired state. They cannot be thought and are known but cannot be said (Stoler: 2013). Rather than hidden, they are intentionally disabled. Disassociation or aphasia “is more than simply forgetting; it is the irretrievability of a

vocabulary, a limited access to it, a simultaneous presence to a thing and its absence, a presence and the misrecognition of it" (Stoler, 2013, 2011). Developing a variation of Stoler's (2013) aphasia, Sherilyn Deen (2018) formulates the term 'colonial numbness' which does not imply a strict denial of Dutch slavery and colonialism, but instead "points to the desired state of recognising those histories as irrelevant, distant and remaining unaffected by those histories in the present" (2018: 17). Aphasia is a process entangled with dissociation, and it is observable in the curatorial methodologies and processes employed in the *Goede Hoop* exhibition.

Blank: Whiteness and Willful Ignorance

Reni Eddo-Lodge defines White privilege, an essential component of Whiteness, as an absence: "describing and defining this absence means to some extent upsetting the centring of Whiteness, and reminding White people that their experience is not the norm for the rest of us" (2017: 86). This coded absence of Whiteness largely allows it to operate in camouflage, as Richard Dyer aptly puts it in *White*: "to apply the colour White to White people is to ascribe a visible property to a group that thrives also on invisibility" (1997: 42). This obfuscation of Whiteness is crucial to its ability to function in covert ways. Insidiously, White people benefit from this invisibility, just as they benefit from the existence of racial injustice, even as Jennifer Harvey (2007: 7) argues, they are harmed by it in the process: "we are spiritually, psychologically, and morally malformed by it" leading to the situation in which "to be White is to be in a state of acute moral crisis" (2007: 7).

The Dutch word for White is 'blank'³⁹, meaning 'without colour', and also means empty or bare, and is a suitable representation of the privileged neutrality that is assigned to Whiteness. 'Blank' illustrates one of the many ways that White people

³⁹ 'Blank' or 'Blanke' is also the Afrikaans word for White people, inherited from the Dutch Language.

are not encouraged to think of themselves as racialised people participating in a particular social moment. Some in the Netherlands consider the word to be archaic and discriminatory because it can be used to imply superiority based on the absence of colour, as opposed to White.

As a dominating social system, Whiteness has been historically constructed as neutral and as humanity's default; as a result, its affective violence can often be difficult to identify, name, and call out. This is because Whiteness or the White identity has also been intentionally disconnected from racialised discourse. While Black activists and scholars in the Netherlands and throughout the world continue to fight against the injustices of an anti-Black, racially based global social order, and, while in spite of this system, Black communities and individuals continue to thrive, Whiteness in the postcolonial era has not yet shed its status and power.

In the late 1980s Black scholars in the Netherlands began to use the word 'wit' (White), to replace 'blank' (without colour) in an attempt to make visible the simultaneous neutrality and spectacle of Whiteness (Mohanty, 1991) at play and draw attention to racial injustice in the Netherlands. Sibon Rugwiza Kanobana (2021) argues that this turn in the language of race should be viewed as a significant intervention led by Black intellectuals in the Netherlands who often share language and familial ties with White Europeans, as an effort to racialise Whiteness in these contexts. However, since the emergence of this word in academic and popular discourse, there has been an ongoing debate in these countries about the 'impreciseness' and 'Americanisation' of the use of *wit* in a European context. While critical studies of European Whiteness have revealed that the continent's racial paradigms differ significantly from those of the United States, the shock and anger this term elicits could also be interpreted as an attempt to delegitimise important social critiques that centre race and are led by the Black intellectual community. As bell hooks contends, "in White supremacist society, White people can safely

imagine that they are invisible to Black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over Black people, accorded them the right to control the Black gaze" (1992: 41).

Calling out the endurance of structural racial violence in the Netherlands is met with the perpetual strategy of denial, and as Alfred J. Lopez (2005) et al. argue, despite the obvious visibility and spectacle of Whiteness, it "remains a largely unexamined category" (2005: 2). The scarcity of critical research and epistemologies on Whiteness in contemporary Europe and beyond suggests a reluctance on the part of White academics and practitioners to analyse and criticise Whiteness and thus, their own positionalities in doing work that is supposedly critical of colonial practices. The Rijksmuseum's relationship with Whiteness allows for the performance of arrogant and wilful ignorance, as well as the claim of 'not knowing' better, as exemplified by the curator's approach to the *Goede Hoop* exhibition. Problematizing Whiteness in museum institutions has largely been left to Black researchers and practitioners (especially historically), or they have invited guests brought in to add a critical and remedial voice into institutional settings that centre the White European experience.

Fatima El-Tayeb (2011) suggests that the scarcity of critical Whiteness scholarship in Europe could be attributed to the fact that the models typically used in race discourse may not apply to the unique forms of racialisation present in continental Europe. In other words, the key component in maintaining Whiteness as default and Blackness as alterity is the dissemination of racial ideologies through language, but in contemporary Europe, the grammar around race has shifted from the basic racist claim that Black people are sub-human to the racial ideology of 'colour-blind racism'. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that there are four central frames to colour-blind racism, namely, "abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimisation of racism" (2022: 80). Race logics and racisms as a global paradigm

are critical within the strategies that modern nation states mobilise a comparative approach as a means to enact colour blindness.

Racism in Europe is concealed by nativist and nationalist constructions of the native and the stranger (Ahmed, 2000), which are defined in the Netherlands as 'autochtoon' (of Dutch heritage) and 'allochtoon' (of foreign birth) or as 'anderstaligen' (other linguals). These words are firmly rooted in the Dutch language and have no equivalent in English, suggesting that "race has long been part of a cultural discourse" in the Netherlands (Çankaya, S. & Mepschen, 2019: 627).

Although the terms autochtoon and allochtoon are expected to be used to identify Dutch citizens with ancestries in the Netherlands, and those with ancestries outside the country, respectively, allochtoon is typically used for individuals with migrant backgrounds considered to be 'non-European' i.e. not white. The term anderstaligen, also often employed in the Netherlands to describe those with foreign heritage(s), frames racism and racist ideology as "a linguistic problem" (Kanobana, 2021: 273) that could be solved by investing in learning the Dutch language and by assimilating into Dutch culture.

Guno Jones (2016: 607) argues that the dynamics of postcolonial citizenship are inconsistent with "universalist-inclusive and progressive conceptions of citizenship". In this regard, Jones contends:

The history of Dutch political debates and policies, on/towards people from the colonies after 1945 reveals a variety of instabilities I have termed 'citizenship alienism': the symbolic, social and legal processes in which the polity effectively renders citizens as aliens or semi-citizens (2016: 607).

Whiteness, as the dominant social order (arguably the world over, but certainly in contexts like Europe and in settler colonial contexts like the United States, Australia and South Africa), continuously finds new paths of renewal to respond to

contemporary conditions and it is important to trace the ways that it does so in different types of post-colonial locations. For example, the ways in which Whiteness permeates and renews itself in post-empire settler-colonial societies such as South Africa differ markedly from manifestations of Whiteness in former European metropolises, or post-colonial societies of the global south that can no longer be characterised by settler colonialism. In many post-independence African countries for instance, White people of European origin returned to Europe during independence struggles and after political independence from Europe was attained. Melissa Steyn (2005: 126) argues that in the South African context, settler colonialism meant that White European settlers maintained an identity in terms of sharing a heritage with “others like them” and thus “a strong economic bond with the west was cultivated, operating from a dominant position, within the local context”.

The *Goede Hoop* project stages White innocence and assuages White guilt about colonial violence and leaves no room for the consideration of the re-traumatisation of people who have oppressed, colonised histories. Further, the curators diminished the specificity of the complexities and nuances within contemporary South African culture. Édouard Glissant (2010), contends that the West is anxious to hold onto its perception of a world where they control and dominate, rather than accepting a world where people simply coexist. Glissant emphasises the interconnectedness of the contemporary global condition and argues that any object, encounter, or experience contains the entire world in the form of relations. Therefore everyone is constantly navigating the colonial/decolonial line, whether knowingly or unknowingly. *Goede Hoop's* curatorial approach presents itself as blind to how the White Dutch sense of self governs the relationship with those it considers other, both at home in the Netherlands and abroad. The exhibition does little to trouble the lived experiences of the White Dutch public and instead projects and promotes the fantasy of a post-colonial world.

Curating Dutchness

While claiming to be revisionist and promising to take a critical approach, the *Goede Hoop* exhibition's narrative begins with a portrait of the seventeenth-century Dutch colonial administrator Jan van Riebeeck. While Dutch and British colonialists may have regarded Jan van Riebeeck as heroic, Patric Tariq Mellet (2020) paints a different picture in his book, *The Lie of 1652: A Decolonised History of Land*. He describes van Riebeeck as being "bent on conquest and dislodging any form of intermediary trading by indigenes" (Mellet, 2020: 126), by elucidating on a precedent indigenous-run port and global port economy that was halted by van Riebeeck and the VOC's violent intervention. In Mellet's (2020) account of this history, van Riebeeck's interest was in a total domination of the people, land and resources of the Cape. This plan was executed through the establishment of a cost-effective trading relationship, which van Riebeeck executed through a hostile takeover of the prominent indigene leader and trading entrepreneur, Autshumao (Mellet, 2020: 127). The *Goede Hoop's* revisionist history is inscribed with a panel of text that refers to van Riebeeck's landing in 1652: "when will he [van Riebeeck] topple from his pedestal?" (Rijksmuseum, 2017).

The curatorial decision to start and conclude the show with van Riebeeck frames South African-Dutch history in a particular way and reveals how exhibition practice can generate distorted histories. For example, while the curators may have intended otherwise, their decision to centre the figure of van Riebeeck perpetuates the torpid trope of his role as the nation's progenitor. These curatorial gestures reveal the exhibition's duplicative nature, as on the one hand, the exhibition appears to critique colonialism, and on the other, it simultaneously reinforces colonial perspectives. This leads to the question of whether the recently revived decolonial discourse in European institutions faces the danger of being subsumed in surface appearances or if it is ready to address its complicity in the colonial matrix of power.

Quijano (2007; 2013) defines the colonial matrix of power as total hierarchical global order in social, economic, geopolitical and epistemic terms, where racial logics and racism becomes the organising principle. This matrix of power is a world-system (Grosfoguel 2011).

The marking of the years 1652 and 1994 as significant in the *Goede Hoop* exhibition sets a definite beginning and end to the Dutch colonial period in South Africa and negates the possibility for engagement on how the colonial afterlife continues to structure and affect both countries in the present. Thus, another “paradox of Dutchness”, to borrow from Wekker (2016), reveals itself: the paradox of the expansive global Dutch imperial footprint and its simultaneous absence in the nation’s national consciousness. This is evident in the Dutch primary and secondary education curriculum and in public and material culture, such as monuments, literature and public debates about Dutch history and identity. *Goede Hoop* hinges on this sentiment, as the curators repeatedly present the oppressive Dutch rule in the colonies as an aberration from contemporary, tolerant, progressive Dutch nationhood and its Modern European values. This sense of aphasia and colonial numbness, particularly the ‘Dutch sense of self’, presents itself in the *Goede Hoop* exhibition in several ways and is expressed via practices of distancing or active dissociation.

Distancing and dissociation are employed in the exhibition in three key ways: firstly, through the use of language; secondly, in the framing of *Goede Hoop* as a benevolent gesture; and lastly, in the use of temporal distancing. In the first instance, language is used to differentiate the contemporary Dutch state from the colonial Dutch republic that colonised South Africa in the past. This is reflected in the curatorial treatment of the subject of apartheid in South Africa as a source of discomfort and a point of conjuncture. While highlighting the anti-apartheid movement in the Netherlands, the curators make a concerted effort to blur

connections between the present Dutch identity and their 'distant cousins' the Afrikaners. This is accomplished by the judicious use of idioms, choice of words, and the inflexion and intonation of the terminology used in the exhibition text and catalogue. In the *Goede Hoop* catalogue, there is an emphasis on objective impartiality, the use of the diminutive, and the omission of emotion, as the following example shows:

The Afrikaners were marked by mingling. They had no choice because otherwise, their progenitors would not have survived even the first decades. All the huffing and puffing about kinship that came later was a great lie. To forge a bond, they had to concoct a tale about chosen people who had adapted to the landscape, with their own language and history (and their own physical characteristics); the bringers of light to darkest Africa, the country basked vicariously in the successes of Boer resistance; by the nineteenth century, it had almost no part to play on the world stage and could now quench its thirst for glory through this brave little band of people (their 'distant cousins' despite half of them being German, Danish and all sorts) who managed to defeat a superpower [referring here to the British colonialists] (van Dis, 2017: 18).

The second way that aphasia and colonial numbness are enacted through dissociation in the curatorial approach is through the presentation of the exhibition as a benevolent gesture. This approach might be understood as an effect of the imagined construction of the Netherlands as a benevolent and innocent nation. The Rijksmuseum's, and thus the *Goede Hoop* curator's internalisation of the mythical Dutch attributes of benevolence and innocence necessitates public distancing from the crimes of colonialism and apartheid. Thus, it was decided to highlight the ways that the Dutch were in support of global movements against apartheid through a poster display of Dutch anti-apartheid movements over an explanation of their complicity in the historical formation of what eventually became the South African apartheid state.

By promoting the concept of the benevolent nation committed to human rights and social justice, the curators mask the current dissent, dissatisfaction and anti-racist activism present in post-colonial Dutch society, which is about the racist treatment of individuals considered to be allochthonous. In *Afropean*, a documentary account of contemporary Black life across several European countries, Johnny Pitts writes about his conversations with Dutch people of African descent living in Amsterdam (2019: 133):

One thing all the Surinamese men and women I spoke to in Amsterdam seem to have to deal with is Dutch historical amnesia about why they are in the Netherlands, on the part of the White majority that refuses to acknowledge the existence of Dutch racism or the history of its slavery and its colonialism.

During and after political decolonisation, the Netherlands experienced an increase in migrants from their former colonies, and in this process, the notion of who was thought of as a Dutch citizen and who could claim Dutch citizenry became increasingly ethnically connotated (Jones, 2014: 30). At the time, many Dutch politicians held essentialist views on ethnic identities and were not initially interested in welcoming Dutch citizens from overseas territories into the Netherlands.

Jones contends that “although post-colonial (Dutch) citizens were never subject to extreme forms of othering and dispossession of rights such as, for example, [the case of] Jewish Germans in Nazi Germany, where their formal, legal citizenship did not guarantee unconditional inclusion in the country of nationality” (2012: 28). Due to the political climate in the Netherlands, the critical topic of the taxonomies of national belonging has been ignored for a long time. As Balkenhol (2016: 2018) contends, “during the 1980s and 1990s, politicians across the board had begun pressuring minorities to ‘integrate’ into ‘Dutch culture’. However, this pressure for integration led to searching questions about who must integrate, what they should

integrate into and what integration is in the first place. There were no clear answers to what Dutchness was or what it ought to be and how one would integrate into Dutch culture. Subsequently, there was a turn during this time towards the 'glorious past' of the Netherlands, a past firmly rooted in the Golden Age to provide a way to answer some of these questions. During this time, 'cultural heritage' became a new buzzword in the Netherlands that would come to unite politicians, civil society and intellectuals (Balkenhol, 2016: 280).

While discussions of race and racism are systematically avoided and muted in Dutch public discourse; one needs only consider how the annual Zwarte Piet spectacle dispels the myth that anti-Black racism is being adequately addressed and that racism does not exist in the country. Rather, public debate on identity, difference, and otherness commonly focuses on ethnicity, ethnic identity, and the tension between contemporary Dutch 'culture' and 'tradition' immigrant cultures, especially those of the Muslim religion. In the Dutch language, the word 'ras' (race) carries with it a heavy ideological weight, which is thought to stem from the legacy of the Holocaust in Europe. Linking social processes of marginalisation or discrimination to 'ras' or describing these social processes as (racial) is considered "imprecise at best, and a reproduction of racism at worst" (Kanobana, 2021: 271).

While the country has no explicit public race discourse that refers to skin pigment, the state categorises people across ethnic lines, through the 'linguistic problem' addressed by Kanobana (2021): namely, *autochtoon* and *allochtoon*. In 1999, this taxonomy was expanded to delineate between Western *allochtoon* and non-Western *allochtoon*, with the latter further divided into first and second generation (Yanow and van der Haar, 2013). Used in governmental administrative procedures such as; education, workplaces and public discourse, Dvora Yanow and Marleen van der Haar (2013); Philomina Essed and Isabel Hoving (2014); Wekker (2016) and Sinan Çankaya and Paul Mepschen (2019) argue that the *autochtoon/allochtoon*

discourse is a racial discourse, albeit powerfully carried out in disguise. Essed and Sandra Trienekens (2008) also state that references to race are more implicit and often intertwined with notions of culture and ethnicity.

The ethno-linguistic typology of difference secures racial logics, to borrow from Hall's statements:

the reason culture and cultural difference cannot be unproblematically substituted for 'race' and 'racial difference' as a way of holding in check the racialised signifier, which continues to secure the various meanings and discourses of race in place, is because the signifier of cultural difference—'ethnicity'—is itself Janus-faced, contradictory, sutured, and stitched up, and as such is always in danger of sliding culture towards nature (2017: 126).

Essed (1996) has thus offered the notion "racial-ethnic" to account for the convergence of "systems of racialization and ethnicization, based in different historical developments: migration into the Netherlands in the context of decolonisation (1950s to 1970s), labour migration (1960s to 1970s), and refugee programmes (1970s onwards)" (Essed and Trienekens, 2008: 56).

The autochtoon/allochtoon dichotomy sets up a dynamic where within Dutch society, who is recognised as strange or other is clearly defined. Here, Ahmed's notion of the stranger as a familiar body applies in that "the stranger is already recognised in the very moment in which they are seen or faced as a stranger", and "the figure of the stranger is far from simply being strange; it is a figure that is painfully familiar in that very strangeness" (Ahmed, 2000: 22). Ahmed argues that rather than the *any-body* we do not know, the stranger is *some-body* who we have already recognised as strange, and in the Netherlands, the Black or Muslim stranger is regarded as a threat to the nationalist or nativist conception of the Dutch nation. In the Dutch context, citizenship is not guaranteed if you are defined as "not

belonging to the ethno-nation” (Jones, 2016: 607) Similar to the previous discussion of homonationalism, Dutch nativism embeds its status as a modern nation state by associating secularisation with progressive rhetoric concerning gender and sexuality (Kešić and Duyvendak, 2021; also see Aldrin Salskov, 2020) .

The widespread European adoption of the terms ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnicity’ as a neutral stand-in for race is aligned with the ‘ethnicisation of labour’ in post-war Europe (Chow 2002; Adelson 2005). Rey Chow argues that this becomes “a flexible social mechanism for producing an eternal boundary between what is considered proper and valuable on the one hand and foreign and inferior on the other” (2002: 34). The focus on ethnicisation, over race, is a process that perpetually defines ethnicised citizens as migrants. Nationalist and nativist constructions of native and stranger make claim to the racist idea of ‘purity’ and apply this to nationhood and citizenship without explicitly using racial discourse based on taxonomies of skin colour. Étienne Balibar’s idea of “fictive ethnicity” on which all nation-states are built comes to mind:

No nation possesses an ethnic basis naturally, but as social formations are nationalised, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicised—that is, represented in the past or in the future as *if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individual and social conditions (1994: 224).

Despite the longstanding presence of Dutch imperial powers in the colonies abroad, histories of colonialism have a marginal place in national practices and places of commemoration in the Netherlands (Deen, 2018). Deen argues that the silences on colonial histories in the Netherlands are discursive and not absolute: “while Dutch histories of colonialism are not wholly silenced, they are also not incorporated into the central narrative of the Dutch nation (2018: 14). However, the reality is that the Netherlands harbours racist traditions that stem from their colonial

past, for instance, the tradition of Zwarte Piet, and employs racist and exclusionary grammars of difference to delineate who can claim Dutchness, and therefore who is considered to be part of the nation. These racist, anti-Black traditions and sentiments have increasingly collided with mostly Afro-Dutch, anti-racist activist communities like #ZwartePietIsRacisme (Zwarte Piet is Racist) and Omroep ZWART (Broadcast Black) in recent years. Amongst the demands made by the Black Dutch activists is the recognition of their presence in the Dutch nation as protagonists of its history. Wekker (2016) notes that a brief, favourable political climate in 2002 created an environment for establishing a monument in Amsterdam to commemorate slavery, initiated by the Afro-European women's organisation, Sophiedela. Subsequent to the erection of this monument, the National Institute of Dutch Heritage, Past and Present (NiNsee), was also founded in 2001, only to close a decade later in 2013 by the conservative and right-wing government of Mark Rutte, citing expenditure cuts as a reason for its closure (Wekker, 2016).

Lastly, temporal distancing frames colonialism as belonging to a radically different time and as an isolated historical event. In the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, as argued in chapter three, this is done at the onset of the exhibition by framing pre-colonial indigene societies in South Africa as pre-historic. Because colonialism is represented as a historical event, this fails to recognise coloniality as a structural and systemic phenomenon that reinvents itself in the present, whichever present it finds itself in (Stoler, 2011; Mignolo, 2013; Quijano, 2007). This notion of temporal distancing is reflected below in another example from the *Goede Hoop* catalogue text, taken from the conclusion to the Prologue written by Adriaan van Dis:

Amid all this upheaval, the new South Africa has started to see itself in a different light. With the passing of the years, the historians have let more colour seep into their ruins. [...] There is space for other stories, corroborated by documents previously hidden or unknown. More Africa; less Europe. But be aware of political

correctness lurking around every corner, because Europe also made Black Africa stronger, through education (lousy as it was), medical facilities, music and philosophers who provided ammunition for those who oppose colonialism. It won't be easy for the privileged Whites. Or for anyone included, including myself (van Dis, 2017: 19).

The catalogue describes van Dis as having an "enduring investment" in South Africa; he published two books on the country, *Het Beloofde Land* (1990) and *Tikkop* (2010), and filmed a documentary travel series about South Africa in 2008. It is peculiar that the curators and editors, Gosselink, Holtrop and Ross seem to have overlooked the paternal, arrogant positioning and "smug ignorance" (Goulordava and van der Pijl, 2014) of van Dis' prologue – the entry point to the catalogue that sets the stage for the exhibition and the critical discourse it claimed to present.

The Mythology of JVR

"A lot of mense is hating but that's not surprising
The hip hop game is like a country I am colonising
This is my call of duty I'm not even pocket dialling
When I stiek uit it's like the British and the Dutch arriving
When they landed at the sea shore
And they thought the Cape was just a detour
Educate yourself, read more
Before they signing your deceased forms
I can't tell you how this feels yoh
This is the city I would bleed for
But I'm at the bottom of the seesaw..."

"You was worried about the waves, I was worried about the slaves
Now you standing there amazed
Go tell the mense what's my name

It's the Cape crusader, young Van Riebeeck
I put it down like young Van Riebeeck
What the name is young Van Riebeeck
Kaapstad did it young Van Riebeeck
Young Van Riebeeck..."

– YoungstaCPT, *Young Van Riebeeck*, 2019

The second room of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition is centred on the image of Jan van Riebeeck. When one enters the room we are met with two large portraits of van Riebeeck and his wife, Marie de la Quellerie. However, what we see is not the recognisable image of van Riebeeck popularised by the Afrikaner myth of the man. While it is now common knowledge that the image of van Riebeeck promoted by the nationalist, apartheid South African state is not factual but fantasy, the erroneous representation of the man can still be found in contemporary popular culture. The confusion around van Riebeeck's true likeness dates to 1884, when twenty-five portraits were donated to the Rijksmuseum by the van Riebeeck family, after which the popular portrait of van Riebeeck was declared the authentic depiction. By 1912, the Rijksmuseum's provenance research showed that the man depicted in the portrait was Bartholomeus Vermuyden and a different painting in the collection was identified as depicting the actual image of van Riebeeck. Nonetheless, despite this revelation, both the Rijksmuseum and the apartheid nationalists in South Africa continued to use the earlier photograph believed to be van Riebeeck as the official portrait. While the Rijksmuseum eventually rejected the first image of van Riebeeck in favour of the second in 1985, the inauthentic image of Jan van Riebeeck continued to circulate as the stock image for South Africa's official national documents, currency, publications, and cultural objects until the mid-nineties, when efforts to rebrand the post-1994 nation's public imagery began. This was the van Riebeeck that I had come to know in my early primary school years in

the late 1980s and early 1990s as the ‘founding father’ of South Africa, as knowing this ‘fact’ was an essential component of the historical fiction pedalled by the apartheid public school system. Founding-fatherism in cultivating the identity of Die Vaderland (The Fatherland) was an important symbolic weapon in the apartheid state’s nationalist armoury to assert their White, paternal values.

