

# Introduction

## Whose Heritage?

Our regular route to the groceries led my fieldwork host Yvette and me past the statue of Anton de Kom, one of the most heatedly debated objects of cultural heritage<sup>1</sup> in Amsterdam Zuidoost (see Figure 0.1). De Kom (1898–1945), author of the influential 1934 history of Suriname entitled *We Slaves of Suriname*, is one of the greatest Afro-Surinamese heroes, who ‘called on all Surinamese for unity and equality, turned against colonial rule, and was active in the Dutch resistance 1940–1945’.<sup>2</sup>

‘It does not look like him,’ Yvette declared curtly when I asked her about the statue, and that was all she had to say about the matter. As we drove on, Yvette swiftly turned her attention back to the task at hand – grocery shopping. Would they have all we needed at the shop, and would we be able to carry the heavy shopping trolley back up to the apartment?

Yvette’s comment had touched upon the main controversy regarding the statue of Anton de Kom. A group of local residents calling itself *Een waardig standbeeld voor Anton De Kom* (A dignified statue for Anton de Kom) had argued that De Kom was cultural heritage: ‘Suriname and the Netherlands have a shared history. In recent years, a growing awareness seems to develop among both scientists and politicians that this shared history can no longer be stashed away, but that it ought to have a prominent place within

Dutch Culture. . . . In view of this process, this seems to us a timely moment for the rehabilitation of Anton de Kom.<sup>33</sup> The dramatic turn of events when the statue was unveiled in 2006 was headline news, and like everybody else in Amsterdam Zuidoost, Yvette had seen the shocking media images. Video footage showed an enraged group of protesters desperately trying to prevent the ceremony from taking place. The speeches of the dignitaries, held in a tone of reconciliation, were no longer deemed newsworthy in the face of protesters crying and yelling, deeply hurt by what they perceived as an insult to black people in the Netherlands. ‘This is a racist image!’ they yelled, ‘We want a dignified statue. We are no longer slaves!’ Newspapers printed photos showing a sign hanging around the neck of the statue that read: ‘The genes of the slave masters are clearly still alive.’

Years after the unveiling, this sense of disappointment and anger was still palpable. As one of my interlocutors, an opponent of the statue, told me in 2011, the statue had been intended to bring Afro-Surinamese together to contemplate and make plans for the future: ‘But we did not get what we went for. . . . It’s not *our* thing. [The protesters] say that the statue does not speak to what we need, in terms of *that* Afro-Surinamese culture, in terms of *that* heritage, in terms of *that* spirituality, in terms of *that* identification.’<sup>34</sup>

Though Yvette seemed to reiterate concerns about the statue, she was definitely not enraged. Did she even care, I wondered? Why wasn’t this statue more important to her? Did she not care about her heritage? Was it not *her* history that was at stake here? Did she not see herself as Afro-Surinamese, a descendant of the enslaved, a black Surinamese-Dutch woman? Did she not feel the pain and trauma of slavery that has formed the basis for many of the memorial projects? Is she somehow immune to the racism black people experience on a daily basis?

Yvette was my second host during my fieldwork in Amsterdam Zuidoost. She had moved from Suriname to the Netherlands a little over ten years ago. Since her husband had passed away several years earlier, she had shared a spacious apartment with two of her sons on the sixth floor of an apartment building in Amsterdam Zuidoost. This part of Amsterdam is famous for its huge modernist architecture and is known as *blaka foto*, the *Sranantongo* term for ‘black city’. Yvette had found success in life and owned a house in Suriname that included a fish pond (‘With twenty thousand Tilapias!’) and an orchard.

At home in Amsterdam Zuidoost, Yvette was street wise. She knew her way around the bustling markets, which sold everything from

Chinese-made Gucci bags and African roots CDs to Surinamese fruit and vegetables such as *antroea*, *sopropro* and of course the devilishly hot *adjoema* and Madame Jeanette peppers that I was frequently warned against, to African *fufu* flour, Dutch *kibbeling* and tropical fish. Yvette had always hired a stall at the yearly Kwakoe summer festival, where she sold her delicious Surinamese food, but now the fees for these stalls had shrunk her profit margin too much for her to find it worth the effort. Yvette bought her meat exclusively at the butcher's around the corner. Not only was the meat there the freshest, she said, but the butcher, a white Dutch man, also owned the house adjacent to hers in Suriname. With Yvette, you could drop any name and she would list every single skeleton in their closet. She passed the statue of Anton de Kom almost every day.