One may wonder why, some 400 years after his arrival in South Africa, we should care about van Riebeeck and what it means that his image persists in the popular imaginary. The legacy of settler colonialism, which van Riebeeck has come to symbolise, haunts contemporary South Africa, and the country’s complex social, economic, and political contexts can only be understood through the thorough unpacking of the colonial past.



Van Riebeeck mystery deepens further

THE story ‘Mystery deepens over whose face was on SA’s old money’ (Cape Argus, January 8) refers, in Jan van Riebeeck’s birth town of Culemborg in the Netherlands, the image that is claimed to be the ‘incorrect’ image of South Africa’s first settler is still published today as a true and correct image of him as a young man. My husband visited Culemborg last year in October. He bought a booklet there at the ‘Van Riebeeckhuis’ called ‘Culemborgers Overzee’ (Culemborgers Overseas). In this booklet, the so-called ‘incorrect’ portrait of Jan van Riebeeck (the image on the old South African banknotes) is published on page 16 as a ‘jeugportret van Jan van Riebeeck’ (a portrait of a young Jan van Riebeeck). If genealogist Jonkheer van Kretschmar’s conclusion, drawn in 1984, about the true identity of the person on the Van Riebeeck painting is accurate, how is it possible that, in 30 years, that information never reached the caretakers of the Van Riebeeck House in Culemborg? Was Van Kretschmar’s conclusion rejected by the Van Riebeeck House? Or did the Van Riebeeck House never bother to update their booklet? When you visit the webpage of the Van Riebeeck House, it boasts the ‘correct’ image (the image on the right in the newspaper article) under the heading: ‘Who was Jan van Riebeeck?’. Maybe both images are correct, seeing that the ‘incorrect’ image is of a younger Van Riebeeck? ‘Don’t we all sometimes seem almost unrecognisable on pictures of our younger selves?’ CHRISTÉL VAN ZYL Kula River

Figure 24: Article in the Cape Argus, 12 January 2015.

Contemporary representations of Jan van Riebeeck continue to emerge momentarily in South Africa, as evidenced by the rap song at the beginning of this section which was released in 2019 by the Cape Town-based hip-hop artist YoungstaCPT. In 2019, the rapper released the rap album *3T*, which contains the

single *Young Van Riebeeck* (YVR). In the battle track, YoungstaCPT confronts Jan van Riebeeck's spectral presence in South Africa, reflecting on the ongoing challenges and traumas brought about by European colonialism that is sensed and felt throughout the country. He boldly declares "this hip-hop game is like a country I am colonising" (YoungstaCPT, 2019). The lyrics reference the Dutch period of colonisation and the slave trade in the Cape Colony and comment on how colonial histories are mythologised and used as propagandist backlash the South African publics. In addition, the rapper draws attention to the fact that the sanitised, whitewashed conception of what van Riebeeck represents endures in the popular imagination. In the music video⁴⁰ of YVR, directed by the South African filmmaker Imraan Christians, we see vignettes of van Riebeeck, travelling in a boat propelled by enslaved men on their way to the Cape of Good Hope. In YoungstaCPT's portrayal of the Dutch landing on Cape shores in 1652, the revolution begins at the onset when the enslaved men aboard van Riebeeck's ship assassinate him before his plan to colonise the Cape could take hold. By the end of the video, van Riebeeck is seen floating in the ocean, presumably deceased, while the enslaved men escape, prompting the question: what are the alternative histories that could be imagined for South Africa if the Dutch and later the British failed in their attempts at colonisation and subjugation? In the last verse of the track, YoungstaCPT makes connections between imperial histories of subjugation, obsolete epistemologies and overcoming the colonial project of internalised anti-Blackness:

"A lot of mense is hating but that's not stopping me
This was the same thing that they did in the Cape Colony
Making us think we living free in a broken democracy
But the truth will set us free, you'll read it in my biography

⁴⁰ See: Youngsta CPT (2019) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_w4TQCl0CA&t=3s [2023, March 11].

When they brought us on the slave ships
And they took away our education
Looking for an oasis..."

"Our history was rewritten by the Europeans and Britain
We all share the same symptoms
But you can never ever hide the scars
Take a look at how far behind we are
Now come meet the man behind the bard his initials are YVR..."

– YoungstaCPT, Young Van Riebeeck, 2019

YoungstaCPT's rendition of the Dutch arrival occurs before the mythical 1652 encounter between the VOC and the Khoekhoe, as depicted in Charles Bell's infamous 1850 painting could transpire (Fig. 1). Addressing van Riebeeck's early interactions with the Khoekhoe communities, Gosselink writes as follows:

During his time on the Cape, Commander Van Riebeeck supposedly took a peaceable attitude to the Khoekhoe whom he perceived as a constant source of trouble. Livestock bartered with difficulty from the Khoekhoe was continually *stolen* [my emphasis] back again. Farmland would be trampled, and agreements to prevent this from happening again in the future were always broken. For a long time, Van Riebeeck would not respond with force. This explains why he is generally described as a passivist administrator, a worthy man who in good faith, starting from nothing, built a village from which a proud nation arose (2017: 51).

It is unfortunate that in as late as 2017, the Rijksmuseum took the approach to perpetuate the harmful myth of the binary of van Riebeeck (representative of the Dutch Nation) as a benevolent colonial administrator, and the Khoekhoe communities as the perpetrators, in a catalogue claiming to intervene into the ways that Dutch publics understand Dutch colonialism. The fact that this catalogue

circulates internationally, means that it adds to the harmful archive of popular global representations of colonial histories based on untruths and biased views and promotes the underthinking that we currently see in Western cultural interventions that claim to take 'decolonial' praxis seriously. It is both unclear and peculiar as to how Gosselink came to her analysis of van Riebeeck's relations with the people he encountered in the Cape and whether this was informed through thorough archival research—which in itself demonstrates that the ways that archives are read are critical to the practice of rewriting/ writing colonial histories.

Other questionable representations of van Riebeeck as the founder of South Africa continued to be perpetuated in other Dutch Museums in the Netherlands until very recently. The house where van Riebeeck is purported to have grown up in, in a town called Culemborg, south of Amsterdam, is the site of the Jan van Riebeeck Museum, established in 2011. According to Boelsma (2022), early installations at this museum presented van Riebeeck as a man who "loved gardening and contributed to the development of South Africa". After its initial years of showing a conventional, uncritical and untruthful narrative of van Riebeeck, the museum installed an exhibition, *Trots of Schaamte? (Pride or Shame?)* in 2019, with the curatorial text reading as follows:

"Niedt langer wordt hij beschouwd als een 'stichter', 'held' of 'vader' van des vaderlands (Zuid Afrika). De acties van de VOC in het algemeen en van Jan van Riebeeck in het bijzonder worden onder de loep genomen. Was hij wel zo heldhaftig?"

"He is no longer regarded as a 'hero', 'founder' or 'father' of the country (South Africa). The actions of the VOC in general and of Jan van Riebeeck in particular, are under scrutiny. Was he really that heroic?"

The exhibition can be viewed online via the museum website, and while it barely scratches the surface of van Riebeeck's legacy in South Africa, it starts to take a

more nuanced look at the ways that van Riebeeck is positioned in Dutch History. In September 2022, the museum presented the theatre production titled *Wil Dan de Echte Jan van Riebeeck Opstaan?* (Will the Real Jan van Riebeeck Please Stand Up?)⁴¹. I suspect that the revisionist turn at the van Riebeeck museum in 2019 could be attributed to the climate of cultural criticism in 2017, when the *Goede Hoop* exhibition received substantial local and international critique, particularly from vocal critics and scholars within the Netherlands, such as Wekker and Zeefuik. It was also a time when the Zwarte Piet 'debate' received substantial international attention.

In South Africa, the van Riebeeck myth reached its peak in 1952 during the apartheid government's van Riebeeck Tercentenary celebrations of the Dutch occupation of the Cape. At the time, van Riebeeck's image was used by the apartheid nationalists to renew the historic ties between the Dutch people and Afrikaners in South Africa. But while the Afrikaners may have popularised the fictionalised image of van Riebeeck, the erroneous appropriation and mythmaking around his figure did not begin there. The memetic notion of van Riebeeck as the great heroic leader and father of the Afrikaner nation took root in the late nineteenth century and was used to fabricate a single historical identity for the White inhabitants of South Africa, who had both 'lost' their individual-collective identities rooted in 'their 'mother countries' and had become an established White settler community of varied European ancestry.

Cecil John Rhodes, the British imperialist and Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, had a deep admiration for Jan van Riebeeck, perhaps because they were both protestant White males on a land-grabbing mission into 'darkest' Africa. The two men viewed Black Africans as "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (Lalkhen and

⁴¹ See: www.janvanriebeeckmuseum.nl [2023, March 11].

Roomanyay, 2020) and themselves as the guardians of civilisation and the owners of all they surveyed. In 1899, Rhodes, the then-prime minister of the Cape Colony, commissioned the bronze sculpture of a fake resemblance of van Riebeeck gazing towards Table Mountain (Fig. 25) to be installed in Adderley Street in the centre of Cape Town. Again, in the absence of an alternate depiction of van Riebeeck, Bartholomeus Vermuyden's portrait was utilised. As part of his vision for South Africa, Rhodes appropriated the fictitious persona of Jan van Riebeeck to claim a Dutch and European history for the Cape. As a result, he constructed a White settler identity that merged Dutch ancestry with British culture.

This was based on the belief that White people share the same superiority and are, thus, justified in dominating the country collectively.



Figure 25: Bronze Statue of Jan van Riebeeck at its original location at the entrance to Cape Town Pier, circa 1920s, Cape Times. University of Cape Town Libraries, 2022.

The Colony as Museum Object

In addition to the representations of Jan van Riebeeck and his wife, the Rijksmuseum puts eighteenth-century Cape colonial domesticity on display in the second room of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition. The Cape Colony is presented as an object in this room, reinforcing colonial perspectives where colonies were typically

viewed as exotic curiosities to be studied and displayed (in the metropole) by the imperial powers. Thus, colonisers often reduced the complexity of colonial communities to a simplified and idealised portrayal that aligned with their imperial objectives. The colony was thus viewed as a static object for colonists to study and manage rather than a dynamic and developing society with its own history, culture, and agency. This perspective also strengthened the power dynamic between the coloniser and colonised, with the former presuming superiority and control over the latter.

The curators positioned this room as the audience's first interaction with Dutch settlers in the Cape, presenting the museum visitor with 'ordinary' colonial life. However, there is a major omission here: daily life in the colony was dependent on forced and unpaid labour by individuals who built, maintained, and sustained colonial society. It also depended on the trade of livestock and other goods with the indigenous inhabitants of the land that the Dutch had encountered. Yet, presented to us in this section of the exhibition is a neat and idyllic Dutch settler colonial society that is 'pure' and untouched by the local context, the imagined Dutch constructions of self are left intact. Thus, instead of critiquing the notion of the colony as object, the Rijksmuseum simply reinforces it.

When I visited the exhibition, I was struck by the contrast between the imperial grandeur of the room, where the image of Jan van Riebeeck takes centre stage, and the absencing of the indigenous people and enslaved labourers, and what this signified in terms of status, power, and gender. Here, we make the distinction between 'absence' as referring to a state of non-presence (of a person or thing), whereas 'absenting' refers to an active process or practice of excluding something or someone. Thus, we can think of 'absenting' as a deliberate act of exclusion or erasure, intentionally omitting certain voices or perspectives, histories and knowledge systems. In the case of the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, the intentional

exclusion or erasure of certain histories, cultures, or perspectives is absenting, and the intentional 'absence' perpetuates power imbalances and marginalisation of certain groups while reinforcing dominant narratives and perspectives. As bell hooks (1992: 40-41) reminds us, the absence of recognition is a strategy that facilitates making a group the 'Other', and this notion is key when considering the curation of this room.

In terms of the 'absence of recognition' of the indigene people that the Dutch came into contact with during this period, the most telling omission and misrepresentation is the story of Autshumao⁴², the chief and interpreter of the Gorinhaikonas. The relationship between van Riebeeck and Autshumao was significant in the sense that Autshumao fulfilled a crucial role in Coloniser-Indigene relations. A mediator and interpreter that spoke fluent Dutch, Autshumao would eventually lead acts of resistance against van Riebeeck's Cape Colony, employing skilful strategies that were effective in keeping the Dutch colonists at bay. He did this by garnering support from other indigene groups that would become allies in the resistance movement against the Dutch, demonstrating the idea that for resistance to become revolution, it has to be collective. (Mellet, 2020)

The idea of resistance is imperative when talking about Dutch-Indigene relations in the Cape. Firstly, it gives us a sense of the humanity of the colonised and enslaved people, and secondly, it demonstrates the agency of individuals and shows us that practices of refusal were at work in the 17th and 18th century Cape Colony. It is

⁴² AUTSHUMAO (|Au-tsâma-ao) aka Arri (Herrie/Harry) was the founder of the proto-port of Cape Town. His original name like that of his first-born son was Arri, but because of his travels on the high sea he acquired the praise-name |Au-tsâma-ao (he who swims around with fish). Autshumao (the creolised version of his name) was born in circa 1610. He went to Java with the English in 1630 to train as an agent for English shipping. On returning to the Cape, he first established a trading and facilitation station on Robben Island with his followers. Whenever ships arrived, Autshumao dressed in European attire and boldly engaged with the ships' captains. This earned Autshumao the title of 'Governor' from the English and French. Also, important to note that the Dutch refers to Autshumao as Herrie and van Riebeeck refers to him in his journals as such. See: <https://camissamuseum.co.za/index.php/7-tributaries/1-cape-indigenous-africans/autshumao> [2023, March 16].

absurd to assume that indigene people in the Cape did not resist their conditions of enforced labour and the theft and encroachment of their cattle and land. However, ideas about refusal, resistance or the desire for revolution did not make their way into the *Goede Hoop* exhibition text. The museum doesn't ever use the word resistance but instead uses the obscurantist substitute for this: 'conflict'. The *Goede Hoop* exhibition text frames the story of Autshumao as follows:

The commander [van Riebeeck] decided to keep the cattle in a closed kraal at night and heighten the walls of the fort. He was deeply suspicious, certainly of Autshumato, the interpreter and intermediary involved in bartering with the Cochoqua. Van Riebeeck considered bartering him and his people off to Robben Island so he could trade directly with the region's original inhabitants. Nevertheless, he delayed this banishment, and later Autshumato, dressed in Dutch clothing, would even join the commander at the dining table – van Riebeeck had no choice but to stay on good terms with him. Autshumato, it turned out, was an opportunist who increased his power by manipulating not only the Dutch, but also his own group and the Khoekhoe who often came to trade there (Rijksmuseum, 2017).

As one moves to another part of the display in this room, in a panel of text titled "War with the Khoekhoe", the museum curators write:

The Khoekhoe's position in the conflict was clear: They were doing their utmost to frustrate the Dutch and drive them away, back to where they had come from. But it was all in vain. The Dutch had come to stay. The mutual distrust and the growing dependence on alcohol on the part of the Khoekhoe and on livestock on the part of the Dutch had developed into a hopeless situation, a deadlock that only worsened as more burghers settled on the Cape. The farmers occupied more and more of the Khoekhoe's grazing land. In response, the Khoekhoe destroyed the farmers grazing land and stole their tobacco, plants and cattle.

The Rijksmuseum curators repeatedly frame their narratives of the VOC's invasion in ways that show generosity towards van Riebeeck and the Dutch colonisers. In contrast, Indigene leaders like Autshumao are discredited and framed as being manipulative and dishonest, while the Khoekhoe groups are described as being sketchy, lazy and drunk. Moreover, the text above presents another example of the Rijksmuseum's attempts at fashioning a paternal, benevolent, tolerant and morally-just identity for the Dutch. When this text is read in conjunction with the objects displayed in this room and the first room of the exhibition on pre-colonial South Africa, the curatorial grammar consistently communicates an image of the Dutch as sophisticated, civil, and just in contrast "to the 'guilty, uncivilised, barbaric' other" (Wekker, 2016:15) that they were 'forced' to contend with.

The oil portraits of Jan van Riebeeck and his wife Marie de la Quellerie are placed next to an object called the Swellengrebel Cabinet, made in Cape Town, 1740-1750 and plates from the export porcelain service belonging to the Swellengrebel family c. 1750. These objects represent the great wealth that was accumulated during the time of VOC expansion and Dutch imperialism. Hendrik Swellengrebel eventually became governor of the Cape Colony, and his family was part of a wealthy class of VOC officials and businessmen that enjoyed an increasingly luxurious colonial lifestyle. These wealthy Dutchmen and Dutch descendants would flaunt their status and wealth through the purchasing and display of objects such as porcelain dinner sets and hand-crafted cabinets. The Swellengrebel cabinet, made from a selection of local and exotic timbers, is a treasured item in the Rijksmuseum collection and is normally displayed in the permanent museum exhibition of the eighteenth century, for a long time considered to be the crown jewel of the permanent displays at the Rijksmuseum. The piece is highly valued because of its provenance (the cabinet can be traced directly to Hendrik Swellengrebel) and the unique design of the surface decoration.

The *Goede Hoop* exhibition display addressed in this section, which centres on van Riebeeck's image as the representation of settler society, fails to create meaningful parallels to the ways in which Dutch settler colonialism continues to affect South Africa today. What if the museum were to 'come clean' about their inherited wealth by demonstrating how it was earned through colonial violence and, most importantly, that this inherited wealth was generated by enslaved bodies who provided free labour for imperial projects? Exhibitions are mediums for public communication. Thus, they have the ability to expand or alter visitors' awareness about a subject or subjects. Because awareness involves knowledge transmission, it cannot be separated from epistemologies and power.

The Occlusion of Colonial Histories in the Netherlands

As evidenced by South Africa's many vestiges of colonialism highly visible in public life, the Dutch colonisation of South Africa has unquestionably influenced and affected the socio-political landscape of the country in the present. In the Netherlands, however, the history of Dutch conquest in South Africa is largely rendered invisible. In spite of this absencing, however, the Dutch have indeed been influenced by their colonial pasts, and the *Goede Hoop* exhibition was a missed opportunity to initiate this crucial dialogue with the Dutch publics.

Melissa Weiner (2018) demonstrates through an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary education textbooks used in the Netherlands that false narratives regarding enslavement, the omission of African voices, and the narrative of the underutilisation of the African continent's rich resources by its inhabitants are continually perpetuated. This is yet another example of Dutch attempts to portray themselves as hardworking and benevolent and the indigenous groups as lazy and inferior. Further, in terms of how the subject of history is taught in schools, it is up to

the individual instructor to determine how much time to dedicate to colonialism, slavery, and the slave trade, despite the fact that the Dutch national history curriculum now includes these themes (Wekker, 2016). Despite the recent modifications to the curriculum, Weiner argues that the majority of Dutch history textbooks used in primary and secondary schools continue to portray Africa as the “inferior other” (Hira, 2012; Weiner, 2018). It is clear that the positioning of colonial narratives in the textbooks works to exonerate the Netherlands of guilt for slavery, colonialism, and apartheid in South Africa, leaving no one accountable for the exploitation and genocide of Africans (Weiner, 2018). Weiner contends that the reason the Dutch have mitigated their participation in these crimes against humanity is to preserve their national character as a tolerant culture devoid of racism, sexism, and xenophobia.

It is peculiar that in spite of the longstanding presence of Dutch imperial powers abroad, histories of colonialism have a marginal place in national practices and places of commemoration in the Netherlands (Deen, 2018). Schilling (2020: 121) argues that “working through the Dutch colonial past has many potential interfaces but has tended to focus on two areas: the legacy of slavery from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the results of twentieth-century Indonesian independence”. She further points out that the legacies of the VOC are positioned uncomfortably between these two processes of remembrance and forgetting.

In terms of national exhibitions that addressed the imperial past, the Rijksmuseum’s *Goede Hoop* exhibition was the first show on Dutch colonial histories of its scale, prominence and influence since the 1990s (Holtrop, 2019), but missed the mark in terms of providing an opportunity for robust dialogue, discourse and scholarship that sits with, works through and is in recognition of the ongoing violent afterlives of Dutch colonialism in South Africa, and elsewhere in the world. In their presentation,

the museum employed the colonial world exhibition trope by displaying the colony as a static and muted object, to be *gazed at* with curiosity and wonder, rather than presenting the Dutch relationship to the former colony as ongoing, and the post-colonial condition as a dynamic construct to be critically engaged with.

Chapter 5: Debris, Ruination, Ghosts: the Haunting Afterlives of Dutch Colonialism

If museums and memorials materialise a kind of reparation (repair) and enact their own pedagogies as they position visitors to have a particular experience or set of experiences about an event that is seen to be past, how does one memorialise chattel slavery and its afterlives, which are unfolding still? How do we memorialise an event that is still ongoing? (Sharpe, 2016: 45).

The afterlives of colonialism and slavery are pervasive and permeating. At times, they are easy to identify; in most cases, however, they are sensed and experienced but remain hidden and invisible. The staging of exhibitions such as *Goede Hoop* in European museums serves as a testament to the ongoing influence of colonialism and the spectral presence of its ghosts, underscoring how its residual presence constrains and influences contemporary exhibition practices. In South Africa, the eery and intractable haunting presence of Dutch colonialism reverberates through its ruins—the remains of which are both tangible and intangible. Ruins of the Dutch colonial period are found in the built environment: for example, the ‘Cape Dutch’ buildings; monuments and memorial sites; the urban form that shapes and moulds the historic centres of towns and cities and in the names of suburbs, roads and streets. In many parts of Cape Town, people walk among and live with the dead, as parts of the city are built on top of colonial burial sites since the enslaved were frequently laid to rest in mass, unmarked graves. The colonial afterlife is present in

formal and informal burial grounds such as the Prestwich Street⁴³ burial ground dating to the eighteenth century, where the remains of what Shepherd calls a “cross-section of the ‘underclass’ of colonial Cape Town are laid to rest, including [enslaved people], free Blacks, artisans, domestic workers, fishermen, criminals and sailors” (Shepherd, 2013: 234).

When the remains were discovered by ‘accident’ by property developers who were planning to build a luxury residential building on the site, nearly 3000 bodies were accounted for, including babies only a few weeks old and men in their late sixties (Davids, 2017). Archaeologists recognise the bones as being between 180 and 270 years old, and many of them were presumed to be the remains of enslaved people. During the annual Emancipation Day march in 2015, an event that commemorates the abolition of slavery in 1834, Reverend Michael Weeder, one of the organisers of the march and Dean of St. Georges Cathedral in Cape Town commented: “the east end of the city (currently known as Greenpoint and De Waterkant) was where they buried people. The Khoi didn’t seem to have the concept of marking a grave—they buried you in an upright position, like a shaft,” (Pather, 2015). The accidental ‘discovery’ of these ruins of the city’s past lives is the haunting of the absent presence of colonialism’s ongoing horrors.

The epigraph that opens this chapter draws from Christina Sharpe’s (2016) astute reflections on colonial catastrophe as ongoing and unfolding, bring into question the ways that the afterlives of colonialism are remembered and memorialised, which

⁴³ Human remains in Prestwich street were found by ‘accident’ in 2003 during building construction activities at the site. The exhumation of the remains was fiercely contested by the “Hands off Prestwich Street” activist group but this group eventually lost the fight with property developers, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and the City of Cape Town. Despite the efforts at creating a counter-heritage discourse by the activists, the human remains found at the site were eventually exhumed and moved to a new memorial or ossuary three blocks away built by the City of Cape Town. Construction on the Prestwich site went ahead and it is now the site of luxury apartments complete with a restaurant, swimming pool, gym and deli (Shepherd, 2013: 239).

is the focus of this chapter. For Sharpe, living in the wake of colonialism and slavery is living the “history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday black existence” (2016: 20), in all of its peculiarities and complex meanings and manifestations across the globe. Sharpe proposes that to be “in” the wake of colonialism and chattel slavery, is to occupy a position of consciousness” (ibid.). Moreover, Sharpe contends that, in making “the wake and wake work our analytic, we might continue to imagine new ways to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery’s afterlives to survive (and more) the afterlife of property” (2016: 22). The notion of wake work implies that the afterlives of slavery and colonialism are always operative in the present. The wake of colonialism is therefore not something that can be escaped or disregarded and is a condition that must be acknowledged and worked with in order to move towards social, retributive and reparative justice. Wake work, therefore is a methodology that troubles the ways that museums deal with their complicity in colonial violence.

The material traces of colonial pasts are “imperial ruins” (Stoler, 2013: 14) that are easily identifiable. They are what Schilling refers to as the material “nodes of colonial memory” (2020: 114). Then there are the immaterial ruins of Dutch colonialism that find expression in intangible forms of culture like in the dialects of Afrikaans⁴⁴, a creole language with Dutch, Indigene and Indonesian roots. Additionally, there exists the invisible yet insidious vestiges of Dutch colonialism that are reactivated and resurrected in different forms and in response to varying circumstances. Stoler (2013) argues that while these invisible remains may often be the most significant, they are also the hardest to trace, see, prove or document. In

⁴⁴ Afrikaner nationalists modified, standardised and modernized the Afrikaans spoken language into written language, towards the end of the 19th century (Willemsse 2015: 5), by imposing grammars and syntaxes, making it suitable to print and sell to other Afrikaners - a function of capitalism. By denying the language’s association with slaves and Oorlams (mixed raced descendants of slaves and European officers), the nationalists sought to elevate Afrikaans, and to use it as a medium in Afrikaner education, cultural, and economic (labour) policies, as a ‘White man’s language’ with a ‘White history’ and ‘White faces’ (Willemsse 2015: 5).

In the Wake: On Blackness and Being, Sharpe quotes Maurice Blanchot (1995: 1-2), who writes: "The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact...". In the neo-colonial world, the disregard for the less visible marks of ruination often contrasts with the care that is shown for the physical ruin. The never-ending debates around the preservation and protection of colonial heritage that are seen as the physical markers of a 'collective' and 'shared' national history come to mind.

In recent years, activism around South Africa's apartheid and colonial material remains have held prominence in the country's political landscape, specifically after the emergence of movements like #RhodesMustFall brought contestations held over the future of South Africa's colonial heritage to light. The activism that led to the removal of the Cecil John Rhodes statue from the University of Cape Town campus rallied around the notion that colonial inheritances of the past are not innocuous; they are embedded with and transmit meaning and can be experienced as painful reminders of the existence of past and present forms of colonial conquest's horrors and "unresolved sorrow" (Davids, 2017). Writing about her play, *What Remains* (2017), dealing with the history of enslaved people in the former Dutch colony, Cape Town, the playwright and scholar, Nadia Davids writes: "it is possible to be of and from this place and not have to negotiate its past, not have to recognise its presence. It is possible to do that until the past erupts and demands to be listened to" (2017).

When thinking about the potential for the past to erupt in the present and how the afterlives of colonialism might affect the contemporary, it seems appropriate to turn to the metaphors of ghosts or haunting and literature on colonialism as zombification⁴⁵. In *Spectres of Marx*, Jacques Derrida (1994) describes the spectre or

⁴⁵ Hauntology is the school of thought that deals with preserving lost histories or with the act of grasping at disappearing fragments of history. Hauntology sees haunting as both a socio-political and psychological state.

ghostly presences as the knowledge, meanings or memory that 'History' has repressed or denied. The spectre or ghost could be understood to be a liminal entity that is neither dead nor alive in the physical sense, it haunts the present that it has unfinished business with or where justice has not been achieved. For María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, the terms spectre and spectrality also "evokes an etymological link to the visual, visibility and vision, to that which is both *looked at* and *looking*" (2013: 2). The duality of the nature of the ghost or the spectre is unsettling, as it is for the most part unseen, yet at the same time, always present, always looking, operating affectively, and according to Gordon, "are never innocent: [t]he unhallowed dead of the modern project drag in the pathos of their loss and violence of the force made for them, their sheets and chains" (1997: 22). In terms of confronting the spectre, Derrida argues that it should not be negated or exorcised but lived *with*, and the recognition and reckoning with the spectre is necessary for the move towards social justice.

Another way to consider the colonial afterlife, is through the lens of the Zombie, typically known as a horror subgenre. The notion of the zombie is used to describe dead bodies that have been brought back to life through supernatural methods in works of fiction. However, there is a more nuanced history behind the concept of the zombie, and it is inextricably linked to the afterlives of colonialism. The zombie⁴⁶ mythos originated in West African folklore, where it was linked to necromancy (the use of magic to reanimate the dead). On Haitian plantations, the zombie's origins were a critique of colonialism as an institution—mythologised as the "myth of the

⁴⁶ The word 'zombie' appears in writing as far back as 1797 in colonial Saint-Dominge as the enslaved workers belief in not a returned soul, but a returned body— a person bodily raised from the grave and turned into an enslaved labourer. Enslaved people from Africa brought to the New World during colonialism took their culture and beliefs with them, including the fear of the undead. The colonial context transformed the zombie into a symbol of the dehumanisation and abuse of the enslaved. The enslaved were often subjected to inhumane working conditions, including long shifts without rest breaks. They weren't seen as people with agency and autonomy, but as disposable objects. Zombification, in which a person's will and spirit are extinguished and they become a lifeless, soulless shell, was used as an analogy for this dehumanisation.

walking un-/dead toiling the land and crops for White masters” and the political project known as ‘the West’ (Younes, 2022: 28). The modern zombie myth is a multi-headed “amalgam of creolised stories from different Indigenous and West African folktales and traditions dealing with the French enslavement of Haiti” (Younes, 2022: 28). Thus, the zombie was born in the colonial space of death and is inextricable from the ‘culture of terror’ of the plantation. As Anna Younes (2022) argues, the modern zombie thus needs to be understood as a modern and fantastic folktale emerging because of and alongside the colonial violence of transatlantic slavery and settler colonialism. The zombie is mutable, always changing, never one thing and paradoxical as it occupies the liminal space of being inherently dead and alive.

Thus, the colonial afterlife can be likened to the zombie — encompassing the colonial histories of slavery and conquest of lands and simultaneously, the legacies of resistance and revolution. The term ‘coloniality’ was formulated by the decolonial theorists in an attempt to theorise and to name and call out the invisible nature of the horror of colonial violence and its ongoing effects that adapt and respond to changing conditions in the present. Coloniality can be thought of as both a haunting and monstrous matrix or affective structural framework that is unseen but present, scaffolding the systemic logics and ideologies of colonial power. We can extend this notion to think of coloniality as the living dead, driven to kill and cannibalise the living.

Stoler’s (2013) concept of “imperial effects” or the colonial afterlife could be thought of as the ghoulish remains of colonial violence and injustice that haunt the present. “Imperial effects” can affect social lives and experiences in a spectrum of ways, and haunting compels us to confront their “paradigm of difference” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) and the many injustices that it has left us with. At times, although rare, ghosts can surface and be seen and experienced, such as in the case where the developers of the Prestwich Street

site were unexpectedly confronted by human remains. The colonial slave trade, for example, haunts the present in the many forms of which anti-Black racism (which uses skin colour as its primary marker) is arguably the most recognisable, as it crosses social, geographical and cultural limits and has endured through time. The ghost seeks a host to allow it to surface, and this could take the form of “someone, something or perhaps a controversy, which allows it to surface and demand our attention” (Blackman, 2019: 271).

The notion of the colonial afterlife and its effects is also evoked in Stoler’s concepts of “imperial formations”, which register “the ongoing quality of processes of decimation, displacements and reclamation” concerned with ‘imperial debris’, and ‘ruination’ (2013: 4). Ruination’s deep saturation often appears in less spectacular forms, defined as an ongoing process of tracing the “fragile and durable substance of signs, the visible and visceral senses in which the effects of empires are reactivated and remain” (Stoler, 2013: 1). Borrowing from Derek Walcott’s ‘rot that remains’, Stoler argues that imperial formations cultivate debris which accumulates and has political lives, thinking of debris not as the leftovers of imperialism and colonialism, but rather as “what people are left with – the social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, things” (2013: 1).

For Ian Baucom, “time does not pass, it accumulates” (2005: 24) and, like time, imperial debris accumulates across multiple fields and historical tenses—they have no temporal limits. Similarly, Charles McDonald (quoted in Stoler, 2013) argues that the debris is always present: “debris is more than what is ruined or left behind: debris does not materialise out of thin air; it must always already be present. It is not a kind of thing but rather a state of being into which and out of which things may pass”. This understanding of debris as a state of being is crucial in that it points to the ideological maintenance of the colonial afterlife as atmospheric, always there, operating transcendently, and activated accordingly to shifting circumstances in the present. We can further relate this to the idea of living in the wake, as proposed by Sharpe (2016)—where the wake is

thought of as a period of mourning after death or disaster, which in the case of the colonial afterlife is ongoing, and so is the requisite state of consciousness needed to live in the incessant state of coloniality, and with the unfinished project of emancipation.

Aimé Césaire writes that “It is hard to imagine all is lost; since the energy of the ashes is still here; And blows from time to time through the debris” (1946). Central to the notion of imperial debris is the desire to question how “empire’s ruins contour and carve through the psychic and material space in which people live”. This ideological deliberation resonates with what Anthony Bogues (2010) calls ‘historical catastrophe’—expressing the idea that violent events of the past are continuously reconstructed in the present. Imperial effects haunt the present in that they are continuously evolving and responding to contemporary social conditions by deploying racialised, colonial logic, terminologies and meanings. ‘Ruinination’ is useful when thinking about the colonial afterlife because it places emphasis on the everyday, sometimes less unidentifiable and obvious ways that “imperial processes” have left their marks on the lives of ordinary citizens, processes and practices.

Ruinination is critical of notions such as colonial legacies and entanglements, because they fail to capture the weight of the colonial catastrophe, its effective cyclical recurrences of intergenerational violence and trauma, and the resistance and refusal it takes to work towards its dismantling. As Stoler (2013) laments, imperial formations are processes of becoming, and ruinination is an ongoing corrosive process that weighs on the future. While ruinination occurs in the external, physical and metaphysical world, it also occurs in the internal world of the body. As a direct result or effect of ongoing colonial violence, debris and ruinination can accumulate in the body. The ruinination of the body is best expressed in the scientific phenomenon known as weathering (see Gerominus 1992), which simply refers to the corrosion of the Black and othered body over time due to an accumulation of negative impacts

caused by exposure to 'imperial affects'. Similarly, weathering is effectuated in the physical ruins of colonialism, in the buildings and structures built by the colonisers, particularly in the settler colonial contexts of the global south. These physical ruins, the burdensome debris we are left with in the present, include museums and monuments, houses and churches, and segregated colonial city plans.

Tuck and Ree describe colonisation as "horrific as humanity gets" and settler colonialism as "an ongoing horror, made invisible by its persistence" (2013: 642). Related to this idea of colonality as an unfolding and mutating terror, Sharpe asks, "what then are the ongoing coordinates and effects of the wake, and what does it mean to inhabit that Fanonian 'zone of non-being';⁴⁷ within and after [coloniality's] denial of Black humanity?" (2016: 45). Many United States-based scholars point to the ongoing horror of settler colonialism as best exemplified by the systemic killing of African-Americans at the hands of the United States Law Enforcement. With the current worldwide focus on this issue, which sparked the global #BlackLivesMatter campaign, the murder of unarmed Black men and women by police in the United States immediately come to mind when thinking about examples of how the 'zone of non-being' is enacted in the present. However, Black American people are not alone in experiencing the mutating terror of the colonial afterlife.

The disregard for Black life continues in other settler-colonial settings as in the following case from South Africa. In April 2017, 16-year old Matlhomola Mosewu was murdered for allegedly stealing a sunflower on a farm in Coligny, in the North-West Province of South Africa. A silent witness to his own murder, Mosewu was

⁴⁷ According to Fanon, the zone of non-being is a space wherein individuals are denied the right to exist as human beings and are reduced to mere things or objects. This can occur as a result of colonisation, racism, or any other type of systematic oppression. In this space, individuals are deprived of their humanity, and their identities are formed by those in authority. The zone of non-being is a psychological condition, characterised by feelings of alienation, isolation, and despair. It is a place where individuals feel helpless and powerless, and they may turn to violence to affirm their humanity and reclaim their identity.

killed by two White farm workers⁴⁸ who had loaded him onto the back of their *bakkie* (the South African colloquial term for pick-up truck). The murder-accused denied that they had killed him—their version of events was that when they caught Mosewu picking the sunflower on their farm, they had loaded him onto the back of their *bakkie* and on the way to the police station he fell and died. Eyewitnesses have since contested this story: they claim that Mosewu was pushed off the back of the *bakkie* and as a result, died from a broken neck.

The situation in Coligny, a small town in the north of South Africa, which like most towns and cities in South Africa is segregated according to race and socio-economics, says a lot about the power relations and anti-Black violence embedded in contemporary South African society. While one cannot deny the strides made since the social and political transformations post-democracy, it is clear that relatively little has shifted regarding the macro socio-economic power relationships amongst the White and Black populations of the country, and this reality is especially visible in small farming towns and communities outside of major urban centres. In towns like Coligny, Black life can be cut short for picking a sunflower on land that was ultimately acquired through illegitimate and forceful means by White colonial settlers and the apartheid state. Mosewu's brutal murder is testimony to the ways that the afterlives of colonialism and apartheid continue to haunt South Africa in the present and an indictment on any notion that the violence of this past has *passed*.

⁴⁸ Pieter Doorewaard and Phillip Schutte were found guilty of killing 16-year-old Matlhomola Mosweu on April 20, 2017. Later, they filed an appeal to the Supreme Court of Appeal with the assistance of the right-wing Afrikaner organisation, AfriForum and were set free. See: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/two-men-convicted-of-coligny-teen-matlhomola-mosweus-murder-now-free-after-sca-overtuns-their-conviction-6588830f-06c7-4809-9500-7d1ccbc7e62b> [2023, March 18].

Presenting and Illuminating the Afterlives of Colonial Pasts Through Artistic Practices

Trouillot contends that “the problem of historical representation is how to present [the] ghost, something that *is* and yet is *not*” (1995: 147). To extend this notion of haunting as absencing, we might ask how one does the work of tracing as well as showing imperial effects. Making visible the intersections between the realms of the living and the spectral afterlives of the Dutch colonial project is a concern explored by the Dutch artist, Natasja Kensmil. Many of Kensmil’s artworks take form as ghoulish portraits of powerful historic figures that featured prominently in the told histories of the Dutch colonial empire. In these portraits, Kensmil illuminates themes of suffering, torment and the violence of power, some of which are drawn from the oral histories and folklore of her parent’s country of birth, Suriname, a former Dutch colony. The paintings visualise the accounts of the darker histories that were shaped by the powerful historic figures that would otherwise be invisibilised in celebratory and heroic accounts of the Netherlands’ Golden Age. Working in what appears at first to be a monochromatic colour palette on the surface of the canvas in a style reminiscent of traditional European oil painting, Kensmil sets out to give form to the repressed presence of the histories of coloniality and slavery that haunt contemporary Dutch society.

Kensmil’s paintings are reflective of her palimpsestic approach to contemporaneity – her works are composed of layers of paint, (that are not, in fact monochromatic, but made up of various colours to produce this effect), historical references and personal reflections. In *Johanna Le Maire* (2021) (fig. 26), Kensmil presents the ghoulish figure of Johanna, the daughter of Isaac Le Maire, a powerful financier and shareholder of the Dutch East India Company, who would eventually fall out of favour with the company. The work includes processed fragments from a script about the history of the *Kaap de Goede Hoop* (Cape of Good Hope) trading post,

and a drawing of the post, centring seventeenth century VOC iconography. These portraits offer an account of the contribution made by the Netherlands to early global capitalism and its many effects—the ghosts and afterlives that haunt the present, echoing Gordon’s sentiments that “haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life especially when they are supposedly over and done with or when their oppressive nature is denied” (2008: xvi). Kensmil’s images embody her encounter with the archive of the Dutch colonial past and her refusal to accept its “truths” (Campt, 2017). The portrait of Johanna Le Maire serves as a reminder to Dutch publics that the histories of Dutch colonialism is not something that has been left behind in the country’s former colonies, but rather that it is very much present in and affects contemporary life in Dutch society. At the same time, the works promote a conversation on what it means for Black and brown bodies in Europe to carry the weight of having to produce and disseminate counter-narratives of empire.

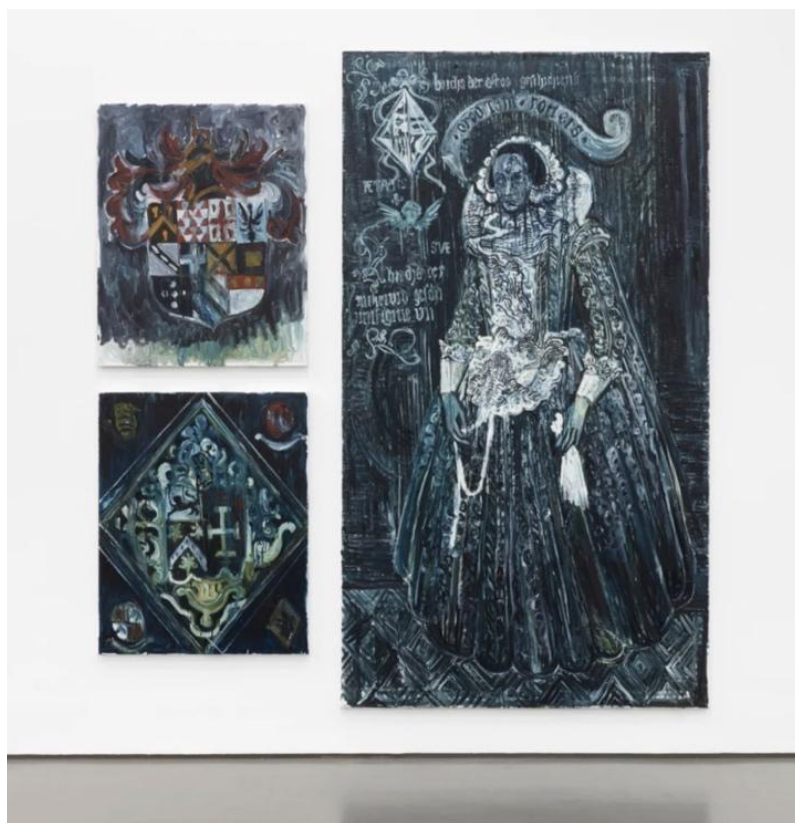


Figure 26: Kensmil, N. 2021. *Johanna Le Maire*. [Oil on Canvas] Cape Town: Stevenson Gallery.

In another approach to finding ways to make the spectral traces of colonial histories in Europe visible, Françoise Vergès's 'The Slave at the Louvre Walking Tour' of the Louvre Museum in Paris sought to uncover the ghosts of slavery in Europe and to "displace the gaze from the colony to the metropole" (Vergès, 2016:13). The curators that participated in The Slave at the Louvre guided tour pointed out how prominently the objects and commodities of slavery were represented in 17th-century Dutch paintings in the museum's collection. In the 17th-century, Amsterdam was the main port of entry in Europe for spices, tobacco, sugar and cotton. The curators were interested in looking at when these objects first appeared alongside representations of Black subjects in relation to emergent (at the time) European constructions of Whiteness, self and other. Vergès contends that the guided visits sought to restore the presence of the invisibilised humanity that European art had helped to construct and affirm the living legacies of the enslaved. With this intervention, Vergès shows that other than 'mining' the museum's storeroom to stage an exhibition or installation that would expose the museum's ghosts, the ghosts of slavery and colonialism can be brought to light by examining what is already on display in the museum's galleries. In illuminating the ghosts of colonialism and slavery that are already always there, she shows that the spectral remnants of the past or the 'imperial debris' is always among us in the present. Thus echoing del Pilar Blanco and Peeren's view that "the spectre is always already before us, confronting us with what precedes and exceeds our sense of autonomy, seeing us without being seen" (2013: 33).

Hall's work on locating the post-colonial claims that "the process of decolonisation...like colonisation itself, has marked the colonising societies as powerfully as it has the colonised" (Hall, 1995: 246). Vergès and Kensmil are both European citizens and descendants of the African diaspora, seeking to expose the colonial ghosts that haunt European society. They both contend that the spectre of

European imperialism — the unseen yet always-present colonial framework that structures and scaffolds the neocolonial world — often goes unnoticed and unacknowledged, particularly in spaces and institutions of culture. In the act of illumination, the spectre becomes legible. As Schilling argues, “the ability to visualise the traces of colonial history...has been a productive way to think about colonial pasts, not only to the academic community but to a wider audience” (2020: 113). Curatorial and artistic interventions can be seen as acts of reclamation, resistance and talking back to the violent institutional practices and structures that replicate and uphold colonial knowledge, sentiments and values. Using creative artistic methods such as performance, installation and multimedia, artistic interventions can disrupt dominant narratives. These techniques can challenge visitors’ expectations and prompt them to think critically about the narratives on display at the museum and may lead to the audience questioning the authority of the museum itself.

Slavery and colonialism haunts contemporary Dutch society in a myriad of forms, such as the annual Zwarte Piet parade and the resistance it elicits, and in the remnants and symbols of the Dutch empire that permeates everyday life. Ghosts of the colonial past also surface in the existence of ephemeral and popular artefacts, such as the board game *De Gouden Eeuw*, released in 2008. I stumbled upon the *De Gouden Eeuw* game during a visit to the Black Archives in Amsterdam, who collected it for their collection consisting of artefacts of the Dutch ideological colonial project. The board game exists “beyond the boundaries of formal pedagogy” (Forsdick, 2020: 202), is intended ‘or ‘edutainment’ and is aimed at younger consumers. Objects like this boardgame provide valuable evidence for exploring the dynamics of colonial memory and its significant social effects, as well as for countering European manifestations of the “absent-minded imperialist” as articulated by Bernard Porter (2006). Charles Forsdick (2020: 202) argues that the

board game genre enables “vicarious travel around the “empire” and draws on colonial travel narratives and adventure stories to reproduce and validate a colonial perspective based on the concept of civilising missions and faith in Western technological and scientific superiority. Forsdick contends that a proliferation of this material could be found in Dutch society, particularly during the interwar period (2020: 202). The *Gouwden Eeuw* board game emerges as a tangible remnant and spectral representation of the colonial past. Its deceptively innocuous presence forces a confrontation with the Dutch past that has been disavowed but that is hidden in plain sight.

The Haunted Present: Curated White Nationhood in South Africa

The obstinate remnants of Dutch Colonialism that remain intact throughout South Africa’s public and social landscape are partly due to the apartheid state’s aggressive efforts at crafting a post-Anglo-Boer war nationalist history of South Africa. The Afrikaner nationalists achieved this through the prudent curating and public staging of national narratives that emphasised the Afrikaner’s European origins. Visual culture was an important site or ‘rationalising and normalising’ apartheid and the Afrikaner nationalist ideologies that supported it (Freschi, Schmamman and van Robbroeck, 2020). The performance of this Afrikaner history took place in locales that included television, print media, monuments, sculptures, parades, festivals and art exhibitions funded and supported by the state. An example of this is the van Riebeeck Tercentenary celebrations in 1952 (Fig. 27), which Rassool and Leslie Witz describe as “an attempt to display the apartheid state and assert its confidence” (1993: 448). From 1952 onwards the 6th of April 1652 was commemorated as Van Riebeeck Day as van Riebeeck is thought to have arrived on Cape shores on the 6th of April in 1652. From 1980 onwards, the day became known

as Stigtingsdag (Founders Day)⁴⁹. Van Riebeeck thus became a symbol of the nationalist, White rule, and Cape Town was promoted as the nucleus of the White nation (Grundlingh, 1991; Jeppie, 1990; Rassool and Witz, 1993). The van Riebeeck Tercentenary festival, which used the phrase “We build a nation” as its rallying cry, is essentially the fictionalised representation of the White Dutch arrival in three-dimensional form. It was a grand attempt at presenting the imagined White settler nation to the public a few years after the apartheid state had come into power in 1948. More than half a century later, the efforts made towards curating the White Afrikaner nation continue to reverberate and the once-heralded cultural landmarks and markers of power remain as vestiges that haunt the present.



Figure 27: Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Celebrations, 1952. Grand Parade, Cape Town.