Of course, Yvette knew the protesters' arguments: that the statue did not look like Anton de Kom but rather like a slave; that the nakedness of the statue was an insult to Anton de Kom in particular and Afro-Surinamese in general; that the placement of this 'ogre' affirmed the arrogance of the continuing white Dutch colonial mindset. She could enumerate them all. Yet when I tried to inquire more about Yvette's take on De Kom's statue on our short drive to the *toko*,<sup>5</sup> my inquisitiveness did not turn up much more than some obligatory answers. '*Min'e bemoei*' ('I don't get involved'), she would say. Yvette made it abundantly clear that she had made up her mind about the statue of Anton de Kom and that there was nothing left to discuss. She seemed to feel the same about the issue of slavery in general. She had never been to the national commemoration of slavery and its victims in the centre of Amsterdam and could not think of anyone who could talk to me about slavery (thinking I was looking to find 'experts') and was personally unconvinced that she had anything of importance to add to that discussion. Besides, she had more important things to worry about: hunting down a good bargain at the *toko*, feeding a hundred people for tomorrow's big catering job, picking up the *koto* (Afro-Surinamese traditional dress) she had ordered from her Thai dressmaker, or worrying about her son's job.

Yvette's stance on slavery is one that I encountered often during my research and one that took me by surprise. The slavery memorials with their emphasis on violence, suffering and heroism and the general idea that they represent 'the' experience of descendants of the enslaved had not prepared me for this seeming indifference about slavery and its afterlives.

In this book, my central concern is what people in Amsterdam Zuidoost make of the cultural heritage of slavery that is being produced across the Atlantic world by museums, heritage institutions, grassroots organizations and many other players in the heritage industry. How does the public memory and cultural heritage of slavery resonate in the everyday lives of those they are intended to address, for instance on their way to the groceries?

Yvette's stance and that of others like her have serious implications for wider formations of cultural heritage in the Atlantic world, in which the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery have increasingly found a place in the official heritage canons (Araujo 2013; Smeulders 2012). UNESCO, for example, initiated their immense *Slave Route Project* in Benin in 1994 to 'contribute to a better understanding of the causes, forms of operation, issues and consequences of slavery in the world . . . ; highlight the global transformations and cultural interactions that have resulted from this history; and contribute to a culture of peace by promoting reflection on cultural pluralism, intercultural dialogue and the construction of new identities and citizenships.'<sup>6</sup> These calls have been taken up in local politics of citizenship and belonging across the Atlantic world. Grassroots organizations have been able to mount political pressure on governments to recognize slavery as part of their history, epitomized in the opening of the National Museum of African American History in Washington in 2016. Across the Atlantic world, slavery and the slave trade are becoming part of historical canons (Araujo 2010; Fleming 2011; Horton and Kardux 2004; Rice 2010). US President Bill Clinton's famous 1998 visit to the former slave fortress of Goree in Senegal and his expression of remorse was followed by his successor, George W. Bush. On his visit to Goree Island in 2003, Bush called slavery 'one of the greatest crimes in history'. In 2009, Barack Obama even caused a minor scandal both in Ghana as well as among African Americans in the US for visiting Kenya, his father's country. As an 'African American', he had been expected to travel to West Africa to acknowledge the suffering caused by slavery. In 2008, the US passed a law formally apologizing for slavery and Jim Crow (Blaagaard 2011: 62).

In Great Britain, the history of slavery, or rather abolition, has been displayed at the Wilberforce House in Hull since 1906 (Hamilton 2010), while museums began exhibiting this history in new ways from the 1980s (Kaplan and Oldfield 2010). An exhibition on the slave trade opened in the British National Maritime Museum in 1999, and public interest for slavery peaked in 2007 with the bicentenary

celebrations of the abolition of the slave trade (Kaplan and Oldfield 2010), during which then Prime Minister Tony Blair formally apologized for transatlantic slavery (Blaagaard 2011).