While its contemporary presentation may be limited and parochial, the staging of the Afrikaner nation’s Dutch and European lineage is by no means a past practice. An example is found in a museum in Stellenbosch, a town in the Western Cape province. The Stellenbosch Village Museum shows how a museum’s curation, in terms of the visual, textual, structural and spatial aspects of display practice, can foreground Whiteness and a partial European narrative of history, heritage, and

⁴⁹ See: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/arrival-jan-van-riebeeck-cape-6-april-1652> [2023, March 18].

memory of a place. At the same time, the museum omits and silences the narratives of Black communities in the town. The Stellenbosch Village Museum is essentially a White cube comprising a digital display of what the museum refers to as “the timeline of Stellenbosch”, an interactive map of the town’s history. The rest of the museum consists of four historic houses, namely the Schreuderhuis, Blettermanhuis Grosvenor House and Berghhuis. The houses, which are said to have their origins in different historical periods, were owned by prominent men of the settler-colonial community of the Cape Colony. Each house is named after its head patriarch. The architectural styles of these houses reflect an amalgam of European influences and the ‘Cape Dutch’ architecture style.

The museum guides at all four homes are Black women who are dressed in modest costumes reminiscent of those worn by enslaved women or servants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Curiously, while they are dressed as enslaved labourers, the women perform the role of the wives of the former owners of the houses. These performances encompass the carrying out of actual domestic tasks, including house cleaning, tending to the garden and feeding the animals kept in the backyards of some of the houses. As part of the condition of employment, the women are forbidden to display any object (for example: cell phone, soft drink can, magazine or newspaper) that would suggest that they are not still in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. This performance and re-enactment of nostalgic colonial memory haunt us because, while the site clearly functions to give the settler community a sense of ‘history’ and a claim to place, it simultaneously and unintentionally exposes the violence of that history. It highlights the ways in which colonialism has structured the temporal and spatial dimensions of social life, resulting in the systematic expropriation of subjugated peoples’ time, labour, and resources. This has led to a contemporary reality in which the accumulated wealth

and power of colonial and settler-colonial nations are built on the exploitation of the temporal and material resources of indigenous, enslaved and colonised people.

Among the violent practices embedded in the Stellenbosch Village Museum is that it negates the historical injustices experienced by the town's Black inhabitants, many of whom were forcibly removed from the town centre neighbourhood of Die Vlakte due to the apartheid Group Areas act (1950). The museum workers are represented as enslaved labourers frozen in time without agency, who figuratively continue to serve the interests of their long-departed White masters. As Stoler (2011) reminds us of the colonial racial epistemologies and the psychic structures of power cannot be relegated to mere vestiges. They do not just benignly 'remain'. In the Blettermanhuis, in the interest of the White, colonial narrative of Stellenbosch, a display about slavery is tucked away in a small, obscure room, illustrating Shepherd's argument that "historical injustice is recapitulated in forms of contemporary social injustice" (Shepherd, 2013: 241). This display functions as an analogy for what the Stellenbosch Village Museum has done to narratives other than the White European history of the town.

While the 1952 Van Riebeeck Festival was a performance of White power to affirm the national apartheid government's authority, the Stellenbosch Village Museum exists to remind the White settler community that they belong in a country where the cultural hegemony no longer belongs to White people. The museum achieves this by emphasising that the wealth and status of the White Afrikaner in South Africa's social-racial hierarchy was earned through Calvinist values of hard work over centuries, as well as being the divinely-appointed people to bring civilisation to Africa. The museum provides an idealised depiction of White settler life by displaying the White, paternal settler imagination of the past, in the present. This narrative promotes the idea that White settlers have a right to their privilege and

that their colonisation, and thus their enslavement of Black communities, was morally justified.

Haunting as Absenting: Absence as a Recognition of Coloniality

Returning to the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, we reflect on the experiences of two South African artists who visited the show. In 2017, Simangaliso Sibiyi and Phumzile Twala participated in a workshop at Funda Community College⁵⁰ in Soweto, Johannesburg, titled *Ways of Being an Artist in the World*, facilitated by the director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Khwezi Gule. At the end of the workshop, Gule selected three students to attend a 10-day Decolonial summer school in Utrecht, The Netherlands. The summer school, initiated by the artists Nelmarie du Preez and Dorina van Meel from South Africa and the Netherlands respectively, was centred on questions of what decolonisation means in the arts. The impetus for the summer school came from van Meel and du Preez's ongoing project of facilitating cross-continental debates on how to think about creating a space for north-south dialogue that made room for friction and discomfort.

According to Twala (2021), the organisers instructed participants that dialogues were to be "open-ended", and they were given free-rein to develop and present questions and provocations during the discussion. When Sibiyi and Twala reflect on this process, during their first trip abroad, they note that this was the first time they had to confront notions of colonialism and decolonisation in a context outside of South Africa. They make a pointed reference to the discomfort demonstrated by the Dutch as the South African and Dutch participants engaged in heated discussions.

⁵⁰ Founded in 1984, Funda Community College (formerly known as Funda Centre) is one of the oldest independent Black-led institutions in the arts sector of South Africa, established in response to the inaccessibility of specialised training in the visual arts for Black South Africans under apartheid. Funda continues to serve as a critical point of access to the visual arts sector for young Black South Africans. Funda's mission statement is to provide alternative education for social reconstruction.

The larger part of the discussion centred on positioning, specifically the experiences of the South African cohort, who were tasked with contemplating and discussing the present-day effects of Dutch colonialism on South Africa. The participants also addressed the imbalance in power relations that are intrinsic to exchanges like the one they were participating in and how these difficulties might be countered and overcome. Later in the programme, an excursion organised by du Preez and van Meel took participants to see and comment on the *Goede Hoop* exhibition at the Rijksmuseum. Sibiya (2021) recounts:

The first thing you would see was the huge image of Mandela addressing the crowd. In this exhibition, they showed Nelson Mandela's image from behind. It's something we believe in our culture — showing someone's body from behind, you steal this person, you are not having a conversation. If you want to present him in public, at least show him in a certain way.

Here, Sibiya refers to his discomfort in seeing the enormous billboard image of Nelson Mandela facing a crowd of people on the Rijksmuseum façade (Fig. 28). This image, seen from Museumplein is where one's experience of the exhibition begins. Mandela is shown with his back turned towards the viewer while the Dutch crowd he addresses faces the viewer. Sibiya explained that, from his personal cultural perspective, it was offensive to see Mandela's body presented in this manner because it does not elicit a sense of respect for the individual, a prominent yet contentious concept present in many Southern African cultures. According to Sibiya's analysis, the Dutch crowd Mandela faces looks directly at the viewer; consequently, the viewer makes initial eye contact with the Dutch public. When viewed from this perspective, the decision to use this photograph as the promotional image for *Goede Hoop* becomes prescient for what visitors can expect once inside.



Figure 28: Billboard on the facade of the Rijksmuseum facing Museumplein. Photograph by Greer Valley. 2017.

Once the group had entered the museum, they were greeted by Gosselink. Twala recalls this meeting:

They were open to hearing our critiques, but one moment was tricky. When we brought up the way the text was written, they were defensive about it. Again, the curators spoke about the exhibition as being for a Dutch audience but explained that they had consulted with institutions in South Africa. A word we found particularly offensive was ‘intermingling’, which Gosselink translated to us as ‘cross-breeding’. I was so mad because the rape and the violence of the Dutch encounter had been conveniently left out (Twala, 2021).

Twala explains that in her view, the language used in the exhibition text romanticised violence and the imagery used in the exhibition display poeticised the realities of colonial conquest. In her perspective, the violent acts committed by the Dutch colonisers, like “rape is sorely missing in both the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue” (Twala, 2021). Given colonial discourse of human biology and race, the exhibition’s use of the term intermingling or cross-breeding is a peculiar and problematic ideological choice that echoes eugenic notions of racial

'mixing' and runs counter to contemporary scientific and humanist perspectives on racialised constructs.

When the summer school ended, Sibiyi remained in the Netherlands, this time in Amsterdam, as a recipient of the Thami Mnyele Residency, 2017. Due to this residency, Gosselink invited Sibiyi to make an artwork in response to the *Goede Hoop* exhibition. Sibiyi eventually settled on making an edition of print works titled *Reflect Your Hope* that looks at how one could bring the figures of Nelson Mandela and Jan van Riebeeck, and thus the past and the present, together in dialogue. Sibiyi believes that in the Netherlands, Nelson Mandela is seen as the "liberator for African people" while Jan van Riebeeck is seen as a "liberator for White Dutch people" (Sibiyi, 2021), suggesting that the Dutch perception of the two men is of two authoritative figures of equal footing and stature. He describes his disappointment at seeing the painting of van Riebeeck as the first object on display in the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, especially since the first room of the exhibition doesn't provide a nuanced sense of the complexity of pre-colonial Cape society. For Sibiyi, the transition between the very first display of sparsely placed rocks and watercolour maps of the pre-colonial Cape region and the room centred on van Riebeeck and Dutch domestic life in the Cape Colony translated to "leaving behind an uncivilised distant past into an era of civilisation with wardrobes and furniture" (Sibiyi, 2021).



Figure 29: Sibiya's artwork "Reflect Your Hope" is presented to Taco Dibbits, the director of the Rijksmuseum in 2017.

In Sibiya's *Reflect Your Hope*, Nelson Mandela holds a mirror while facing away from the viewer, a parody of the publicity image of Goede Hoop as depicted on the hoarding outside the Rijksmuseum façade facing Museumplein. However, the viewer sees Jan van Rebeeck's reflection in the mirror instead of Mandela's. Sibiya explains that he uses the mirror as a reflective device to return the gaze to Europe in order to engineer a scenario where South Africa is doing the looking, alluding to colonial practices where Europeans probed African bodies and bodies of the colonised peoples as objects of enquiry in the disciplines of anthropology, ethnology, and art history.

The mirror as symbolism and the notion of mirroring is further employed to emphasise the artist's dual experience of not seeing himself in the exhibition and the subsequent search for himself in what he was looking at. A mirror is both a reflection and a distortion of the world around us, and in this artwork, Sibiya reflects on his experience of traversing a familiar space that simultaneously feels unintelligible and foreign. When viewing the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, a sense of dissociation emerges from what one perceives to be familiar – 'one's own culture,

language, history, and public memory) while also experiencing trauma in seeing the collective self-represented in ways that appear to affirm the colonial episteme. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the two figures of van Riebeeck and Mandela brings into dialogue the artist's feelings regarding the reflection and distortion of the two figures in the context of the making of imagined national narratives. The mirror employed in this work may also be interpreted as the artist's critique of the absence of reflexivity in the performance of decoloniality, as evidenced by the Rijksmuseum curators' approach to exhibition making. Further, the mirror is a portal, allowing access to other worlds, futures, and possibilities, and in addition, acts as a time-loop into the past, where Mandela's figure, who presents the post-1994, post-colonial period in South Africa, must repeatedly confront van Riebeeck's ghost in the present.

Read as a response to the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, *Reflect Your Hope* mediates between the viewer and the exhibition, reminding the audience that there are multiple ways that an exhibition is perceived and experienced, breaking with the objective neutrality that the Rijksmuseum aims to achieve. The work seeks to register the impact of violence and to borrow from Ahmed, "the registering is also the creation of a possibility for being otherwise (Binyam, 2022: 30). Like Twala's account of her experiences and feelings about *Goede Hoop*, Sibiya recalls that the Dutch curators never incriminate themselves or the museum in the crimes of colonialism and both Sibiya and Twala agree that *Goede Hoop* is a deliberate attempt to Whitewash history. To further illustrate this position, Sibiya uses the example of the poster display about anti-apartheid resistance in the Netherlands. To him, this display is more about Dutch opposition to apartheid and not the efforts and activities of the resistance movements in South Africa that led to the toppling of the apartheid state. He reflects on the last room of the exhibition, the #FeesMustFall placard installation, which to him also felt like an afterthought. From

the artist's perspective, it was as though the room was signposting notions of the assumed failure of the post-1994 South African state without connecting the country's present struggles of unaddressed inequality, joblessness, epistemic injustices and land dispossession to its period of colonialism characterised by enslavement, land-theft and violence. This was evident in the arrangement of the poster-artefacts and in the text that accompanied the display.

Compelled by the feeling that this part of the exhibition seemed to call out for intervention, Sibiya's initial project proposal to the museum intended to disrupt the room housing the #FeesMustFall poster display through the use of graffiti. Sibiya's intervention might have been an appropriate visual response when juxtaposed with the museum's own use of graffiti-like text for the provocative slogans painted on the gallery walls. Disappointingly, Gosselink and the Rijksmuseum curatorial team rejected this proposal. Sibiya feels that this last room, or the part of the exhibition dedicated to post-1994 South Africa was a missed opportunity for the museum and their publics to reflect on present-day neo-colonial politics and power structures. Because he was not permitted to realise this intervention, Sibiya questions whether the artwork he eventually presented to Dibbits ever challenged, or unsettled the *Goede Hoop* exhibition in the ways initially intended.

Performing Decoloniality: Decolonial Fronting and Decolonial Fatigue

The handover of Sibiya's print (Fig. 29) was an unceremonious affair, except for the presence of the museum director and the Dutch media. The artist was barred from bringing guests to the handover and described the experience as disconcerting. Sibiya's experience points to a broader phenomenon of 'decolonial fronting' or dressing up in the language of decolonisation, where the idea of decolonisation has

been seized, co-opted, commodified and performed in organisations and institutions facing critique for their complicity in colonialism. One way that decoloniality is performed is when cultural practitioners are drawn into European museums as sojourner-curators and interventionists to assist the institution in handling their baggage and to 'decolonise' their displays, collections and practices. Namibian scholar, performance artist and activist Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja Sakaria names this "practice of museuming" as one that asks the victims of colonialism to handle its baggage (Valley, 2019).

Decolonial fronting is inauthentic and tokenistic, yet it has become common practice in many Western museums, and its repetitive performance eventually leads to decolonial fatigue. The decolonial fronting that takes place in exhibitions like Goede Hoop can also be read as a "move to innocence" (Tuck and Yang, 2012) because, while dressing up in the language of decolonisation, the institution doesn't consider what decolonisation means, what it wants, and what it requires (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 46). The museum's attempts at moves to innocence are blatantly hypocritical, and while it fronts decoloniality, its actions ultimately betray it.

Subsequent to the time spent in the Netherlands, Sibiya was involved in establishing the programme *Decolonial Futures*, an exchange programme organised between the Sandberg Instituut, the Rietveld Academie, FramerFramed gallery in Amsterdam and Funda Community College in Soweto. The programme arose through the collective desire to work towards a decolonial future for South African-Dutch relations. Several South African scholars and artists are faculty for the programme. The participants from Soweto in Johannesburg are either studying at Funda Community College or part of Mollo Wa Ditshomo, a youth-led primary co-operative based at the school. It intends to establish 'an equal exchange' of knowledge and perspectives between South Africa and the Netherlands, where

“perspectives from students working across disciplines of art and design could be established” (Sandberg Instituut, 2020). Projects initiated and produced by the *Decolonial Futures* programme intend to raise questions of decolonisation in the context of art and education. Sibiya sees his involvement in this programme as a continuance of his response to the *Goede Hoop* exhibition and considers this work done through Funda Community College—the exchange of knowledge between South Africa and the Netherlands as an epistemological intervention into countering the knowledge produced and transmitted by projects such as *Goede Hoop*.

Reconstructing the House of Horrors: Distorted Pasts, Decolonial Futures

The agitation and urgency brought about by haunting is a call to action that “something else, something different than before, must be done” (Gordon, 2017: xvi). Haunting serves to remind us that the colonial afterlife is active and present and that it is a global phenomenon, operating not only in former colonies, settler colonial nations, and the ‘global south’ but also in former European metropolises. While the colonial world is often thought to consist of the former colonies, it is vital to understand it as comprising both the former colony and the metropole. The notion that European culture was supposed to radiate outward towards the colonial world “in the form of language, religion, morals, education and scientific and medical know-how” (Sèbe and Stanard, 2020: 6) without being impacted by the imperialist endeavour and its associated violence or by the cultures, languages, societies and practices it came into contact with, is an unreasonable position to take. Moreover, as Vergès contends in her intervention *The Slave at the Louvre*, the residues of colonialism can be felt and observed in most locations across the European continent. Its spectre is ever-present, despite the fact that it is often intentionally disregarded or dismissed. As Berny Sèbe and Matther Stanard (2020:

1) argue, “hundreds of streets continue to bear names of colonial figures, and innumerable ‘imperial sites of memory’ are still to be found across the [European] continent”. However, despite the prevalence and visibility of material colonial remains, many countries remain in denial of how colonialism continues to shape and alter contemporary European societies.

The ‘house of horror’ is typically understood as an immersive experience designed to elicit distress, shock, and anxiety in its visitors. These settings are characterised by a series of terrifying experiences that unfold throughout the visitor’s encounter and are frequently centred on themes of violence. The notion of the European and Western museum project as a haunted location or a ‘house of horrors’ can be examined through a series of lenses. Firstly, European museums are intended as the repositories of history and often exhibit things with a dark past. These things can carry the burden of trauma, translocation and loss, and prompt painful emotions and experiences from visitors who register the loss and dislocation associated with the objects or collections. In addition, museums could be said to be haunted by the ghosts of their past — many museum collections were originally acquired by acts of theft, looting, and exploitation. Secondly, the museum is haunted by the spectre of the ‘museum idea’, the museum’s ideological project, a powerful, resonating force that refuses to be put to rest. The ‘museum idea’ exists to manipulate and control narratives, presenting visitors with partial and biased accounts of historical events that serve the interests of dominant groups or ideologies. Thirdly, in addition to accumulating things, the museum houses the accumulation of epistemological debris, the knowledge systems, theories and beliefs that underpin its operations and practices. The museum’s epistemological debris can include historical biases, colonial thought systems about self and Other, and cultural assumptions that influence the museum’s approaches to curating and exhibiting. As such, the museum project is understood as a site of contested histories, where the ‘museum

idea' is the spectral force that perpetuates untruths and distortions and thus inflicts 'an ongoing horror' in the collective consciousness.

Being a place that 'animates both despair and new possibilities' (Stoler, 2013), the museum is a paradoxical site. The museum project is an ongoing imperial endeavour that, while it appears to be losing traction in some instances and contexts, it continues to present itself as *the* measure of cultural legitimacy. Because the afterlives of colonialism need to be confronted to enact change, haunting as both a socio-political and psychological state provides an opportunity to wrestle with the "ongoing horror" to imagine other ways of being in the world. Thus, in European museums, any attempt at 'decolonial' work must entail acknowledging what colonisation meant for the museum institution itself.

Chapter 6: Affective Epistemologies

To have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning *effectuated*, moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans (Latour, 2005: 205).

Pasts and memory are often described in affective ways. We speak of painful pasts or heritage that hurts. Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering contend that “responses to painful pasts, even if they have been worked through and packaged in narrative form, are not limited to those who lived through them. These events reverberate through longer swathes of time” (2012: 179). Bruno Latour (2005) discusses the concept of agency and how it extends beyond human actors to non-human entities, contending that bodies, whether human or nonhuman, are constantly affected and moved by other entities in the world. My response to the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, which promised to show “400 years of emotive history in 300 items” (Rijksmuseum, 2017), is mediated through my own contextual experiences of personal and collective memory and past and present embodied experiences of institutionalised racism and oppression. Further, this response to *Goede Hoop* situates a palimpsest of history which can be referred to as the notion of ‘looking from here’. *Where* one looks from is as important as questions about *who* is doing the looking. As I walked through *Goede Hoop* from room to room, looking at what appeared to be the White-washed story of *my* history at first glance, I felt a range of sensations travel through my body: emotions of rage, grief, mourning, and loss—of being ‘in the wake’, to borrow from Sharpe (2016).

In the field notes from my first visit to the exhibition, I wrote the following in my research notebook:

First impressions: I feel deeply uncomfortable, bordering on humiliation, as though I am being forced to move through this over-aestheticised exhibition space, where it feels as though the White-washing and erasure of a very traumatic and sensitive history has been intentionally “designed”. I realise this exhibition is probably not for me, but what is displayed here is a harmful repetition of tropes about colonised worlds that are rooted in imperial fantasy. The most problematic aspect of this is that I am looking at White Europeans looking at a partial and obscured account of my own history, and I feel muted and silenced, even invisible. Who is doing the looking/ the politics of looking is something not considered by the curators of this exhibition.

(Greer Valley, field research notebook, 2017: 3).

The main driver for the feelings expressed in the excerpt above was the realisation that the Rijksmuseum had laboured at length to show the ‘good parts’ of slavery and Dutch colonialism, while in South Africa, we are dealing with the material continuations of colonial subjugation in everyday life. It was as though my body had registered “in a kind of hauntedness, a sense of being weighed down, a palpable reaction” (Bondi, Davidson and Smith, 2007: 17). Sibiya’s experience of seeing Nelson Mandela’s portrait on the hoarding outside the Rijksmuseum appears to have conjured a similar kind of hauntedness.

The emotions Sibiya and I experienced speak to the relationship between affect, collective history, and the museum. My contention is that our emotional responses to *Goede Hoop* point to the existence of an affective archive of generational trauma, in which our ancestors' bodies were dishonoured in ways that rendered them objects of curiosity or invisible. When confronted with traces of colonial representational violence in the present, we are reminded of this archive of trauma, and the response to it manifests in a number of different ways. In mapping the histories of the visual culture of race discourse, many scholars (Fanon, 1967; hooks, 1992; Hall, 1996; Pinder, 2013) have argued for the significance of visual culture and

the visual arts in the production, perpetuation and critique in race discourse. Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton and Steve Watson's (2016) edited book, *Heritage, Affect and Emotion: Politics, Practices and Infrastructures* grapples with such questions, positing affect as an articulation of a cluster of emotional responses not always identifiable but embodied in the ways in which exhibitions are physically experienced. In other words, how do emotive responses shape representational practices? (also see Tolia-Kelly 2016).

Earlier in this dissertation, I mentioned the open letter sent to the board of the Rijksmuseum from a collective of activists, scholars and artists in response to the *Goede Hoop* exhibition. I first encountered the letter on Boelsma's Facebook page. It begins:

To the chair and Members of the Board of the Rijksmuseum,
With this letter, we're putting forward our concerns and discontents with regards to the exhibition "Goede Hoop, South Africa and the Netherlands from 1600", which is currently on view at the Rijksmuseum. The decision to tell a colonial history from a White perspective reproduces a harmful form of selective amnesia. Many of the failures of the exhibition, listed below, could have probably been avoided if the Rijksmuseum had truly valued the ideas of people for whom such a perspective is not acceptable because they have been—and still are—dealing with the consequences of colonialism (2017: para 1).

The letter was signed by a collective of over 50 activists and cultural workers, including prominent South African artists and curators Khwezi Gule, Donna Kukama and Gabi Ngcobo, among other influential voices in the arts and cultural space of the country. I interviewed Boelsma about this open letter, as I was interested in tracing the affective responses to *Goede Hoop* on social media. I found it intriguing that this group had organised to formulate an international collective response to

the Rijksmuseum, which appeared to be impactful and affective. I had been searching for visitor responses to the exhibition online as, regrettably, my requests to Holtrop for access to the museum's guestbook for *Goede Hoop* were refused. The open letter can be regarded as a public display of affect that could be read as a political statement of solidarity (Papacharissi, 2015: 7).

The letter is a public acknowledgement that the curatorial choices in the exhibition are harmful, particularly in the ways that it omits voices of people in South Africa' its choice of language:

- 'interbreeding' instead of sexual violence or sexual exploitation
- 'slave' instead of enslaved;
- and the appropriation of the aesthetics of protest—such as the hand-written slogans on the museum walls.

Regarding the last point, the collective argued that "this form of appropriation reduces real gestures of protest to objects for aesthetic contemplation and falsely claims the inclusion of these voices, without actually doing so" (Boelsma, 2017: para 11). *Goede Hoop* also appropriates what the collective has called "gestures of protest" because it acknowledges sites of protest and dissent as an affective space that can easily be inserted into an exhibition—without having to engage in the radical politics, discomfort and risk of actual protest action.