France has several monuments and museums to commemorate slavery; in 1998, it was the first nation to formally recognize transatlantic slavery as a crime against humanity (Beriss 2004). In 2006, President Jacques Chirac made a formal apology for slavery and made 10 May a national day to commemorate victims.

In 2002, Queen Beatrix's unveiling of the National Slavery Memorial in Amsterdam attracted widespread media attention. The grassroots organizations who had pushed for the memorial framed the unveiling as a revolutionary end to the silence over slavery (Oostindie 2001; Van Stipriaan 2005). They saw it as a way of giving voice to the 'descendants of the enslaved', who, they argued, continued to suffer from the mental, social and economic consequences of enslavement.

In the wake of this project, the highest representatives of the state expressed their remorse about the Dutch involvement in transatlantic slavery. During the United Nations conference against racism in Durban in 2001, the Dutch Minister of Urban Policy and Integration, Roger van Boxtel, a proponent of the Dutch slavery memorial, expressed 'deep remorse' about the 'grave injustice in the past' (Schoten 2009: 24); in 2002, then Crown Prince Willem Alexander said on a visit to the former slave fortress Elmina on the Ghanaian coast: 'We look back with remorse to that dark age of human relations. We pay tribute to the victims of this inhuman trade' (Oostindie 2005: 66); and every year since 2002, high state dignitaries have given speeches at the slavery memorial in Amsterdam,<sup>7</sup> and memorials have also been placed in Middelburg, Rotterdam and Abcoude, with more initiatives on the way.

Yvette's curtness, then, raises the question of the appeal of these grand narratives of belonging and citizenship in the everyday lives of those they are meant to represent. If these forms of cultural heritage are meant to offer persuasive narratives of binding, belonging and political subjectivity, Yvette's stance raises the question of how, whom and under what circumstances these narratives manage to persuade. My investigation therefore focuses on the local resonances of this in people's concrete everyday lives.

## Negotiating the Politics of Autochthony

In the Netherlands, the push by grassroots organizations over the past three decades to commemorate and include the topic of slavery in the national historical canon has taken place in the broader context of the increasingly dominant twin processes of heritage formation and the culturalization of many areas of social life. In this conjuncture, “cultural identities” and concomitant “sentiments of belonging” are prominently brought into play in the political arena’ (Van de Port and Meyer 2018: 1). Cultural heritage has become a central ingredient in the making of collectivities and as such has become an important marker of social in- and exclusion (Hall 1999). The idea that cultural heritage should be safeguarded for the benefit of humankind – embodied most prominently by the UNESCO – is increasingly translated by some heritage players into nationalist projects of cultural protectionism. These cultural protectionists no longer understand cultural heritage as a common good but as the property of a particular nation or people. In their understanding, ‘culture’ and ‘people’ become homogeneous, static entities that are linked by birthright to a specific place. Here the idea of autochthony emerges, which merges ‘culture’, ‘people’ and ‘country’ to become a quasi-natural organism. Autochthonous literally means ‘to be born from the soil’, from the classical Greek *autos* (self) and *chthonos* (soil) (Geschiere 2009: 2). In the English language, the term also figures in a geological or botanical sense, as in autochthonous rock formations or plants (Geschiere 2009: 225). It is a primordial, seemingly incontestable claim to belonging: “born from the Earth itself” – how could one belong more?’ (Geschiere 2009: 2). And yet, cultural protectionists perceive their culture and heritage as constantly under threat and go to great lengths to defend and entrench it. Identities are hardened and exclusionary in this climate. The cry to ‘protect our culture’, as Jan Willem Duyvendak and others (e.g. Mepschen 2017; Modest and De Koning 2016) have argued, ‘has become common code in Western Europe to deny immigrants full citizenship’ (Duyvendak, Geschiere and Tonkens 2016: 1), as they are not seen as being ‘of the soil’. In this context, as I will show in Chapters 1 and 2, slavery has become an important means for political mobilization and for building leverage in claims to citizenship.