In this regard, Zizi Papacharissi argues that "the storytelling infrastructure of platforms like Facebook or Twitter invites observers to tune into events they are physically removed from by imagining what these may feel like for people directly experiencing them" (2015: 4). The collective open letter allowed connections to the exhibition that would otherwise not exist, it permitted a "meaning-making" situation

that would have otherwise gone unknown by evoking affective responses — Papacharissi calls this “affective atonement” (2015). Thus, the collective engineered a prompt for the interpretation of the exhibition by giving people an opportunity to feel like those directly experiencing the exhibition, although they may not be able to think like them (Papacharissi, 2015: 4). Peter Weibel (2012) argues that digital media changes the notion of distance, and it also transforms the senses and the condition of being human.

In their article, ‘Good Hope, A Hopeless Exhibition in Rijksmuseum Amsterdam’⁵¹ published in the popular online arts journal, *Africanah*, Phumzile Twala and Thato Rossouw call *Goede Hoop* an “act of European arrogance” that “feels like a nostalgic retelling of a past of conquest—sans the violence foisted on and the dehumanisation of a lot of people that came with it” (2017: para 4). The article unpacks their experience of the exhibition, highlighting how it made them feel, which could also be read as a “public display of affect” (Papacharissi, 2015). Twala and Rossouw’s reading of the exhibition recognises that the series of curatorial choices, omissions and erasures enacted in *Goede Hoop* resulted in what I call the “curatorial atmospherics” of the exhibition, a term on which I will expand shortly, but in short, means that curating is a practice that produces a series of affects. Further, our judgement of an experience is determined by how it affects us, and thus the following chapter thinks with and through the concept of affect in relation to how exhibitions are experienced, which offers the potential for the emergence of new interdisciplinary and reparative models of curatorial practice, that respond to the globally widespread and traumatic experiences of anti-Blackness — and all this encompasses — that circulate through the wake of colonialism.

⁵¹ See <https://africanah.org/good-hope-a-hopeless-exhibition-in-rijksmuseum-amsterdam/> [2022, November 15].

Finding the Feeling — the Concept of Affect

What is often referred to as the 'turn to affect' or 'the affective turn' does not have a set or general definition, but rather presents multiple points of entry into an immanent and expanding conversation located in the space of becoming and in-between-ness. For Lisa Blackman, the "emphasis on immateriality over ideological and discursive processes is a call by some for an emancipatory politics of change" (2012: IX), where "work on the body and embodiment has been recognised as increasingly important for the study of areas and practices which now recognise that sense-making cannot be confined to meaning, cognition or signification" (2012: X). According to Margaret Wetherell (2015), research on affect raises pertinent questions concerning the classification of emotional states, the construction of affective meaning, and the mechanisms underlying affect transmission. There are several theoretical formulations of emotion and affect. The approaches I have found most useful that apply to the sites of exhibitions and museums are the notions of "affective practice" (Wetherell, 2015), "exhibitionary affect" (Fisher, 2007), and "emotional geographies" (Thrift 2000, 2004, 2008).

Melissa Gregg and Gregory Siegworth argue that "it is tempting to imagine that there can only ever be multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect: theories as diverse and singularly delineated as their own highly articulated encounters with bodies, affects, worlds" (2010: 4). Ahmed attributes this to "the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near" (2010: 43). In psychobiological terms, the embodied production of sensation is understood as a:

Registration of the state of psychobiological core affect in terms of valence (positive or negative) and intensity (strong or weak). The process of reading or registering core affect simultaneously weaves together with meaning-making to produce

dynamic flows of feelings, experiences, and action that are culturally recognisable and communicable to oneself and others as types of affect and emotion" (Smith, Wetherell and Campbell, 2018: 3).

The recognition of affect and emotion as imperative to the study of complex questions relating to the conditions of the human experience is gaining traction, for example, Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake (2000), Katherine McKittrick (2000) who argue that attending to feelings is important if we are going to understand the insidious power and tenacity of racism. Liz Bondi, Joyce Davidson and Mick Smith (2007: 5) contend that this is because "bodies are intensely emotionalised areas and thus an important focus for, and locus of, work on how, why and what we feel", further, that:

The first step in thinking about the force of things is the open question of what counts as an event, movement, an impact, a reason to react"...There's a politics to being/feeling connected (or not), to impacts that are shared (or not), to energies spent worrying or scheming (or not) to affective contagion, and to all the forms of attunement and attachment" (Bondi, Davidson and Smith, 2007: 16).

Affect can be thought of as a phenomena that is inclined towards action, comparable to the concept of haunting, in that it impels us to act. This is important when considering the forces at work when we encounter and experience an exhibition. For Gregg and Siegworth, it is the forces that exist beyond conscious knowing, beyond emotion that move and suspend us "across a barely registering accretion of force relations, or that can leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability" (2010: 2).

The terms 'emotions' and 'affects' are two distinct terminologies used in the existing literature on affect that discusses issues of feeling. This distinction states that affect

is a dimension of physical experiences and interactions, a dimension that continues to be largely non-semantic and non-representational. This distinction now serves to structure a large portion of the work in affect studies. Emotions, on the other hand, are seen to be a “translated, signified, and subjected form of the elusive, pre-discursive affective matter”. Emotions are frequently considered to be the “consciously experienced and privately appropriated forms of matters of feeling” (Sharma and Tygstrup, 2015: 7). While affect is generally considered an umbrella term under which feelings, emotions and affect belong, Eric Shouse (2005, as cited in Lauwrens 2020: 6) has reflected on three distinct descriptions for them. Firstly, feelings are “personal and biographical” states of being with meanings, identifications, and labels attached to prior encounters, and secondly, emotions are when feelings are performed “within a cultural and social context”. Lastly, affect “occurs outside consciousness and before interpretation” without being contrived by society and culture. Regarding this distinction between affect and emotion, Mike Crang and Tolia-Kelly (2010: 2309) write:

What emerges in the difference between ‘emotional’ and ‘affective’ is the sense that the affective represents the ways in which flows of emotion coalesce to form a social phenomenon that is beyond the individual subjective responses, feelings, and sensibilities. Affect also moves us onto a terrain where race as felt identity is immanent to interactions, and in that sense, it materialises the felt world.

Laurajane Smith, Margaret Wetherell and Gary Campbell argue that “feeling refers to qualia and the subjective phenomenological experience, while emotion refers to the processing and packaging of affect in familiar cultural categories such as anger, grief, disappointment” (2018: 1). They caution against the hierarchical or chronological positioning of affect and emotion however, (affect first and emotions second, for example) “when the initial registering and generative processes of affect/emotion are always already embodied and semiotic” (2018: 1). For the

authors, attentiveness to both emotion and affect brings complexity to the way we understand the relations between humans and “the past, things, beliefs, spaces, traditions and institutions” (2018: 2). And certainly, as Ahmed reminds us, emotion has been long associated with the feminine, the primitive and the natural, and as a result often translated into “less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgment” and emotion as “beneath the faculties of thought and reason” (Ahmed, 2004: 3). There is widespread assumption that “to be emotional is to have one’s judgment affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous” (Ahmed, 2004: 3).

Affect studies are critiqued for the assumption that affect is non-intentional; for instance, Ruth Leys who argues that the separation between affect as an autonomic bodily reaction, resonance and meaning; and belief or cognition, produces a “materialist theory of the body and emotions and ignores the crucial questions of how to theorise the body and embodiment in ways that do not set up a false dichotomy between mind and matter” (2011: 457). If emotions affect how we experience, understand, and come to terms with pasts, presents, and futures, we can think of the affective as the result of the accumulation of experiences and interactions between the material and immaterial, that is not fixed, but becoming and unfolding.

Affect is embodied and concerns the registering of events in both bodies and minds. This challenges any attempt at formulating neat and static definitions of what affect or the affective might be. While we can agree that emotions punctuate all strata of human experience, I argue that they are particularly present at sites of cultural heritage and social engagement, given the ability of these sites to produce and transmit affect. Realising the ability of an exhibition to transmit affect, Alexander Dörner, an art historian and museum director, reorganised the collection

at the Landesmuseum in Hannover, Germany, in the 1920s. He did this by constructing what he called atmosphere rooms, which transformed museum visits into emotional experiences. The atmosphere rooms were designed through the careful use of coloured walls, bespoke furniture, impactful lighting design, and a keen awareness of the role of empathic immersion on the part of the visitor. The Landemuseum's final room in a series of other spaces was designed by the artist El Litsitzky, and this room was an avant-garde gallery space where the collection of abstract art was displayed (Vella, 2018).

It can be assumed that Dorner was acutely aware of the function of the museum as a space that could transmit feeling and emotion over and above the role that museums performed at the time—as a didactic or representational space. Equally, objects and museum accounts can have both delicate and powerful affective resonances. While these resonances can elicit feelings of intimacy and connection, they can also reveal the potential for violence, such as the imposition of hegemonic narratives or the erasure of marginalised voices. Thus, museums can both facilitate and hinder opportunities for empathy and understanding through their affective grammar.

In the English language, viewers might describe their feelings as having been 'touched' or 'moved' by what they have witnessed, observed or engaged in. The notion of being touched or moved—touch related to the sensory and feeling — meaning that they have been emotionally impacted in some way, may show up in a host of ways in the body. It could alter bodily direction or composure slightly or result in dramatic gestures: perhaps a pursing of the lips, drop of the jaw, hands thrown upwards or positioned on top of the head. The idea of being moved entails the moving of our psycho-social boundaries. Such instances (of being touched or moved) demonstrate how what seems to be outside of the self has a dramatic

impact on our emotional interior, going beyond the physical bodily border to 'get' to us. Thus, emotions construct, uphold, and occasionally blur the boundary between the internal and external parts of the body. Touch can also encompass reflection, which, according to Stewart (2005), is caught in a web of affects and other cultural frames and occurrences to which we might become attuned (through experiencing joy, pain, longing, despair, among other emotions).

Eric Shouse (2004) states that the important aspects of affect rest upon the fact that, in many cases, the message consciously received may be of less importance to the receiver of that message than his or her non-conscious affective resonances at the source of that message. Shouse further elaborates that the source of the power of many forms of media lies not so much in their ideological effects but in their ability to create affective resonances independent of content or meaning (2004: 2-3). The state employs a variety of national modes of representation that aim to elicit, produce and shape emotion. Insignias of national pride, for example, may discourage critical inquiry in popular discourse because they are designed to foster feelings of belonging. Accordingly, questions surface around how the concept of affect works in an exhibition produced by the museum, an institution involved in the engineering of affective responses.

In applying a sense of action/dynamism to affect (the notion of humanness related to the ability to be affected and to produce affect), Ahmed (2004), influenced by the social constructionist arguments characteristic of emotion research in the 80s and 90s, observes that rather than asking "what are emotions?", we should be asking "what do emotions do?" Smith, Wetherell and Campbell take this further: "it is vital that the theorising of emotion be pragmatic, and at its core, it must ask what it is that emotions do, and are used for, and we believe that this needs to start from a focus on performance and practice" (2018: 2). Ahmed (2014) argues that it is the

social contact with objects (understood to mean other people's actions, texts, material objects, exhibitions, among other examples) that makes meaning.

The Curatorial as Affective Practice

I present exhibition-making and curatorial practice through the lens of what Wetherell (2012) considers as an "affective practice". According to Wetherell, "affective practice" focuses on the emotional as it emerges in social life that "draws attention to a type of affect and emotion that is regular, if not necessarily always routine, relatively predictably ordered and patterned (but with a could-be-otherwise quality), socially consequential, and bound up with ongoing social relations" (Smith, Wetherell and Campbell, 2018: 3). Affective activity is a kind of social practice: "In social psychological terms, affect is distributed. It is an in-between, relational problem. Subjects cannot be disentangled from objects or individuals from their situations" (Wetherell, 2012: 158). Wetherell essentially argues that every social practice results in some kind of affect. In that affective practice is a human activity primarily concerned with emotion as its specific focus, affective practice differs from general social practice. A practice approach to affect, positions it as a dynamic phenomena, "emergent from a polyphony of intersections and feedbacks, working across bodily states, registrations and categorisations, entangled with meaning-making and integrated with material and natural processes, social situations and social relationships" (Wetherell, 2012: 139).

Affective activity consists of a dynamic and malleable patterning system. These patterns are not predefined but emerge from the intricate interaction and interdependence of the large' field's social, cultural, biological, and material components. Affective activity is a continuous process of shaping and reshaping bodily sensations, perceptions, and behaviours that are constantly responding to changing environmental conditions. As a result, practice theories propose that

affective action is characterised by an innate flexibility and openness that permits ongoing evolution and transformation. The order inside these patterns is not stable but rather emergent, reflecting the ever-changing interactions and entanglements between the system's constituent pieces. A deeper understanding of the complexities of affective activity can shed light on how individuals and groups traverse and respond to their social and physical contexts.

The preceding discussion of affective activity and its complex interplay with social and cultural practices provide a useful framework for examining the neglected role of affect in heritage practices. The regulation of political uses of heritage and focus on education as the core practice of museums by international bodies such as AHD, UNESCO, and ICOMOS in the 1980s and 90s, resulted in a de-emphasis of affective qualities in heritage. Affect theorists challenge and are critical of the presumptions of professional neutrality in exhibition narration and emphasise the emotional situatedness of curatorial practice. The concept of affective practice, as proposed by Wetherell, thus offers a connection to the realm of heritage and curatorial practice as a form of social and cultural practice (Smith, Wetherell and Campbell, 2018: 9). In this sense, heritage practice is recognised as a verb (Harvey, 2007: 327), an ongoing process that is enacted by nations, collectives, and individuals in the present, in conversation with the past.

The connections between emotion and curatorial practice may be obvious, particularly in exhibitions within museum institutions. They connect to various processes involving individual actors, a sense of place and nationhood, and the stage for multitudes of potential conflicts and frictions. If producing an exhibition is a world-making exercise (Khan et al., 2020), curatorial practitioners will attempt to engineer a specific experience of a particular world that may have a significant impact which shifts perception and calls for action in the real world. In *Exhibitionary*

Affect, curator and scholar Jennifer Fisher writes about the difficulty in finding studies that talk about the impact of what she refers to as the *ambience* of the exhibition (2006: 27). Fisher argues that “the role of atmosphere in the staging of an exhibition, its choreographies, and mise en scene are seldom celebrated” (2006: 217). By highlighting the ambience of an exhibition, Fisher is arguing for the consideration of the feelings that are generated by being immersed in the exhibition space and its “mood states” (2006: 27). She contends that in applying an approach to curating that is informed by the ambience or atmosphere of the exhibition, this would expand the rhetoric of the exhibition beyond the merits of the exhibition space itself, the logic of the curatorial concept and the notoriety of the artists featured in the show. In this sense, exhibitions are thought to be energetically charged contexts that transmit affect in addition to the transmission of knowledge, meaning that they provoke feelings in the audience, move the audience, and alter their state of being.

This powerful duality in the potential of an exhibition to transmit knowledge and affect calls for curatorial responsibility, as an exhibition’s curation comes with unavoidable consequences. For example, one of the functions of curatorial practice and exhibition-making is its ability to shape the sentiments and processes that become prevalent in the art world. Many examples exist regarding affective responses to exhibitions that deal with the histories of colonialism and slavery, particularly over the last decade. For instance, the eerily unsettling and outlandish *Exhibit B* (2013), directed by the South African artist, Brett Bailey, showed in several countries in venues across Europe. *Exhibit B* was part of Bailey’s *The Exhibit Series* (2010-2013) that appeared in different countries under different titles—*Exhibit A* and *Exhibit B*, while production for *Exhibit C* was intended to go ahead in 2014. At best, *Exhibit B* can be described as a poor attempt at an artistic critique of the racist practice of the display of human beings that were considered inferior and

other to Europeans, a widespread colonial practice during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *The Guardian* newspaper notes (2014):

Perhaps the most chilling part of this exhibition was the section on the Dutch Golden Age, which combined Bailey's interest in still-life paintings with a court document detailing the horrific punishments meted out to escaped slaves: "Among the overflowing bowls of fruit," says Bailey, "we have a slave forced to wear a perforated metal mask covering his face and a pin going through his tongue. It is about the silencing of marginalised Black voices, the silencing of histories.



Figure 30: Exhibit B, showing the part of the exhibition dealing with the Dutch "Golden Age". BBC

In a video produced by the BBC ahead of the showing at the Edinburgh Festival in 2014, Bailey talks about the exhibition as invoking feelings of shame and guilt within White audience members. He does not address the feelings of shame, anger, hurt or trauma the show may have conjured in Black audience members. In his words: "I am interested in beauty and the objectification of people. Turning *them* into beautiful *objects* [my emphasis]. I am very interested in the seductive quality of beauty. Then also in what lies behind that beauty and the horror that is there" (BBC, 2014). The exhibition resulted in protests in all the cities it showed in and the cancelled scheduled showing at the Barbican Theatre in London. In Berlin, outraged activists called the production a "human zoo", which Bailey both affirms and denies

across his various contradictory media responses to critiques of the show. In London, a campaign was formed against the show, "Boycott the Human Zoo", by a coalition of anti-racist activists, artists and other communities. The campaign set up an online petition that drew on the signatories of over 22000 people calling on the Barbican to decommission the work.

The subsequent cancellation of the show at the Barbican provoked many public opinion pieces and written responses, including an analysis by the art historian, Valerie Greslé, published in 2014, where she writes:

It opens up a space for thinking about cultural institutions in London and their relationship to histories of slavery, colonialism, and contemporary forms of racism. It is as though the Barbican, similarly to cultural institutions in South Africa, find it difficult to imagine multiple audiences shaped by more than one subjectivity. The Barbican has responded to criticism with a document that finds itself unable to communicate in a considered and human manner with the critiques that are currently being wielded at *Exhibit B*. This is one of the most distinctive markers of privileged Whiteness: The absence of humility, of a self-reflexive, considered dialogue with subjects who have a direct, historical (and traumatic) relation to racist lineages, overt and insidious. And this from an institution located in a city that so deliberately stages the language of multicultural and cosmopolitanism.

Throughout the critiques, Bailey remained arrogant, defensive and unreflective. The *Exhibit Series* demonstrates how exhibitions have the ability to affect the way the viewer feels, that there may be a recognisable state of feeling different after witnessing an exhibition and thus, the importance of scholarship that seeks to understand and unpack the emotional components of artistic, political, and commercial representations in relation to their diverse social, spatial and temporal settings.

In 2008, the exhibition *Read the Masks: Tradition is not Given*, held at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, received a “deluge of rude, often hateful and even violent responses” (van der Pijl and Gourlordava, 2014: 267). The Van Abb museum’s exhibition was a component of a broader artistic endeavour titled *Be(com)ing Dutch*. The project is described as follows:

As questions of cultural identity and normative national values become ever more of an issue in political and cultural debate, *Be[com]ing Dutch* asks whether art can offer alternative examples of thinking about how we can live together today. *Be[com]ing Dutch* seeks to put our ideas of cultural identity under pressure and examine the process of inclusion and exclusion in the world today⁵².

Annette Krauss and Petra Bauer, the two international artists who produced and curated the exhibition, received death threats, prompting the project’s cancellation. In addition to the exhibition, the show’s second act was to take the form of a mock protest to be staged and filmed. The final act of the intervention was conceptualised as a film that would include the artists’ preparatory sketches, the public’s reaction, and the artists’ subsequent research into the Saint Nicholas myth that forms the basis for the annual Zwarte Piet event. None of the subsequent acts in their three-part artistic endeavour ever materialised as a result of the violent public response.

It follows that the exhibition form — in addition to having a physical topography that is designed and constructed — also comprises an emotional topography consisting of the emotional entanglements between objects on display and the visitor’s embodied knowledge, perspectives and memories. The notion of “emotional geographies” may be helpful in this regard since it aims to comprehend

⁵² <https://becomingdutch.com/introduction/> [2023, March 3].

emotion experientially and conceptually in terms of its socio-spatial mediation and articulation rather than as solely interiorised subjective mental experiences (Bondi, Davidson and Smith, 2006: 3). Bondi et al. (2006) explore three core themes in their volume, *Emotional Geographies*, namely: “the location of emotion in both bodies and places; the emotional relationality of people and environments; and the representation of emotional geographies” and argue for a “non-objectifying view of emotions as relational flows, fluxes or currents, in between people and places rather than things or objects to be studied or measured” (2006: 3). Ongoing and unfolding colonial histories are sites of trauma, shame, loss, friction and healing and thus, they could be thought of as ‘emotional geographies’ (Anderson, 2009; Massumi, 2002; Brennan; Reckwitz, 2002).

Affective Atmospheres and Curatorial Atmosphericities

Atmospheres can be said to encompass “a certain quality which words cannot translate but which communicates itself in arousing feeling” (Dufrenne, 1973: 178). Furthermore, an atmosphere both surrounds and envelopes something particular while also existing on the “edge of semantic availability” (Anderson, 2014: 139). ‘Affective atmospheres’, as argued by Anderson, “exist between presence and absence, between subject and object, between subject and subject, and between definite and indefinite” (Anderson, 2014: 137). Given the inherent ambiguity of affective atmospheres, Anderson (2014) suggests it may be a useful concept in thinking through how an object’s affective quality or tone, can condition one’s life by imparting specific locations, events, and interactions with a particular feeling.

We can say that the exhibition produces an atmosphere that transcends the physical exhibition and the various elements it comprises—individual objects, texts,

discourses and meaning it creates. Moreover, the site of the exhibition can both possess an atmosphere and be possessed by atmosphere, as Anderson points out:

While atmospheres are ambiguous and their reality and existence is often in question, subjects and objects are within atmospheres and we encounter particular things, other people or sites through them...It is through the atmosphere that a thing, person, or site will be apprehended and will take specific presence”
(Anderson, 2014: 144).

Like the spectre or ghost, atmosphere could be thought of as a paradox, both always unseen and present. Atmosphere could also be thought to both emanate from an object and be completed by the subjects that perceive them, thus belonging to both subject and object, and as such, always in the “process of emerging and transforming” (Anderson, 2014: 79). Theorising the spatial experience of exhibitions and its affective resonances necessitates a confrontation with the bias toward linear communication in rhetorical models and visualist approaches, which tend to see exhibitions primarily in terms of how meaning and values are created. Exhibitions have the potential to problematise and facilitate the representation of emotion in the sense that a visit to an exhibition will compel a response in individuals by changing their route for a moment in time or altering their immediate trajectory in some other way.

Fisher (2006) argues that curators are essential players in the art world who shape an exhibition’s impact, its feeling, and the moods that are defined inside it, and some do this more consciously than others. Further, Fisher (2006) suggests that affect is transmitted through the environmental stimuli of the exhibition and that these incorporate the many representational and non-representational codes perceived by the viewer. Gernot Böhme (2018) refers to this as ‘tuned spaces’.

Representational codes could include the texts, catalogues, exhibition scripts,

objects and material culture on display. Non-representational codes on the other hand, could be the curatorial choices of colour, textures, patterns of movement, tone of the 'museological voice' or the narratives that have been included or occluded. The curators of *Goede Hoop* display an 'affective aesthetics' repetitively in the exhibition. An obvious example of one of the representational codes present in the exhibition is the stylised wall text, referencing graffiti lettering or protest poster art as addressed in earlier chapters.

Questions may arise about how affects are produced and transmitted by exhibitions and experienced by audiences. Here, I suggest the concept of 'curatorial atmospherics' to think through how the environment produced by the curatorial choices and strategies employed in an exhibition, structure, alter and affect viewers' states of being. This concept refers to those felt aspects of an exhibition that come before cognition, interpretation, or analysis. For example, an exhibition's atmosphere may be perceived to be violent and hostile or engaging and welcoming and these perceptions or feelings about the exhibition space are linked to other systemic conditions that exist outside of the exhibition context (anti-Blackness, gender disparity, class hierarchies among others). Importantly, and as has been cautioned by Ahmed (2004), the atmosphere has the risk of being hypostasised, and she also reminds us that the atmosphere of a site is never received by a neutral body. She writes: so we may walk into the room and "feel the atmosphere", but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we may say that the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point". Following Ahmed's argument and revisiting earlier questions around who is doing the looking at museums or exhibition sites, we can add that what is being sensed, and by whom is a consideration of equal significance.

I suggest that the 'curatorial atmospherics' of an exhibition can be described as the cumulative series of affects that are transmitted deliberately or unconsciously and received through a wide range of social, sensory and emotive registers. The transmission of affect is felt, experienced and articulated through a range of responses by the viewers who are immersed in its space. The feeling of space touching the immersed body and feeling different as a result is where the transmission of affect can be located (Fisher, 2006). Although it originates in the social realm, the transmission of affect has biological and physical effects on the individual, affecting both their visual and non-visual senses (Fisher, 2006).

In a conversation with Holtrop in 2019, she expressed that after the *Goede Hoop* exhibition's de-installation, the Rijksmuseum highlighted affect and visitors' emotional reactions as a critical topic of concern for the museum (Holtrop, 2019). The concern over the affectability of the exhibition was recognizable when it was the security staff at the museum operate as the only humans and representatives of the museum that visitors have contact with when viewing content that might be perceived as painful, confrontational or challenging. The guards, museum guides, and sales-people become the institution's visible representatives and act as mediators between the institution, the exhibition and museum visitors, and are often at the receiving end of the range of emotional responses that the exhibits arouse. This notion of visibility can also be seen as contradictory because, as the USA-based artist Fred Wilson addressed in the work *Guarded View* (1991), public-facing staff members of the museum institution are also often invisible to visitors and problematically perceived as objects in the spaces of the museum.

Following on from the museum's experiences with *Goede Hoop*, to address the issue of affect, the museum had proposed that all staff members attend "affect training" workshops before the upcoming opening of the *Slavernij* (Slavery)

exhibition in 2021. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Karwan Fatah-Black, notes that “in bringing up the Dutch colonial past the Netherlands, it seems the conversation turns very tense very quickly” (Siegal, 2021). The experiences of the individuals who are at the receiving end of this tension, and sometimes violence, often goes unacknowledged. I understand the intended workshops focused on affect training never occurred due to the museum’s shutdown during the global Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2021).

Inherited Pain and Emotional Labour

In general, the designed environment of museums is a formalist system of display rooted in the socio-cultural eras of the past; as such, these spaces embody the politics, the pain, the suffering, and the separateness characteristic of the time when the collections were formed.

– Fred Wilson, 1993⁵³

Wilson argues that museums often rely on formal and traditional ways of displaying their collections, and this design reflects the values, beliefs, and biases of the time when the collections were first put together. By stating that these spaces embody “the politics, the pain, the suffering, and the separateness characteristic of the time when the collections were formed”, Wilson highlights that museums can reinforce or perpetuate historical injustices, inequalities, and prejudices. He suggests that museums can play a role in shaping our understanding of history and culture, and that their design and curation should be more self-aware and reflective of contemporary and changing values and perspectives. Wilson’s work often focuses on issues of race, representation, and cultural history within the context of museums and their collections.

⁵³ Fred Wilson, statement for the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.

The rapidly shifting demographics of European countries have forced museums across the continent to confront and acknowledge their colonial histories, which can no longer be ignored. This is reinforced by Keightley and Pickering, who add that “while trauma is neither multiple nor communicable in a conventional discursive sense, painful pasts are not hermetically sealed off from the world of aftermaths, whether this is after the holocaust, after slavery or after systematic torture” (2012: 179). The confrontation with European colonialism is a continuous and ongoing project, as the brief mapping of ‘decolonial projects’ in Dutch institutions.

In a similar curatorial approach to *Goede Hoop*, the Birmingham Museum in England showed the exhibition *The Past is Now, Birmingham and the British Empire* in 2017. The museum appointed independent Black and Brown artists and activists as co-curators to develop an exhibition that would challenge the museum’s exhibition practices and speak to the changing demographics and diversity of the city of Birmingham. While the exhibition received international acclaim, the co-curators described the collaboration with the museum as ‘fraught’ and challenging. *The Past is Now* used a curatorial approach comparable to *Goede Hoop* in the manner in which it employed an authoritative voice and encouraged ‘passive’ language in the exhibition text that it felt it could defend. The museum refused to incorporate the anti-colonial disruptive strategies the co-curators suggested “in the fear that doing so could create further barriers, isolate new and existing audiences, and challenge the museum in ways that it was not resourced to handle” (Minott, 2019: 565) .

It should be noted that at the time, the staff at the museum were entirely made up of White, British museum workers, despite being located in the ‘diverse’ city of Birmingham. Again, parallels can be drawn to the Rijksmuseum and its location in one what is considered the most culturally diverse city in the Netherlands. While

these cities are located in different countries, geographically separated by the North Sea, and vastly different in terms of language and culture, similarities can be drawn in terms of their historical imperialist endeavours in the building of empire. Rachel Minott, the researcher on this exhibition, and one of the independent, external practitioners contracted to the project, argues that the point of decolonial work in the sector is to “fundamentally challenge White supremacy and the centralising of Eurocentric views on morality, civilisation and knowledge” (2019: 566). Thus, she argues, “curators who identified as White will face the most challenges to their practice and subjectivity, which has been historically perceived as neutral, while the perspective of BAME⁵⁴ museum workers, community partners and audiences has often been perceived as emotional or politically motivated” (Minott, 2019: 566), pointing to the problems of working in an environment built on assumed prejudices and an institution that upheld and manufactured those prejudices for decades.

The processes that led to *The Past is Now* exhibition illustrate that attempts at instituting a ‘decolonial’ curatorial practice is often conflated with diversity, equality and inclusion discourse and devoid of a critical analysis of power, race and history or any tangible or radically transformed outcome. To meaningfully engage and deal with colonial pasts is to break away from current neocolonial practices altogether. What does appear to be emerging from exhibitions on colonial pasts such as *The Past is Now* in the United Kingdom and *Goede Hoop* in the Netherlands, is a complex, evolving conversation on what decoloniality means in the former metropolitan colonial ‘centres’ and how justice could be prioritised in the present (Kassim, 2018). The curatorial processes of these exhibitions and the exhibitions themselves often do more to reveal uneven power relations embedded in the

⁵⁴ Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) is a term used in the United Kingdom to refer to citizens not of White British ancestry. The term itself is widely contested in the UK and not universally accepted, but frequently used in UK government discourse.

cultural sector, rather than address the epistemic injustices of curatorial practice or contribute to a rewriting of colonial history.

Narratives of Colonial Trauma

In May 2021, the exhibition *Slavernij*, described as a “blockbuster exhibition” (Rijksmuseum, 2021) by Dibbits, was officially opened at the Rijksmuseum by the King Willem-Alexander. The cinematic video trailer for *Slavernij* depicts a dark-skinned man on a rocky shore looking out towards inky blue, stormy seas and crashing waves. This opening scene is followed by a series of harrowing vignettes set against a theatrical score, undoubtedly composed to be provocative and affective. In a peculiar move, press accounts and marketing material for the exhibition refer to it as “an exhibition theme that the museum had never mounted before: slavery (Yang, 2022). Given that the *Goede Hoop* exhibition at the Rijksmuseum in 2017 addressed colonialism (and, by extension, slavery), this remark reveals another disjuncture on the part of the curators by failing to make it obvious how slavery and colonialism are related. Moreover, Pao-Yi Yang refers to the exhibition as “the museum’s first attempt to show the most unsettling aspect of the nation’s past” (2022: 1). However, the Rijksmuseum had in fact dealt with slavery in South Africa in the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, albeit crudely.

The reasons for the fashioning of this exhibition as the museum’s ‘first attempt’ to reckon with slavery may be manifold, and I can only speculate here that this could indicate an attempt to override or cover up the “mistakes” as Holtrop (2019) puts it, the curatorial team made in *Goede Hoop*. The forced closure of museums during the Covid-19 global pandemic from 2020 onwards meant that *Slavernij* was the first exhibition to open at the Rijksmuseum when it reopened to the public in late-2021. The Rijksmuseum likely saw the reopening as the chance to work from a clean slate. While the physical exhibition ended in November 2021, three-dimensional

installation views can still be seen on the Rijksmuseum website⁵⁵. Also accessible online are recordings of the symposium that coincided with the opening.

As Holtrop explained during a conversation in 2019, the museum intended for *Slavernij* to follow on from *Goede Hoop*, as part of a series of exhibitions that addressed the nation's colonial past. Holtrop also added that *Slavernij*'s curatorial process intended to take cognisance of the "lessons" (Holtrop, 2019) gained from *Goede Hoop*. However, the connection between the two exhibitions is not made clear from the virtual exhibition housed on the Rijksmuseum's website; in fact, there is no mention of *Goede Hoop* at all. While the curator's stated goal may have been to critically examine colonial pasts through a series of interventionist exhibitions, their fragmented approach to each show gives the impression that they are trying to downplay the global magnitude and effects of Dutch colonialism.

However, the *Slavernij* exhibition demonstrates the Rijksmuseum's moves to make a clear break from the deeply problematic and inherently racist approach they took to curating *Goede Hoop*. Interestingly, several of the critiques that were made by *Goede Hoop*'s many critics, some of whom are briefly mentioned in this thesis (Zeefuik, 2017a; Shepherd and Ernsten, 2017; Twala and Rosseau, 2017, Valley, 2017) are explicitly addressed in the *Slavernij* exhibition. Having had four years to reflect on and think about the critical responses that *Goede Hoop* elicited, the curatorial team have, at first glance, made several departures from the curatorial strategies deployed in *Goede Hoop*.

In analysing this exhibition, I have identified four critical approaches to *Slavernij* that break with curatorial conventions that we have seen in previous exhibitions presented by the Rijksmuseum, including *Goede Hoop*.

⁵⁵ <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/stories/exhibitions/slavery> [2022, November 16].

Firstly, to address the critique of the Rijksmuseum's all-White and Dutch History department, Valika Smeulders, a Black Dutch woman born in Curaçao (a former Dutch Colony), was the lead curator. According to Smeulders, *Slavernij's* "inverse" curatorial team consisted of herself and three additional curators, one of whom is also a Black Dutch woman: Stephanie Archangel. Eveline Saint Nicolaas and Holtrop were the two White Dutch curators on the team. Smeulders also recruited a 'think tank' of scholars to assist with the exhibition's curation and research processes. After the *Goede Hoop* exhibition closed in 2017, Smeulders was assigned to the role of curator in the History Department. Then, in 2020, following the resignation of Gosselink, Smeulders was promoted to the position of head of the department.

Secondly, the exhibition is structured around the narratives of ten people from different Dutch colonial territories whose family histories are 'entangled' in Dutch histories of slavery. These are Joao, Wally, Oepjen, Paulus, Surpati, Dirk, Van Bengalen, Sapali, Tula and Lohkay. While a selection of objects from the Rijksmuseum's collections are shown, the focus of the exhibition is not on the display of objects, but instead on personal stories. It also begins to sketch out the complex stories of monarchs who collaborated with imperialists to capture and enslave people from their communities. In an interview with *The Week in Art* podcast, produced by *The Art Newspaper*, Smeulders appears sceptical of the current histories of provenance of the objects in the Rijksmuseum collection, when she says:

What are you able to tell if you're only using those objects with a link to the elite, so what we did was two-fold. In the exhibition, we decided we were going to focus on personal stories of people who were enslaved, people who were the enslavers, and the voices that spoke out against the system. So to be able to speak about the enslaved, we knew from the start that we were going to have to bring in new objects and new material (2021).

Thus, *Slavernij* exemplifies a curatorial strategy that turns away from the storage models of memory (Trouillot, 1995; Sather-Wagstaff, 2015). Joy Sather-Wagstaff contends:

Memory, heritage and history are often conceptualised and even reified as *things* [their emphasis] encoded or contained in material culture forms, be they the built or natural environment, such as monuments, houses, mountains, ruins or other tangible artefacts such as artworks or clothing (2015: 195).

This statement echoes John R. Gillis's (1994) critique of a reification of memory and history and by extension, heritage and identity as objects. The authors believe that instead, we should investigate how social interaction with objects in space and time influences the active social mediation and performance of memory. These views are in dialogue with Pierre Nora's (1989) ideas that memory relies heavily on material traces as triggers, yet memory itself is not a thing. Similarly, for Trouillot (1995: 14), "memories are not discrete [and complete] sets of representations that are to be stored in a cabinet...generally accurate and accessible at will". As Trouillot argues, not all instances of remembering include conjuring up images of the past. Because implicit and explicit memory systems are intertwined in reality, this may be why explicit memories evolve.

Thirdly, and perhaps quite controversially for a conservative, nationalist institution such as the Rijksmuseum, is the turn towards a consideration of the emotions and 'feelings' of the people represented in the exhibition. Smeulders makes a number of references to the thoughts and feelings of the enslaved in the interview with *The Week in Art* podcast. It is also interesting to note that Smeulders discusses the museum's move away from the disproportionate reliance on formal or state archives as an acknowledgement that these records were generated from the perspective of

the Dutch imperialists. As an alternative, *Slavernij* relies heavily on voice: oral histories, storytelling and song. She argues:

How do you get into the emotions, how do you get into the thinking process, how do you get into the heads of the people who were enslaved?...If you go through the archives, you mostly get to the people who resisted slavery because those are the people who ended up in juridical processes, so they are described from the viewpoint of the coloniser...So to get into the emotions and what people are thinking, we needed to bring in oral history – and oral history has helped us talk about the feelings of people who were enslaved, who were unable to protect their children for example, so songs talk about that, songs talk about how people felt when their loved ones were sold off, songs talked about how people felt about the people who helped the enslaved. This helped us understand how people looked at the entire system (2021).

This emphasis on feelings indicates a departure from traditional heritage practices by recognising the archival value of emotive registers.

Fourthly, in a gesture that seems to address the critique of an “episodic” (Shepherd and Ernsten, 2017) or linear approach to exhibiting histories, a hallmark of the Rijksmuseum’s earlier displays and exhibitions, *Slavernij* begins with a contemporary art installation by the Beninese artist Romauld Hazoume, titled *La Bouche du Roi* (1997 – 2005). The sculpture represents a slaving vessel and is a commentary on the Atlantic slave trade, which facilitated the abduction and forced migration of millions of African men and women to the Americas as commodities. The installation positions plastic petrol cans as masks in the formation of the slave ship, Brookes (1781). In the contemporary, Beninese men use these petrol cans as storage cans for the illegal trade in gasoline.

Following the art installation, the exhibition narrows its focus to the ten stories revolving around ten individuals or groups of people (as in the case of the Van Bengalen story) selected by the curatorial team. How the curators selected these ten people is unclear from the curatorial text I have seen online. These individual stories address universal themes related to colonialism and slavery, namely: constraint, forced labour, technologies of control, rebellion, escape, suicide, the accumulation of wealth by the Dutch colonisers, racism and the construction of otherness as in opposition to Dutchness. Importantly, it begins to piece together a more nuanced history of life in the Netherlands during the colonial period by showing that Africans (adults and children) laboured as servants in the Netherlands in the eighteenth century. In the mid to late 1800s, slavery was believed to only exist in the former colonies as it was illegal to buy enslaved people in the Netherlands itself.

However, one could purchase enslaved people in one of the colonies and bring them to the Netherlands to work as a labourer or servant, and in principle, as free people under Dutch law. As the exhibition demonstrates in the story of Paulus, these men, women and children would still have been marked as other, often forced to wear engraved brass collars, a sign that they were the property of a master. It is unclear if the individuals that were forcibly brought to the Netherlands had any real sense of freedom or liberty since they were still seen as property and objects by White Dutch citizens. However, it proves that Africans and other people from the Dutch colonies have lived in the Netherlands for more than 200 years. Nevertheless, the exhibition does not labour at this last point, which was a missed chance to link this history to contemporary discussions around Autochthonous and Allochthonous subjectivities as circulated in Dutch discourses of citizenship.

The narrative related to the Cape Colony, in the story of the Van Bengalen group of people, depicts the story of people that were captured along the Bay of Bengal, imprisoned as slaves, robbed of their identities (names and surnames were substituted with a new first name and Van Bengalen as the surname), and transported to the Cape and to other Dutch colonies. The exhibition emphasises that the global footprint of this surname is testimony to the reach of the VOC and can act as an atlas of the impact of slavery and colonialism. The overall design of the exhibition space is a sparse, minimal arrangement of objects and wall text and employs a muted colour palette. The choice of aesthetic language in the space foregrounds the stories of the ten people. Here, the objects on display throughout the various rooms become the accompaniments and interlocutors to the narratives of the individuals.

In conclusion, this chapter has presented arguments to support the view that exhibitions can be considered as affective environments that comprise atmospheres which elicit a range of affects. While the Rijksmuseum acknowledges the importance of affect in their internal reflection on the *Goede Hoop* exhibition, and while this is partly taken into consideration in the curation of *Slavernij*, the museum does not go far enough in considering who is being affectuated by the archives of trauma they are working with. Sibiya and Twala's experience and response to *Goede Hoop* exemplifies how this archive of trauma is in operation through its curatorial atmospherics. Affect can provoke a range of emotional responses, including extreme ones such as the violent death threats received by the curators of the *Be[com]ing Dutch* exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum, and can also incite action, as demonstrated by the 'affective atonement' and 'public displays of solidarity' shown in the written responses to *Goede Hoop* by writers, activists, and scholars, as well as to Brett Bailey's Exhibit Series. Emotions have a significant impact on how we come to terms with the past, present, and future. As curating is a practice that produces a

series of affects, it is imperative to attend to emotions, feelings, and questions around what emotions do, especially in exhibitions that exhibit painful pasts or 'heritage that hurts'. To attend to affect is therefore to attend to the embodied responses to an exhibition and to consider these as being as significant as the visual responses in the production of knowledge and meaning, while also acknowledging the interconnectedness of all these aspects in the practice of exhibiting.

By staging exhibitions and programmes that are by definition fleeting and ephemeral, former colonial states are signalling that they are *doing something* to remedy the effects of the radical dispossession global imperialism enacted without addressing material losses. However, as the case of *Goede Hoop* demonstrates, these kinds of responses may contribute little beyond revealing the neocolonial nature of the ties between former colonies and colonial powers. Moreover, when not executed with consideration for publics and individuals who continue to suffer from imperialism's afterlives, they might serve as a catalyst for the re-traumatisation of the descendants of slavery and colonialism

Chapter 7: The Exhibition as Social Intervention

It is not possible to decolonise the museum without decolonising the world. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't engage with this important work, but we have to do so with the full awareness that decolonisation cannot be limited to discrete objects, museums, or archives, and cannot be substantial as long as the people from whom all this wealth was expropriated are not allowed to lead the process. It is not about hiring an individual curator from Congo or Nigeria, but about opening the imperial borders and letting people re-build their worlds in proximity to their objects.

— Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (2020)

Museums are one of multiple technologies and sites where imperial knowledge is continually reproduced and reinforced through displays, exhibitions, and curatorial practices. Decolonising museums, from the colonisers' point of view, necessitates facing violent pasts of conquest and haunted presents. Although the museum and its projects require urgent reframing and decolonisation, we must consider what it means to decolonise the museum, its programmes, and its exhibitions in a world that is yet to decolonise.

This consideration is particularly pertinent in contemporary European institutional contexts where decoloniality is appropriated and performed — what I have referred to as 'decolonial fronting'. The phenomenon of 'decolonial fronting' is problematic because while museums are institutions that are immersed in colonial practices, they can claim authorship of so-called decolonial work without undergoing radical restructuring themselves. This restructuring may involve, among other potentially reconstructive acts, a re-evaluation of their supposed position of authority in relation to their respective publics or their internal power dynamics. In addition to being inauthentic, 'decolonial fronting' has the potential to misdirect and undermine the efforts of anti-colonial activists, cultural practitioners, and social movements, with

repercussions for the global anti-colonial struggle and, most importantly, the fight for retributive and social justice, which encompasses restitution, repatriation, and reparations. On the other hand, might the exhibition serve as an interventionist instrument within the institution to demolish colonial systems? If this is a possibility, what is to be done and how? What ways of thinking, approaches and methods are necessary to enable ongoing meaningful decolonial work inside and beyond the museum's walls?

Decolonial scholars Mignolo and Maldonado-Torres, describe the epistemic afterlives of colonialism as among its most damaging, far-reaching and least understood. Epistemic violence is thought to operate within a broader structural matrix of colonial effects. In this regard, Pillay (2015) argues that epistemic violence plays a critical part in structuring other forms of violence. Pillay (2015) distinguishes between political violence, economic violence and epistemic violence and argues that epistemic violence is both the most difficult to confront and the most important of these forms of violence. He submits that this is because it concerns the dominant and systematic ways that society makes and disseminates forms of knowledge.

Many cases over the past decade demonstrate that to strengthen their relevance and future viability and to advance national goals of inclusivity and multiculturalism, European museums frequently position their exhibitions representing colonial histories as 'social interventions'. They may do this by including more diverse content in their programming, engaging with artists to produce installations and interventions based on colonial collections, or inviting participation from museum publics to share their perspectives and stories around a particular subject or event. While these steps can be generative, it does not confront the inherited colonial 'museum idea' that structures all interactions within the museum and its relationship to the outside. Susan Ashley points out that:

There has been great hand-wringing over the new, post-colonial role for the museum and how it functions as a place of representation, socialisation and commodification (Hallam and Street, 2000; Hein, 2000; Kary and Levine 1991). Much has been made of how to ensure participation and inclusion with the aim of creating unbiased cultural representations and developing new 'non-White' audiences. But at their core, museums retain two basic competencies left over from the colonial times—they collect and they exhibit (Ashley, 2005: 13).

If the museum is a repository for larger societal issues or a reflection of existing societal attitudes, what is the trend of decolonial exhibitions enabling or disabling? And how do they fit into the larger political agenda? In this chapter, I examine the practice of 'exhibiting', one of the museum institution's core competencies inherited from the imperial past, and also a practice that is being reworked and reconsidered in the present. This is achieved by considering the exhibition's potential as a social intervention through a framework of **'Refuse - Reject - Sacrifice and Repair'** to address the following questions: who is intervening?; what does intervention do? and what kinds of interventions are possible?

Refuse: Sorry Is Not Ever Enough

The notion of "refusal" is employed here to refer to the practices through which European states refuse to accept responsibility for "the rot that remains" (Stoler, 2008)—the refuse, waste, and debris of European imperialism. In parts of this study, I indicate the practice of refusal as Tina Campt presents it, "creating possibility in the face of negation" (2019: 15), to refer to the ongoing acts of resistance in the wake of global imperialism, as evidenced by the widespread contemporary existence of anti-colonial, anti-racist activism and solidarity led by indigenous and Black activists the world over. Despite some progress since the end of the 20th century, Europe has only recently

begun to confront its colonial past and the neo-colonial structures of dependency it maintains in many former colonies. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, the Dutch state has historically been slow to recognise colonialism as a crime against humanity. Consequently, the accurate portrayal of Dutch colonial history in national school curricula and public and material culture remains pedagogically insufficient.

Nevertheless, on December 20, 2022, one hundred and fifty years after the official abolition of slavery, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte apologised for the kidnapping and enslavement of people by the Dutch state for over two centuries. Outright public apologies for colonial violence are still rare in Europe. The Dutch case is one of two instances of a formal apology on the continent, the other is Denmark. France, the United Kingdom and the European Parliament have officially recognised slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity but have not issued formal apologies. Rutter stated in his speech that “for hundreds of years, people were made merchandise, exploited, and abused in the name of the Dutch” State”. He then apologised “for the actions of the Dutch State in the past: posthumously to all enslaved people worldwide who have suffered from those actions, to their daughters and sons, and to all their descendants into the here and now”⁵⁶.

The apology came after the Dutch government announced in September 2022 that it would make an apology for its role in the slave trade later that year or in early 2023⁵⁷. Melanie Judge and Dee Smythe argue that “an apology animates pain of injury, its story, and effect—and promise of acceptance, forgiveness, and reparation” (2022: 1). The question that arises is how will this apologetic gesture matter or benefit those who have suffered as a result of colonial violence? After the speech, Prime Minister Rutter

⁵⁶ see: <https://www.npr.org/2022/12/20/1144311201/the-dutch-leader-apologizes-for-the-netherlands-role-in-slave-trade> [2023, January 16].

⁵⁷ see: <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/explainer-dutch-apology-and-south-africas-place-in-the-slave-trade-20220914> [2023, January 16].

clarified to reporters that the government would not compensate “people, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren of enslaved people”. In the place of reparations, he proposed that the state would set up a two hundred million euro fund for projects to assist the Netherlands in dealing with the afterlives of slavery. A portion of this funding is earmarked for a new slavery museum—the National Trans-Atlantic Slavery Museum—an initiative of the Municipality of Amsterdam and the state, to be constructed in Amsterdam over the next few years.