This mobilization is not without its perils. In the Netherlands and elsewhere, the history of slavery is told through narratives of victimhood, heroism, redemption and overcoming: the victims

demand recognition from the perpetrators, societies are called out to break historical silences and thus heal the trauma of slavery in order to finally ‘close’ the ‘slavery dossier’.<sup>8</sup> Such narratives face the dilemma of having to break with a colonial past precisely by invoking it, and thus entrenching the position of the victim. In the process, identities often become, to stay with the metaphor of autochthony, sedimented and static. Moreover, perhaps because of the important role of museums and other heritage institutions, the focus has often been on representation. On the one hand, this has been a question of aesthetics, or the form in which slavery is adequately represented. Should one focus on victimhood or resilience (Hamilton 2010)? On heroism or ordinary people trying to survive (Fatah-Black 2018)? What place should violence have in these displays (Wood 2002)? On the other, this has been a political question. What displays of slavery can adequately represent black communities in the Atlantic world? What, in other words, is the ‘authentic’ black experience?

In the Netherlands, for example, grassroots organizations mobilized the figure of the descendant of the enslaved as a unifying political symbol, a figure that, it was hoped, could speak with one voice and create political leverage. The government, too, wanted to deal with one partner who represented the black community as a whole, forcing the grassroots organizations who petitioned for a memorial to prove their legitimacy as representatives of ‘the’ black community in the Netherlands. Such an impossible task led to inevitable conflicts, most prominently during the unveiling ceremony of the national slavery memorial in Amsterdam, when the black elite attended the ceremony while ‘ordinary people’ were not admitted to the ceremonial grounds for security reasons. After all, the Queen was present, and the unveiling took place only weeks after a political murder had shocked the Netherlands (Stengs 2009). Several spokespersons of the black community took this as further evidence that the monument did not represent the right kind of descendants. They argued that the memorial project was an elite affair that was detached from the everyday concerns of regular people.

It is telling, then, that there is not one but several monuments to commemorate slavery in Amsterdam alone. The comité 30 juni/1 juli, the organizers of the earliest memorial project on Surinameplein (see Chapter 1), articulated their concerns about the involvement of the state in the national memorial project. They were aiming for a grassroots approach, addressing a different audience. Their project had already begun in the early 1990s, and they saw the national

memorial as an appropriation of their own project. They argued that the memory of slavery ought to remain at the grassroots level and that the state was not yet ready for this kind of gesture. They felt that the national memorial betrayed a more thorough engagement with the question of what slavery means in people's everyday lives today.

The logic of authenticity in the commemoration of slavery is also operative on a larger scale in controversies about black culture and heritage in the Atlantic world. As Paul Gilroy has argued, the pressures of economic recession (and, I would add, the dismantling of the welfare state) and populist racism has led to a 'retreat into pure ethnicity' among some black Europeans. Whereas the older generations yearn for a return to their places of birth in the Caribbean, the younger generations who are often born in Europe have 'moved towards an overarching Africentrism which can be read as inventing its own totalizing conception of black culture' (Gilroy 1993: 86–87).

This new ethnicity is all the more powerful because it corresponds to no actually existing black communities. Its radical utopianism, often anchored in the ethical bedrock provided by the history of the Nile Valley civilisations, transcends the parochialism of Caribbean memories in favour of a heavily mythologised Africanity that is itself stamped by its origins not in Africa but in a variety of pan-African ideology produced most recently by black America. (Gilroy 1993: 87)

Such a perspective runs the risk of repeating the ethnic absolutism of the cultural protectionists and their logic of autochthony by retreating into a primordialism that defines blackness in ever narrower and exclusive terms. Stuart Hall has argued that this position is problematic because it understands identity as one shared culture, an authentic core, a true self common to those with shared ancestry, one stable and unchanging people. This identity is understood to be hidden, buried under layers of colonial disfigurement, and as something to be discovered, excavated and brought to light.

Though problematic, it played a critical role in struggles from Pan-Africanism and the poets of *Négritude* to feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist movements of our time. In all of these, Hall argues, this identity is often the object of what Frantz Fanon once called a

passionate research . . . directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others. (Fanon 1963: 170, as quoted in Hall 1989: 223)



As Paul Gilroy has argued, this position cannot simply be dismissed as a wild goose chase. Constructivists who confront ethnic absolutism with anti-essentialist arguments often move ‘towards a casual and arrogant deconstruction of blackness while ignoring the appeal of the first position’s powerful, populist affirmation of black culture’ and abandoning the ‘ground of the black vernacular entirely’ (Gilroy 1993: 100). This perspective amounts to ignoring ‘the undiminished power of racism itself’ (Gilroy 1993: 101) and the ways in which black people make sense, politically and culturally, of the conditions under which they live.

Gilroy therefore proposes a third position he calls ‘anti-anti-essentialism’, in which he approaches, in his case, music as a *changing*, instead of unchanging, same, which involves ‘the difficult task of striving to comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions’ that are part and parcel of cultural transmission and translation (ibid.: 101).

Since Gilroy’s and Hall’s seminal intervention, headway has been made by anthropologists researching the complex production of black Atlantic heritage. Anthropologists working in Africa have shown how notions of ‘mythologised Africanity’ play out in the context of heritage and roots tourism, especially in West Africa (Hartman 2007; Holsey 2008; Jong and Rowlands 2007; Schramm 2010; Shaw 2002). These authors describe, often in highly self-reflexive ways, how the roots tourists’ notions of Africanness regularly clash with local political-economic interests, cultural frames and ethical considerations but also how they can, in some instances, create common ground. As Katharina Schramm has argued, the encounter between US American and European roots tourists and West Africans she found in Ghana was not a structure of clear-cut positions, but

a diffuse conglomeration of views and opinions that were floating around diverse discursive lines and that had different practical and political implications. Sometimes these views clashed or were contradictory, at other times they overlapped and were even at peace with one another. (Schramm 2010: 15)

Similar work has been done in Amsterdam Zuidoost, where self-identified ‘descendants of the enslaved’ live in close proximity to people from West Africa. In particular, Ghanaians, many of them members of Pentecostal churches (Van Dijk 2000), have a very different relation to transatlantic slavery and ‘African’ culture than the ‘descendants’ (De Witte 2017; see Chapter 3). In her research on

the renewed interest in African roots among ‘descendants’, Marleen de Witte has shown that for many, especially young ‘descendants’, Africanness is a matter of self-making, self-expression, self-styling and self-definition that is a response to a ‘dominant culture of identity and selfhood that touts the value of authenticity and “becoming who you really are”’. On the other hand, through critiques of stereotypes of Africa, Eurocentric beauty ideals and an emphasis on empowerment, ‘Africanness’ must also be read as a critical engagement with the cultural protectionists’ logic of autochthony.

By looking at people’s everyday lives, I take an approach that investigates how slavery is mobilized in these politics of autochthony. I ask if and how people in Amsterdam South East both *live* and *live by* the narratives produced in this emerging public sphere. What models of political subjectivity offered by narratives of cultural heritage do they adopt, adapt or abolish in their everyday lives? The question, thus, is not only what people *make of* the narratives circulating in the public sphere but, in the process, also how they *make* these narratives as they encounter, discuss or ignore them on their way to the groceries, work and in the general to and fro of their busy lives. If the emerging domain of cultural heritage produces new narratives of binding and belonging, how do people adopt, reject or negotiate these narratives in everyday life? What kinds of subjectivity do people articulate with reference to slavery and its cultural heritage? I argue that the larger appeal of *planetary* narratives about slavery needs to be understood in the ways they relate to *local* particularities in the Atlantic world.

This entails a grassroots view of how larger narratives about slavery are expressed locally. As I will show, it takes considerable, complex and complicated political work to give it a place in the dominant canons of history and cultural heritage, and the forms in which it is represented do not speak to all in the same way everywhere. The presence of slavery, then, needs to be authenticated locally, from specific cultural, social and physical locations. That is, it needs to be made credible for a very diverse public with very different stakes in the various memorial projects. Rather than restricting my analysis to the memorial projects themselves, the different stakes and stakeholders involved, and the politics of representation through which they emerge, I also look at the ways in which they are embedded locally in people’s everyday lives. How the memory of slavery matters, in what moments, and to whom, cannot be discussed in general terms. It needs to be pieced together, and, as I will argue in this book, it needs to be *traced*.