Pauline Wakeham (2012: 3) argues that apologies such as the one delivered by Rutte can be akin to “strategies of containment, seeking to manage calls for social change by substituting rhetorical gestures of atonement for more radical processes of redistributive justice or political power-sharing”. In response to the Dutch government’s public ‘apologetic gestures’ and attempts at ‘decolonial fronting,’ activists and artists in the Netherlands are increasingly adopting a stance of resistance and refusal. On the day before the apology, activists protested in front of the Royal Palace in Amsterdam to publicly reject Rutter’s statement, contending that it was yet another Janus-faced attempt by the Dutch state to Whitewash history.

Esajas, a member of the Black Archives collective and the social movement Black Manifest, refused to attend the speech despite receiving an invitation because of a lack of consultation with the broader Black Dutch community. Esajas expresses concerns over the fact that reparation wasn’t even mentioned, arguing that the state has not communicated any concrete plans to address the ongoing injustices Black Dutch communities face, many of who are the descendants of enslaved people. An activist from Sint Maarten, another former Dutch colony, shared Esajas’s sentiments, telling a journalist from *The Guardian* newspaper: “We’ve been waiting for a few hundred years

for true reparatory justice; I believe that we can wait a little longer”⁵⁸. Armand Zunder, the chairman of the National Reparations Commission of Suriname, criticised Rutter’s speech for failing to demonstrate accountability for colonial violence and emphasised the need for reparations.

Anti-colonial activist groups in the Netherlands also questioned the announcement’s timing since many have urged the prime minister to wait until 1 July 2023, when descendants of Dutch enslavement will commemorate 150 years since their emancipation at an annual celebration known as *Keti Koti* (breaking the shackles). In particular, anti-colonial activists in the Netherlands critiqued the unacknowledged and unanswered questions surrounding the conditions of abolition, making the point that while a formal abolition date may have been announced, was it observed in reality? Furthermore, how long did unpaid labour practices continue after emancipation? This is a pertinent question. For example, in the case of South Africa, the British House of Commons and House of Lords enacted the Slavery Abolition Act in 1834. However, enslaved people living in the Cape Colony were among the last to be liberated since the Cape was among the last places under Commonwealth rule to adopt the legislation. Further, this legislation in itself did not change or alter exploitative labour practices, which continues to exist in the present.

The Dutch government seems to have overlooked, whether by intention or incidentally, that “an apology must be assessed against the severity of the suffering and the interpersonal and social contingencies that shape impact” (Judge and Smythe, 2022). Since an apology is a social act, its significance depends on whether or not it is connected to attempts to alleviate the circumstances that caused the injury. In response to the announcement in September 2022 that the Dutch government would

⁵⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/19/dutch-pm-apologises-for-netherlands-role-in-slave-trade> [2023, January 16].

be making an imminent apology for its role in the enslavement and global trade of people, University of the Western Cape professor, Rasool, was interviewed on the local South African radio show, 'The Morning Review with Lester Kiewit' on Cape Talk radio:

So this is what we are talking about here, how European societies are able to recover a sense of dignity and an ethical sense of how they live with themselves, when it is so patently obvious that their societies, their economies, and their social structures have benefited so enormously from slavery and colonial exploitation (Rasool, 2022).

Rasool's statement, though it refers to apologetic gestures, or Derridean "scenes of repentance" (Derrida, 2001: 28) by European states for their role in the historical trauma caused by colonialism, underscores one way to consider the ongoing trend of staging decolonial exhibitions and programming in European museums. This tendency correlates with a rise in public discourses over the necessity to quantify the loss and social suffering caused by European imperialism and demands for reparations. Symbolic gestures of acknowledgement and apology are essential, but they merely represent a small portion of the efforts necessary to overcome the magnitude of the catastrophe of coloniality. As Carranza et al. (2015: 4) argue, "at their best, apologies can help to mark a before and after period, acting as a symbolic turning point".

The apology is a social practice drawing people into "circuits of exchange, reproducing and transforming these" (Judge and Smythe, 2022) and can be a paradox. On the one hand, it can act as a powerful expression of the severity of the wrongs committed—justifying the call for retribution and reparations. Conversely, it can also be used "as a normalisation strategy to deny these claims" (Judge and Smythe, 2022). Additionally, the gesture of apology may work as a remedy to decrease guilt and hence alleviate liability and punishment. Notably, the apology from Prime Minister Rutte on behalf of the Dutch government followed three major exhibitions at the Rijksmuseum: *Goede*

Hoop (2017), *Slavernij* (2021), and *Revolusi! Indonesia Independent* (2022). In this regard, Jeremy Sarkin argues:

While Europeans may be attending to the past in their own countries, to the benefit of their people, by having conferences and exhibitions about their colonial history, they tend to do so without involving those directly affected in countries where colonialism occurred. Granted, some former colonial subjects are occasionally invited to attend or speak at such events, but the focus remains inward, on how a particular European country acted in the past and how it ought to reflect on that past (2009: 125).

Wakeham (2012: 3) further argues that “in the context of historical wrongs, apologetic practices of atonement can limit the responsibility of perpetrators by putting the focus on historically delimited, specific injuries rather than acknowledging systemic, ongoing practices, so pre-empting sustained investigation of grievances with statements of contrition”. An example of this is the Namibian—German instance where after years of lobbying from Herero and Nama pressure groups, Germany acknowledged in May 2021 that it had committed genocide in the Southern African country which it colonised between 1884 and 1915. Germany also promised 1,1 billion euros⁵⁹ in aid to be paid over a period of 30 years, with the caveat that the money would be given voluntarily and that the deal was in no way comparable to reparations. Statements like these are often attached to promises of funding, which appear to be arbitrarily derived. They also do not address essential questions of what has been lost?; how is the loss quantified?; and who are the stakeholders? Further, they point to predictable patterns of White supremacist virtue and philanthropic hubris as a way for Europe to avoid taking responsibility for the violence they have inflicted on colonised populations. Anthony Gifford (2007) contends that the unwillingness of the global north to come to terms

⁵⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/28/germany-agrees-to-pay-namibia-11bn-over-historical-herero-nama-genocide> [2023, February, 15].

with the historic injustices of imperialism is driven by both the depth of the prejudice held and the gravity of the issues to be faced:

The notions of White virtue are so ingrained that they cannot admit to barbarities which their ancestors committed. If they respond at all to the claims of Black people for justice, it is by way of 'development aid' or 'anti-discrimination laws', which imply that their generosity is bestowing gifts on the poor suffering Blacks. It is easier to help victims than to pay for past crimes (Gifford, 2007: 267).

While apologies may be contributing evidence in the wake of colonialism's violence, can they ever contest contemporary configurations of power? For Ahmed, bureaucratic apologies can be likened to "box-ticking exercises", in that they are useful for the institution to create the impression that it is handling grievances from certain publics, but in a way that it is not implicated in any wrongdoing (2021: 2), or at the very least where it is seen to be taking action to remedy inherited past wrongs. This last point can be observed in Rutter's statement, where he dissociates the Netherlands' past colonial crimes with the present: "it is true that nobody alive today bears any personal guilt for slavery...[however] the Dutch state bears responsibility for the immense suffering that has been done to those that were enslaved and their descendants"⁶⁰. Rutte's statement echoes that of the right-wing populist, Fortuyn, made over a decade ago in 2002:

The slave trade and slavery are practiced by the forerunner of modernity, so by our ancestors...We would not be able to do it again, now, and would not do it...there is no reason to feel guilty, especially because the daughter should not be blamed for the father's actions, and certainly no reason for financial compensation (Fortuyn, 2002: 158).

⁶⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/19/netherlands-apologises-for-dutch-governments-role-in-slavery> [2023, February 15].

While an apology for wrongdoing can exonerate the apologiser from responsibility (Ahmed, 2021), apologies can also be interpreted as an admission of wrongdoing, which is likely why few European and Western states have issued formal apologies for colonial crimes. Apologetic gestures allow the state an opportunity to portray its historical crimes on its own terms, and as such they “perform the semblance of rapprochement without unsettling [White] privilege, thereby bypassing more radical forms of structural transformation that would destabilise the power asymmetries underpinning White authority” (Wakeham, 2012: 3).

Does the ‘decolonial exhibition’ in the context of European museums claiming to show their colonial pasts, Europe’s ‘decolonial project’ also function as an admission of guilt or as an apology that at best could be interpreted symbolically? These exhibitions appear to be positioned as ‘gestures of atonement’ that are aimed at contributing to national and continental political agendas in response to a social climate where activists and governments in formerly colonised countries are engaged in legal and diplomatic discussions regarding the case for reparations. The phenomenon of the ‘decolonial exhibition’ is becoming increasingly mainstream and state-sanctioned and “may be a result of majorities or state agencies not simply allowing minorities to create their own heritage niches as part of a more multivocal public sphere”(Macdonald, 2008: 93). In addition, it points to the desire to exert control over the conversation surrounding colonial reparation.

Reject: The Subterfuge of Decolonial Museum Practice

Black grassroots organisations in the Netherland first placed the Dutch involvement in transatlantic slave-trade and its afterlives on the national agenda in the 1990s (Balkenhol, 2014). The work done by these activists resulted in the creation of a number of public memorials to the people the Dutch enslaved, and these sites are situated in major Dutch cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Middelburg. In June 2021, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, called for the “immediate dismantling of the systemic racism that Black people face around the world” and set out a four-point agenda to address racial violence. The report, written after the tragic murder of George Floyd in the United States and the ongoing racial violence experienced by Black communities globally, recommends the urgent need for reparations for colonial injustices, among other agenda points. While the global conversation around reparations may be becoming increasingly visible as activist voices become louder, responses to calls for reparations are often quietened by European expressions of soft power. This seems to be the primary means by which European governments respond to rising demands for reparations at home in the former metropolises and in the former colonies⁶¹.

European governments such as Germany and the Netherlands are currently funding several ‘decolonial’ exhibitions, art projects, museum programmes and the construction of new museums that deal with issues such as the afterlife of slavery or other aspects of colonial pasts. When I visited Hamburg, Germany in November 2022 at the invitation of the Ministry of Culture and Media to take part in the project “Haunted Waters, Healing Spaces” designed to address the colonial ties between the cities of Cape Town and

⁶¹ A number of EU-funded projects are currently addressing subject of colonialism. See for instance RIME: <https://culturelab.be/archive/rime/> [accessed 15 November 2021].

Hamburg, I met an afro-German activist named Millicent Adjei of the organisation Arca-Afrikanisches Zentrum, who poignantly expressed that the only effect the “decolonial” exhibitions in Hamburg’s museums are having is to increase the amount of dust in their galleries⁶². Adjei offered the observation that the city’s cultural environment has not undergone any noticeable structural change and that most of the financing intended for “decolonial” programmes benefits White German organisations and cultural practitioners. While these practices may seem progressive on the surface, they are contradictory because while the ‘decolonial’ exhibits, symposia, and conferences occur upstairs in public galleries, a vast number of unseen stolen cultural objects from former colonies remain hidden in museum basements and storerooms. Reflecting on her interview with Robin Lelijveld, a researcher at the Tropenmuseum, Vittoria Caradonna (2021) notes the current interest and prevalence of museums dealing with the afterlives of slavery and colonialism in the contemporary. She argues that the current interest in the ‘decolonial’ can on the one hand be attributed to the groundwork of activists in raising the profile of these issues, and “on the other, their efforts have been co-opted by cultural policy and funding bodies and filtered through their language” (2021: 66), noting that in the current cultural climate, “writing subsidy proposals without mentioning community engagement, slavery or colonialism is impossible” (2021: 66).

It is estimated that over 90% of Africa’s material culture is held in European museums (Sarr and Savoy, 2018: 3). Many European museums and nation-states refuse to return these objects to their source countries or communities⁶³. Felwine Sarr and Benedicte Savoy argue in their 2018 report, “The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage”, commissioned by the French government led by Emmanuel Macron, that the African continent holds on to almost none of its cultural and artistic heritage from the pre-

⁶² Unstructured conversation with Millicent Adjei at Embassy Gallery, Hamburg, 19 November, 2022.

⁶³ An exception is the following recent examples of restitution: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/europe-returns-looted-benin-bronzes-africa-reckons-legacy-empire-rcna3986> [2023, April 27].

colonial and colonial eras, as this heritage is held and stored in museums and countries completely out of reach for Africans (Sarr and Savoy, 2018). Most European nations have not yet reached a consensus on the future of colonial cultural heritage, nor have they adopted a standardised government policy or position. The Rijksmuseum, for example, holds onto 4500 objects from its former colonies acquired through theft or military action⁶⁴. Despite increasing discomfort with the presence of these objects, the museum maintains its authority over what gets returned and what stays in its collections, arguing that the objects address Dutch colonial histories and that removing them would erase those histories (Smeulders, 2021). The Rijksmuseum also manages many valuable pieces that belong to the state as well as a number of objects originating from former Dutch colonies that are owned by private individuals. The response that 'history would be lost' if objects would be returned, goes back to the question of whose histories are being prioritised?

In lieu of implementing economic reparations to victims of colonial violence, European governments during the second and early-third decades of the 21st century have allocated substantial sums of money to cultural programmes that, to use a common phrase employed by these institutions, 'address the legacy of colonialism'. Among these projects are exhibitions that are frequently housed in significant national institutions, such as the Rijksmuseum's "Country Series" of exhibitions, which includes *Goede Hoop*. But in order to justly commit to the agenda of decoloniality they claim to be pursuing, Western/European museums must relinquish the historical attitude of superiority they have assumed. While European museums were among the most influential institutions in the formulation and justification of colonialism and the subjectivities it produced, they now often position themselves uncritically as the best

⁶⁴ A 2021 report by the Council for Culture's Advisory Committee on the National Policy Framework for Colonial Collections found that Dutch colonial collections in public museums consist of thousands of cultural heritage objects, religious objects, historical objects, jewellery, natural history object and utensils. This committee also points out that unlike a number of other European countries, Dutch law does not oppose the return of colonial cultural heritage objects by the state to source countries.

positioned and most competent centres to lead the discourse on colonialism's afterlives. This phenomenon reminds me of a remark by David Koloane, a renowned South African artist and art critic: "This is like the jailer celebrating the prisoner's release in the prisoner's absence" (1996: 55).

Importantly, work aligning itself with decoloniality, whether in museum exhibitions or in publicly sanctioned apologies, only make sense if it is conceptualised alongside plans for reparations and restitution. What is the benefit for those whose humanity has been violated if this is not the case? Museums, like other colonial institutions, benefited enormously from their imperial undertakings. Thus, reparations must encompass a broad range of matters: the immediate return of looted cultural objects and human remains; the promise to enact and implement the payment of economic reparations for stolen land and loss of resources (including life); policies that acknowledge and address the generational trauma suffered by those people who were abducted and enslaved and taken to the settler colonies; likewise, policies that acknowledge and address the traumas of genocide, displacement, and the centuries-long exploitation of indigenous people in the colonies that continues today.

The breadth and depth of reparations for colonial injustices should encompass as many manifestations and forms as necessary, and while no compensation could ever be sufficient for the magnitude of the loss suffered, reparative justice must occur. For example according to the South African Land Audit of 2018⁶⁵, the country's White population still owns 72% of all farms and agricultural land. Land dispossession in South Africa is a direct consequence of Dutch settler colonial rule that encouraged settlers and VOC company retirees from the Netherlands to occupy and cultivate local land, displacing local populations, which was later fortified by legislation such as the Natives Land Act of 1913 and various restrictive legislation relating to the ownership of land by

⁶⁵ see: <https://www.gov.za/documents/land-audit-report-2017-5-feb-2018-0000> [2023, April 27].

Black and African people during apartheid rule. Importantly, any work claiming to take a 'decolonial' approach, whether in the museum or the university, or by the state, must acknowledge the theft of land, and advocate for the restoration of land to those displaced by colonialism.

Museums, according to Vawda (2019), require "a reorientation in authority and a permanent shift in institutional cooperation between the global north and global south, informed by new insights drawn from new frameworks outside of the old and new museology" (2019: 76). Acknowledging colonialism is important, but it must be accompanied by inquiries into what constitutes "museum knowledge" (Vawda, 2019) and the 'museum idea', which impacts on curatorial methods and approaches.

Even through dialogue and participation, the dominant position of the museum expert (for example, the curator or museum director) vis-à-vis the marginalised and alienated knower-as-Other frequently results in epistemic violence and injustice. If these kinds of hierarchical barriers are not critically examined, and ultimately changed, the paradox of museums becomes a self-serving contradiction (Vawda, 2019) While 'decolonial exhibitions' are ostensibly intended to demonstrate how colonial histories are interconnected with Western museum institutions, the museum always demands epistemic control over how these histories are told, and thus misses the opportunity to narrate more nuanced and co-created histories.

Institutions often struggle with the practice of collaboration in that collaborative attempts are fraught with the assertion of power hierarchies and skewed towards privileging the institution. This is indicative of the museum's inability to exorcise the colonial spectre of the 'museum idea' which structures everything they do.

What would the exorcism of the colonial spectre of the 'museum idea' look like? To deal with this question, one must consider the follow-up questions that we are faced

with: can a radical curatorial practice be forged within the museum institution in its current form?; and If this is a possibility, what are the potential pathways that would lead us there? On the other hand, should the notion of the museum exhibition as a tool for working towards a decolonial future be abandoned entirely? Is the rejection of the idea that the museum project and its programmes can be decolonised, the only worthwhile intervention that could lead to a more radical future? The critique and rejection of certain aspects of the culture and practices inherent to the museum institution by scholars, activists and artists since the 1970s have indeed led to significant changes to institutional practices and processes. While the museum institution is one that is constantly in flux, and thus embodies the potential for change, there is room for radical improvement to how institutional change is conceptualised and implemented.

Sacrifice & Repair: The Exhibition as Social Intervention

The act of making something public through an exhibition is also about visibilising deeply held perspectives about a particular subject (Bal, 2006). If museums are sites where new realities are produced and mobilised (Bennett, 2005), how might socially engaged exhibition-making methods become acts of political resistance against the dehumanising impacts of neo-colonial practices in and outside museums? Much has been written about the ways that curating is embedded in relationships of power and knowledge and as a result of this work, curatorial projects and exhibitions are increasingly seen as discursive spaces with the potential to disrupt and intervene in existing relations of power. Elena Filipovic (2013: 9) argues that implicitly embedded in the question “what is an exhibition?” is “not so much what the meaning of an exhibition is as a category/genre/object but what it *does* [my emphasis], which is to say, how exhibitions function and matter, and how they participate in the construction and administration of the experience of the items they present”. In other words, how should

exhibitions attempt to act in opposition to authoritative logics, serving as the furnace for the forging of new and transgressive experiences and thought? Filipovic essentially argues for the method, form and relationship between all components that make up an exhibition—including its objects—to move towards an ethics of curation or exhibition-making which she defines as “a responsibility towards the methodology that constitutes the practice” (2013: 10). In this way, an exhibition’s methods and processes, in the act of producing the show, reveals “the premises that underwrite the forming of judgement, the conditioning of perception, and the construction of history. It is the thinking and debate that it incites” (Filipovic, 2013: 11).

Exhibitions are the result of a complex decision-making process, and the meanings derived from an exhibition are the result of both the processes of interpretation made by the curator and viewer, and “social interpretative processes” that can be complex and uncertain. (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). By definition, the exhibition is ephemeral and therefore a form that consists of incomplete and unfolding layers of meaning and affective experiences. Its lack of absoluteness is among its most compelling characteristics, thus, in this aspect lies its potential to generate multiple interpretations and effects. Given its uncertainty and unfinished nature, can the exhibition be viewed as a discursive site of intervention that challenges hegemonic canons of knowledge? To what extent can and has the form been appropriated to execute epistemic agitation, friction and disruption, in particular where the application of subversive forms of knowledge and ideas come together in praxis to establish a space for the facilitation of transformative actions?

An intervention is the act of interceding in the interest of bringing about change. In the museum context, the goal of the intervention is to influence the museum’s specific ideological and discursive environment. The intervention can thus be thought of as a social practice, that encourages the institution and its publics to interrogate, revise,

write anew, even discard knowledges and practices that are harmful, and that aid in the circulation of harmful ideologies and untruths. The most appropriate method to enact this, may be to use the museum's own technology of 'exhibiting'—that is, to use the grammar, processes, and methods of the exhibition to present new perspectives or knowledge around a particular social issue or to pose challenges to the institution itself. The notion of the exhibition as social intervention could thus be seen as a disruptive and creative strategy that illuminates the institutions spectre, posing challenges to its constellation of policies, power structures and processes, with the objective of encouraging the adoption of a more self-reflexive museological and curatorial practice. These prompts for self-reflection have frequently come from outside sources, such as artists and other creative practitioners.

The ground-breaking and now-canonised exhibition *Mining the Museum* (1992) at the Maryland Historical Society by Fred Wilson, demonstrates how exhibition practice enacts colonial discourses of class, race and gender, while also demonstrating the ways that exhibition practice can radically critique colonial cultures of display. The work was a series of unsettling juxtapositions of objects and texts using distinctive styles/forms of display practice, for example 'the white cube' or the 'ethnographic display' and the museum's own curatorial language that "makes reference to histories of slavery, the logic of race discourse, the legacy of collecting practices and the visual mechanisms used by large cultural institutions to announce their power and authority" (Gonzalez, 2008: 15). As Jennifer Gonzalez argues, the work successfully examined the "historical effects of race discourse and its residue in contemporary systems of power and representation" (2008: 14). Objects in museum collections, collection procedures, and the display of collections all contribute to perpetuate colonial logics and the social order, and Wilson's work's effectiveness resides in illuminating not only this fact but also the invisible epistemologies that support these practices.

The concepts of the 'anti-museum', 'unboxing the museum' and 'debordering' are a few examples of previously proposed interventionist concepts that called for urgent structural change within the museum institution, however they are not without their limitations. The notion of the 'anti-museum' is probably the term most associated with the German artist and curator, Johannes Cladders. Cladders explored and expanded upon the relationship between institutions and audiences in a series of exhibitions staged between 1967 and 1978, featuring artists such as Joseph Beuys and Jasper Johns at the municipal museum of Mönchengladbach, a small West-German city near the Dutch border. Critical of the capitalist consumption and appropriation of art at the time, Cladders challenged the ways that art was displayed and consumed by the museum's publics. He experimented with exhibition technologies, such as the catalogue form, to make contemporary art that was perceived as out of reach and perhaps also out of touch by the general publics of the time, accessible to audiences (Ives, 2021). In his 1967 essay "Das Antimuseum: Gedanken zur Kunstpflege" (The Anti-Museum: Thoughts on Curation), Cladders presents his radical views on art and institutions. He writes: "The concept of 'anti' in anti-museum should be understood as the demolition of physical walls and the construction of a spiritual house" (Ives, 2021). The anti- in 'cladders' anti-museum wasn't just a rejection of the noun; rather, it was an attempt to draw attention to the productive, creative, collaborative, and informal ties that may exist between artists and institutions.

'Unboxing the Museum' refers to the process of challenging traditional methods of displaying museum collections. It entails challenging museums' assumptions about their collections, the discourses produced around the collections, and how they are presented to the public. Museums have traditionally presented their collections in a way that emphasises the institution's authority and expertise that typically entails displaying objects in a fetishised and ethnicised manner, that uses traditional

taxonomies of display such as labelling, wall text, objects or artworks positioned on plinths, inside vitrines or on the walls, that are lit in a particular way. The unboxing movement, on the other hand, encourages museums to be more open and transparent about the processes that go into the creation and curation of their collections and exhibitions. This may entail displaying objects in a less normal, 'unboxed' manner, with less emphasis on the interpretation and expertise of the museum curators and more emphasis on allowing visitors to independently explore and interpret objects. Furthermore, the unboxing movement seeks to address issues of diversity, inclusion, and representation within museums. This could include challenging how objects are acquired and displayed, as well as actively seeking out objects and narratives that have been excluded from mainstream museum collections. Moreover, unboxing also seeks to make connections between object and their historical and cultural contexts, thus urging museums to provide greater information on the context in which cultural objects were created and utilised, the layers of interpretation and meaning that are applied to objects by the museum 'expert', as well as to recognise the complicated histories and power dynamics around them.

Christopher Whitehead (2018) proposes the concept of "debordering" or "museums without borders" to advocate for the institutional ideal of "access and responsiveness" for the majority. Whitehead contends that debordering is "the proposal of a public space that is inclusive of multiple groups and identities, that is, a space in which old hierarchies and social orders are no longer allowed to reproduce inequalities" (2018: 52). Bordered practices are written into the morphology of the museum, which encompasses various epistemological, physical cultural, and economic borders or barriers, to name a few. Bordering practices are also prevalent in the world outside of the museum, influencing the processes and methods on the inside. Debordering involves co-production initiatives focussing on the social, and recognising that people themselves are heritage sites or archives. It

requires that collaboration and co-production must take the form of working together to articulate heritages that have been hidden in plain sight, that may overlay, interconnect with, or bypass and contradict, official heritage (2018: 52). Whitehead advocates for the coming together of the powerful and less powerful, in the spirit of co-production and community collaboration and identifies a number of potentially positive outcomes as a result of this process, including: “to help people to feel that their voices are being heard and that their communities and views are recognised; to reveal hidden histories and add to the stock of knowledge about heritage and the histories of places and communities; to valorise people’s ‘lived expertise’ alongside academic expertise; to encourage respect for and promotion of, cultural diversity. While these are all commendable objectives that would undoubtedly lead to a better museum experience for publics and more ethical museal practices, it does not take into consideration the power imbalances that will also inevitably occur as a result of this coming together, not just between the museum and their publics, but the within communities themselves. Addressing the *how* of community participation and co-production is thus essential.

Arguing for the need to reconfigure the basis of defining and assessing inclusion, the curator, Chandra Frank contends that “so-called source communities” must be seen as equal participatory partners in practices of exhibiting. Frank’s two-year exhibition project, *Re(as)sisting Narratives (2014-2016)*, in collaboration with FramerFramed gallery in Amsterdam sought to reimagine the “impact and role of colonialism and slavery on present day memory formation” (Frank, 2015). Much like *Goede Hoop*, the exhibition had set out to explore and reframe the underexplored legacies of slavery and colonialism that exists between South Africa and the Netherlands. However, its approach to the exhibition-making process was grounded in showing how the colonial afterlife is in operation in the contemporary. Thus, the curatorial process made greater attempts at being collaborative, used a combination of archival material and

contemporary art in what was shown on display and involved artists and scholars of South Africa in curating parts of the programme, notably, Burning Museum and Mary Sibande. Moreover, the exhibition was shown in both countries—at FramerFramed gallery in Amsterdam and the District Six Museum in Cape Town, both of these independent cultural spaces in their respective cities. The project attempts unsettle and question who is doing the looking and who is being looked at and recognises that ‘the inclusion of alternative histories and artistic practices within a decolonial curatorial practice is not aimed at the creation of a singular representation of a marginalised community, but rather interested in the intrinsic and notions that inform the creative imaginary of these narrations’ (Frank, 2015: para 10).



Figure 31: Video still of the Re(as)sisting Narratives exhibition opening at FramerFramed gallery in 2016. Video by FramerFramed.nl, 2016.

While the museum is potentially an important space for the enactment of epistemic rupture, it is imperative to keep in mind that the museum is not the sole custodian nor domain of public/collective memory. In this regard, Carson Cole Arthur and Petero Kalule argue that there are things the museum cannot hold and thus, should be looking to the descendants from former colonies to set the terms of engagement: “rather than hold or hoard, we want to think of gathering. Gathering differently as what is never held but as what always from the point of emergence shared” (2023: para 9). The suggestion of gathering, invoking sharing and cooperation is key because it challenges and obscures neo-colonial capitalist notions of holding onto or hoarding property and

resources, a core value of Western society, and which through imperialism/modernity/capitalism was exported to the rest of the world. Genuine collaboration necessitates the production of meaningful co-narratives, and factors such as who produces the discourse, where it is held, and how it is portrayed become vital to the process.

An exhibition as social intervention comprises genuine cooperation and requires museums to make concessions, including the possible relinquishment of its resources, cultural objects, and the narratives and knowledges constructed around its collections, in order to better serve the needs of its publics and advance causes beyond its immediate sphere of influence. This may necessitate that many European museums and their replica exports in settler colonial contexts (such as museums in contexts like South Africa) accept that they will need to let go of their objects and embrace the fact that the act of letting go will likely result in a void in their collections, and possibly the emptying of galleries and storerooms in the museum building. Given the magnitude of the presence of inherited colonial debris haunting the contemporary museum, the emptying of the institution may be what's needed to remedy the problem and to make room for new collections and ideas. Finding ways of exhibiting the absence of objects and their associated meanings might then become pertinent.

By including the heritages and memory that have been excluded, omitted, disregarded and silenced by hegemonic institutions into the public sphere contributes to a more equitable representation of social experience and thus has the potential to disrupt and unsettle mainstream public narratives of the past. Exhibitions, when thought of as an act of counter-discourse and resistance, and an intervention into the institution's knowledge and power structures, is an essential tool in making these omissions visible to wider publics. But broader and thus more ethical representation practices are only the first step in the move towards decolonising institutions and their practices. Here,

Gerald Raunig's notion of "instituent practices" is useful in thinking about the exhibition as an interventionist tool. Instituent practices are practices that conduct radical social criticism, yet that are self-critical about the critiques they make. Raunig argues:

If institutional critique is not to be fixed and paralyzed as something established in the art field and remaining constrained by its rules, then it has to continue to change and develop in a changing society. It must link up with other forms of critique both within and outside the art field – whether these forms emerged in opposition to existing conditions or were the resistance that provoked those conditions in the first place. Against the background of this kind of transversal exchange among forms of critique – but also without naively imagining spaces somehow free from domination and institutions – institutional critique needs to be rethought as a critical attitude and what I call an 'instituent practice' (2009: 3-4).

From Raunig's perspective, no place is immune to the influence of institutions and power relations because they permeate, rule, and shape all facets of social life. Following, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's (2000) thesis that there is no space 'outside' of capitalist forms of labour and production holds true here as well: there is no space 'outside' of institutions, Raunig's (2009b) reading of constituent as a process of collective subjectivation, and constituent power in its connection to instituting positions the pointlessness in discussing strategies for operating outside of institutions. Raunig (2009a, b) instead, points us towards the attention that should be paid to how to build and mould them in their infancy, when they are most amenable to change and reconstruction. As many European museums cannot be characterised as institutions in their infancy, the decolonial turn may present an opportune juncture to redefine their purpose, methods, and relationships to their publics. This should include the adoption or consideration of revisionist and even abolitionist strategies, which would signal their dedication

to dismantling imperialism. Moreover, it is a chance for museums to demonstrate solidarity with ongoing anti-colonial movements and activism taking place within and beyond their walls, aligning with political processes unfolding in their immediate and broader contexts.

Interventions into historical discourses have the potential to reveal what has been silenced, and raises questions about the power structures that silencing helps to maintain. The interventionist potential of exhibitions in large public institutions stems from their ability to appeal to wider publics through visual language, and serve as a social platform for debates about topics that many outside of academic, cultural, or activist settings would consider unspeakable. While exhibitions inside the institution's walls can be a powerful social tool for affecting publics, it is crucial to avoid or minimise falling into any of the many pitfalls that have also been associated with them and to prevent exhibitions becoming a metaphor for decolonisation. These include subterfuge, a failure of self-reflexivity, and the misguided belief in the institution's objectivity. If these concerns are not addressed, the notion of exhibition as social intervention has the potential to become another meaningless concept appropriated by the museum institution, kin to 'transformation' and 'decolonisation'.

Despite the fact that not all shows are curated and not all curatorial work culminates in an exhibition, the ever-evolving practice of curating and the exhibition form are inextricably linked. Nora Sternfeld thinks about curating as a "theoretical practice and a practical theory that is about being able to do and to change something" (2013: 146). Thus, she proposes a way to think about curating beyond the representation and display of objects, and instead as action, which she argues involves "processes that produce themselves—so it is no longer about exhibitions as sites for setting up valuable objects and representing 'objective' values, but rather about [making space]

for curatorial action in which unexpected encounters and discourses become possible” (2013: 149). For Sternfeld, taking a stand in exhibition practice should be considered more important than precise hanging plans.

Fundamentally, practices cannot be altered without an epistemological shift; thus, the significance of large-scale public projects, such as exhibitions, that possess the potential to make cognitive and affective interventions into prevailing epistemologies. Simply put, an exhibition can be considered an intervention if it has resulted in some kind of social transformation and this change could manifest in a multitude of ways, including a more equitable institutional recruitment and appointment strategy, the challenging of the notion of assumed knowledge, and a rattling of internal power structures that actually translate to the expunging of ideas, beliefs and practices that legitimise neo-colonialism and hinder social justice. However, it is always necessary to examine and evaluate the intervention’s structuring conditions. For example, for whom is the intervention intended? This is significant because an exhibition cannot contribute to meaningful social change if it is structured only from the lens of European Whiteness and for White audiences, as in the Goede Hoop case study. While it was stated by its curators that it was an exhibition for a Dutch audience, I have shown previously that who is considered Dutch in the Netherlands is not solely a question of nationality, but simultaneously a question of race and ethnicity.

Towards New Protocols

Many contemporary curators write about the ethics of care in relation to curatorial practice and exhibition-making that go beyond the care-taking of objects, emphasising the need to show care for the people involved in exhibition production and viewing processes (museum staff, artists, participant communities and audiences) and care for

people represented by exhibitions and collections. While it is important to show care for the people and objects involved in the curatorial process, (Ruddick, 1998; Mol, 2010; Morse, 2021; et al.) curators and exhibition practitioners also need to practice care when articulating and designing the methods and processes that go into the practice of exhibiting—this is a ‘care’-ing methodological approach or set of protocols where care for ideas, people, objects and processes of social justice converge.

Arguing for a “critical ethics of care”, Fiona Robinson (1999: 26) contends: “care and justice are no longer fixed in a dichotomous relationship; indeed it is a new kind of moral thinking in which a strong sense of self goes hand in hand with the valuing of human attachment and the focus on abstract, impersonal, distant relations is replaced by a focus on real, concrete, particular relations”. Moreover, Robinson highlights that care ethics “involves a thorough understanding of how relations are constructed and how difference is perceived and maintained through institutions and structures in societies”, and that “the ethics of care can be seen to relate to not only personal and intimate relations among particular individuals but to all kinds of institutional and structural relations in and across societies” (1999: 30). A practice of care, particularly in exhibitions within museum institutions that represent painful pasts, must encompass a commitment to social and retributive justice.

Exhibitions are experienced in embodied and affective ways, and thus to employ care in practices of exhibiting entails a sense of social responsibility and prudence—a sense of being cautious’ in one's actions and a self-reflexivity that what you are about to do will have epistemological and affective implications for the surrounding world. Practices of care necessitates taking a step back and reflecting on what must be done and a consideration for and evaluation of, the practical, ideological, epistemological, and pedagogical aspects of the process and potential approaches to exhibition-

making. Further, 'taking care' demands that responsibility for past and present colonial complicity is addressed by the museum directly and is not passed on to invited guests, who often have to deal with the resultant conflicts. Consequently, the concept of 'taking care' is an essential prerequisite to the notion of 'exhibition as social intervention'. As museums are essentially about people and the relationships between people, objects and ideas, the three key areas of exhibition practice that should be considered with care in exhibitions that are posed as interventions into the dominant historical accounts of colonialism are: practices of collaboration and co-production; selection and curation of objects; and acknowledgements and reparations.

Gathering, collaboration and co-production are critical areas where practices of care should be exercised. To gather, collaborate and co-produce creative work necessitates that curators embrace trust, uncertainty, friction and complexity, allowing for diverse voices and perspectives to emerge and achieve a more nuanced representation of social life. While collaboration and co-production are fundamental components of ethical exhibition production, particularly in contemporary exhibitions that deal with colonial pasts, it is essential to closely examine who is involved in the collaboration process and what hierarchies exist within the museum's staff and leadership structure, with attention to be given to race, gender and geo-political situatedness. To exercise care is to ensure that power dynamics are recognised and addressed, and that all stakeholders participate actively in decision-making processes. The terms of the collaboration should be carefully negotiated and agreed upon by all parties, preferably with the assistance of an external practitioner to increase the possibility for objectivity. When representing stories, histories, and narratives from the global south, collaboration efforts must include practitioners from specific affected communities within those regions and countries, and as much as possible, collaborative projects should be led by practitioners from those countries. Before the project begins, an equitable working relationship should be established with a self-reflexive approach that

recognises the inherently complex and often problematic nature of telling the stories of others.

The processes of selection of contemporary objects to be included in an exhibition should prioritise artwork by black, indigenous and women artists, particularly when showcasing the conditions of coloniality. These selection processes must consider the work produced by black and brown Europeans as well as work by artists located in the former colonies of the global south. Care should be taken to ensure that objects are not just viewed as commodities but as holders of stories, knowledge, memories, and cultural heritage. Likewise, work considered to be harmful or contributing to the archive of trauma as discussed earlier, should not be shown. Care for audiences and their well-being is imperative, and the museum and its curators should take care not to perpetuate the re-traumatisation of communities that Europe has historically othered (and continues to other in many contemporary scenarios).

Acknowledgments and reparations play a vital role in the process of care in exhibition-making. Thus, museums must be transparent in their exhibitions and include labels that explicitly acknowledge which items in their collections have been stolen, while also communicating to their audiences what efforts are being made, or are not being made, to repatriate and return these objects to their rightful communities and places of origin. Provenance research should be prioritised, and if there are any doubts surrounding the acquisition history of an object, it should be promptly returned to its country of origin. In cases where museums or nation-states refuse to return objects, it should be legislatively mandated that monetary payments are made to the countries of origin at competitive market rates, as a form of reparations.

The return of objects is another crucial aspect of in exhibition-making. Hierarchies of value and assumptions around the worthiness of objects must be questioned and

discarded where necessary. For example, in the South African context, this could mean selling European collections at market value, where acquisition conditions allow, to make room for new works by younger black, women and African artists, thus prioritising their voices and perspective over objects that may have been collected with racist attitudes towards what is considered valuable and what is considered knowledge. In the European context, letting go of objects that do not rightfully belong to Europe and relinquishing false sentiments of superiority regarding their abilities to take care of objects in comparison to the abilities of source communities and countries is imperative.

The exhibition is a hermeneutic site since its purpose is to give a discursive interpretation of information and present a conversation using objects, text, and sensory data. However, by privileging museum desires, the exhibition (including all of its components and processes) can become hermeneutically unequal. Nonetheless, when intentionally thought of as a form of retributive action, exhibitions have the potential to facilitate the emergence of new epistemic forms through the transmission of generated information to their diverse audiences. To avoid the phenomenon of hermeneutical epistemological asymmetry that can occur during the process of staging of museum exhibitions, it is critical to interrogate and develop institutional knowledge through the continued re-interpretation of the museum's collections, archives, cultural objects and situatedness through the lens of the anti-colonial knowledges, theories and practices situated in and that have emerged from the Global South of which there are countless examples.

Through taking care in exhibition-making, curators can ensure that their practices are ethically responsible, socially conscious, and contribute towards decolonising narratives in meaningful ways. The museum's most powerful tool at its disposal—the exhibition, is simultaneously the practice that adds to the museum institution's relevance in its

contemporary expression. While it is certainly a part of the epistemic machinery that has played a central role in colonial violence, the exhibition as a grammar, a discourse and as a social intervention is also able to articulate new sets of knowledges and discourse to various publics, through various forms of media. This is largely due to the fact that the language of the exhibition is discursive, and As Morris and O’Neill (2014: 10) point out, “the discursive has become a means of intervening into the exhibitionary situation, through voiced debates and targeted questioning” and is thus crucial to the ongoing relevance of the museum project. But if the museum project is going to be relevant in the future, it must move beyond questioning and debates and towards facilitating reparative action.

Conclusion

The afterlives of colonialism are immortalised through the practice of exhibiting in museum institutions which often perpetuate epistemic violence. This dissertation aims to understand and analyse the emerging phenomenon and increasing occurrence of decolonial exhibitions that have taken place within European museum institutions in recent decades. By exploring this developing trend, the research has sought to shed light on the dilemmas and complexities presented by these exhibitions and propose effective approaches and strategies for addressing them. To address the broader phenomenon of the decolonial exhibition in the wake of colonialism and ongoing global systems of coloniality, I use the Rijksmuseum’s exhibition *Goede Hoop* as the primary case study to illustrate the tensions and frictions embedded in displaying colonialism’s pasts, presents and futures. Some of the inherent problems with the *Goede Hoop* exhibition discussed in this dissertation present of the notion of a shared and reciprocal relationship between South Africa and the Netherlands; the failure to collaborate meaningfully with experts in South Africa; the appropriation and absorption of dissenting decolonial narratives; the

failure to address colonialism from the perspectives of formerly colonised nations/communities/individuals; the failure to address the ways that Dutch attitudes of benevolence can obstruct the just representation of colonial pasts; and the use of dissociative visual and narrative devices that had the impact of taming violent history and enacting historical erasure.

Goede Hoop's presentation of the notion of a 'shared history' or 'special relationship' impedes a meaningful reckoning with the colonial past of the Netherlands and the Rijksmuseum. The exhibition, which is currently archived on the Rijksmuseum website, continues to employ language such as 'shared', 'tempestuous' and 'reciprocal' to describe the relationship between South Africa and the Netherlands. As argued in this thesis, this positioning is duplicitous as the museum failed to consult with specialists in the South Africa, and where it did, their contributions were not taken with the seriousness they warranted. The museum promised radical intervention in its first major showing of Dutch colonial histories but instead delivered a palatable representation of colonialism for an imagined audience that did not extend beyond those it considers as White and European. Moreover, through its limited and fragmented treatment of the long durée of colonialism, the *Goede Hoop* exhibition demonstrated that the Netherlands has merely scratched the surface of the post-colonial complexities of racial representation and the contemporary phenomena of coloniality and decoloniality.

The project of showing the colonial past intersects with multiple and layered meanings that are connected to institutional social, historical and national contexts contingent on place, locality, and identity. It is also connected to global historical and contemporary contexts of capitalism and imperialism that pose challenges to social justice (in all its forms) in the present. Moreover, the exhibition produces and transmits a series of affects that continue to resonate and have consequences

beyond the show's limits and outside of the institution's walls. Thus the museum, its curators and other museum staff carry a sense of epistemic and social responsibility for how they produce exhibitions and what those exhibitions do.

The case of the *Goede Hoop* demonstrates that showing the post-colonial condition from the perspectives of museums in the global north can be fraught with distorted and asymmetrical power relationships and an institutional unwillingness to genuinely cooperate and collaborate. Furthermore, museum institutions themselves often lack the self-reflexivity to begin to think about ways of becoming and coming together that can undo the colonial/colonised gaze and exorcise the spectre of the 'museum idea'. This is largely due to their complicity in affirming the structures of coloniality through their own practices and connections to external systemic relations. While *Goede Hoop's* failure may be considered as important as if the project had succeeded, the exhibition cannot be considered a success in that the lack of care for the audiences experiencing the exhibition points to arrogance and the simultaneous acceptance and ignorance of neo-colonial power relations.

Proposed Approaches for Future Exhibitions Dealing with Colonial Pasts

In response to thinking through the phenomenon of the decolonial exhibition in the contemporary, the final chapter of this study interrogates and proposes a view of *exhibition as social intervention* — highlighting the exhibition's potential to disrupt hegemonic knowledge production and imperial practices of showing and looking. The term intervention refers to a deliberate and purposeful effort, which may be disruptive at times, to initiate change that improves or transforms an existing system, process, or condition. The concept of the exhibition as social intervention is thus critical when considering the possibility of mitigating the museum project's

colonial legacy on a global scale. However, the efficacy of such an intervention is dependent on a number of factors, including the context in which the intervention takes place, institutional leadership, internal expertise, affective sensibilities of staff and unseen spheres of influence such as the board of directors and funding bodies. The exhibition as social intervention thus requires an acknowledging and rectifying of the horror of past injustices embedded in the acquisition and display of objects; the self-reflexive examination of the epistemologies that is produced and disseminated in the exhibiting process; and actively working towards reparations — in whatever form necessary — to restore dignity and agency to the communities from which objects, time and life were stolen.

The approach to working with the notion of the exhibition as social intervention necessitates an engagement with the idea of exhibiting. It is essential to acknowledge that the exhibition is the final material and visual outcome in a series of practices of exhibiting, i.e., the decisions, processes, negotiations, methods, activities, and affective forms of labour that are at times too complex to articulate. Therefore, the practices of exhibiting must be guided by a set of project-specific protocols that firstly recognise the potential for re-traumatisation and violence in any project that deals with colonialism and colonality, and that those who are wounded by colonality are always at the receiving end of this trauma. While this dissertation focuses primarily on museums in Europe, it is critical to recognise that transformation in museums in the global south necessitates a unique set of considerations. It is vital that whomever is leading the project understands this and develops new approaches to practices of exhibiting that are specific to each project, an approach that we do not see in the case of *Goede Hoop*.

While it is agreed that the exhibition can potentially become a site of epistemic disruption and agitation, the question whether European museums, as imperial

benefactors, are appropriate spaces for the critical representation and revision of colonial epistemologies must be seriously considered. As argued in the previous chapter, and in the sentiment expressed throughout this dissertation, museum interventions can degenerate into meaningless displays of 'decolonial fronting' unless the museum is willing to relinquish something, including but not limited to its resources, objects, or assumptions about its own authority over the stories and histories of others.

Thus, the museum is not always the appropriate space to tell the stories of those dispossessed through colonial violence, and this question, must be built into the set of protocols that are considered at the beginning of each individual project. Siting is imperative given the historic socio-spatial divides inherent in most contemporary urban environments. Therefore, in the Dutch context, it could be more appropriate for the exhibitions and programming on colonial histories to be sited in neighbourhoods such as Bijlmeer, a historically Black/afro Dutch neighbourhood in Amsterdam. Thus, locating future exhibitions and projects in spaces that are relevant to the communities that are mostly affected and marginalised by the afterlives of Dutch imperialism.

The Rijksmuseum must consider what the lessons for future exhibitions are that emerged from *Goede Hoop* and subsequent shows like *Slavernij*. An important question for the museum should be: what is left behind in the permanent space of the Rijksmuseum when temporary exhibitions that address the Netherlands' role in colonialism and slavery close? If it has not radically shifted the practices of the museum and the ways it relates to its publics, can the intervention be considered successful?

In echoing Simone Zeefuik's (2017b) sentiments presented in the introduction to this thesis: "let them come to us", I propose that a more meaningful intervention by museums like the Rijksmuseum, would involve transferring resources, funding and decision-making to collectives of activists, artists and independent exhibition spaces that are already working on decolonial representation practices. While an approach such as this may present the dilemma of patronage power dynamics and needs further investigation regarding its viability, it might enable groups outside of the museum to stage interventions that challenge colonial knowledges from within their situated positions. For instance, in the case of the Rijksmuseum, if the institution were to consider hosting another exhibition on Dutch colonialism to follow their recent undertakings, a more impactful and caring gesture might be if the museum entrusted the financial resources, administration and oversight of such a project to the people who run organisations like The New Urban Collective and Black Archives, who possess the expertise and affective sensibilities to carry out such efforts. This gesture might result in less predictable, and even unrecognisable outcomes for the museum, but would likely broaden its connections to its publics and also problematise what the notion of what public means for the Rijksmuseum in the social and political context of the Netherlands. How these collaborations unfold would be negotiated as part of the set of protocols established for each project.

Recommendations for Future Research

The existing body of research available on the decolonisation of museums, their display practices, and collections is extensive. However, there exists a significant research gap concerning the exhibition form and practices of exhibiting in relation to exhibitions that represent and unsettle narratives of colonial pasts. This dissertation has sought to shed light on the distinct characteristics of the exhibition

form and practice, specifically in how the exhibition can become a vehicle for intervening into the transmission of knowledge about colonial histories.

Further research opportunities lie in investigating exhibitions and interventions in Europe that confront colonial histories beyond the confines of traditional museum institutions. By expanding our understanding of these alternative exhibition sites and spaces, we can forge a path towards a decolonial praxis that decentres the museum's hierarchical position as the preeminent seat of cultural power. Moreover, there is potential for further research in conducting a comprehensive study on the phenomenon of decolonial interventions in multiple museums across Europe, using a similar approach taken in this dissertation. This would be a crucial undertaking in critically assessing the long-term impacts of such interventions on the European continent. Additionally, a compelling area for future research would be a comparative study of decolonial interventions in museums across Europe and Africa, particularly focusing on museums that were originally established as colonial institutions.

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