## Tracing Slavery

The notion of the trace allows me to move beyond the purely constructivist accounts of history that are dominant in memory studies, particularly in the Durkheimian tradition established by Maurice Halbwachs (1992). According to these accounts, the past is a social construction that is the outcome of political contestations and moral values in the present, and a central part of how social collectives represent themselves to themselves (Halbwachs 1992). Fostering shared memories of a collective past helps to ensure the continuity of collectivities (Vromen 1993: 511) as well as set the boundaries for such collectives. In other words, this view draws attention to the power relations involved in writing history. George Orwell famously wrote in *1984* that ‘who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past’ (Orwell 1949: 19). Long before Orwell, Walter Benjamin understood historiography as an emancipatory struggle: ‘In jeder Epoche muß versucht werden, die Überlieferung von neuem dem Konformismus abzugewinnen, der im Begriff steht, sie zu überwältigen’ (‘In every epoch an attempt must be made to reclaim the tradition anew from the conformism which is about to overwhelm it’) (Benjamin 2010: 18). In particular, the current obsession with the past has often been understood as a struggle over symbolic and material resources – as a politics of memory (Ashplant 2000; Hodgkin 2006; Hodgkin and Radstone 2003). Especially in the present post-truth era of ‘alternative facts’ and ‘deep state’ conspiracies, the ‘fact checking’ work of deconstruction is crucial. It is important to deconstruct historical narratives as operations of power, especially in the context of slavery (Trouillot 1995a).

Nonetheless, I share the growing dissatisfaction expressed recently by Mattijs van de Port and Birgit Meyer with constructivist writings that present ‘as a conclusion its finding that the history is “assembled”, the community is “imagined”, the tradition is “invented” or the identity is “staged”’ (Van de Port and Meyer 2018: 2). Such conclusions, Van de Port and Meyer argue, ‘stop at the point where research should begin’ (ibid.). They want to ask how if histories, communities, traditions and identities are fabricated do people ‘manage to convince themselves and others that this is not the case’. In fact, I want to go a step further and argue that the past is not only a fabrication but something that in a certain, perhaps ontological sense also exists in and of itself.

The notion of the trace helps me to reconcile ontology and constructivism because a trace has an indexical and a symbolic dimension. In the form of, for instance, footsteps, traces are an index of a past event. Traces, as Jacques Derrida has argued, are simultaneously past and present like spectres – not entirely there, nor entirely here. After all, spectres are in the twilight zone between past and present: coming from the past they haunt the present but are not entirely *of* the present. Spectres are thus not self-identical; they have ‘no being in itself’ but mark ‘a relation to what is no longer or not yet’ (Hägglund 2008: 82). The spectre thus has its own, hybrid being, its own ontology: a ‘hauntology’. The past comes to us in mediated form, but the medium carries something of the past itself. At the same time, these footsteps need to be actively identified as traces by someone with the ability to recognize and interpret them. Traces are connected in an indexical way to a past event, in a sense even caused by it, but that temporal connection is perceivable only for those with the ability to follow the trace in particular places.

An example from my fieldwork in Suriname may illustrate this idea of the trace. In October 2009, I went on a trip to the Surinamese rainforest. We, four European tourists, were following our guide, Mr Asudano, through the misty forest, and without him we would surely have been lost instantly. Mr Asudano had grown up in the area and had been working as a conservationist there for many years. He had been sharing with us his deep knowledge about the most unlikely creatures and the little-known medicinal properties of many plants in the forest when we entered a small sandy clearing with a little creek running through it. Mr Asudano stopped and pointed to the ground: ‘There! Do you see it?’ We saw sand, water and some dry leaves. At a loss, we gave him a blank look. ‘There,’ he pointed again, ‘a tapir walked here, you can clearly see the traces he left.’ ‘This is where he came from,’ he said, pointing to the right, then pointing to the left: ‘he went in that direction.’

The trace of the tapir invites us to appreciate the trace as a relation to a real event and as a material object in processes of meaning-making. An event occurred: the tapir had walked there, and it left footprints in the sand as a matter of fact – it really happened – and now it was somewhere in the bushes or, with some bad luck, in the belly of a jaguar. At the same time, one needs a particular mode of perception to recognize the trace *as a trace*, and as the trace of a tapir. One needs to know about the tapir, the shape of its hooves, its food habits, its habitat, and so on. Moreover, one needs to know what it means to have encountered its trace. Did we encounter the trace of a

very rare and shy animal? Or are there thousands of them trampling the creek night and day? Is the animal perhaps even sacred?

In a chemical sense, traces can be present as residues, as ‘trace elements’ that require specific technologies like atomic absorption spectrometry to be detected. They easily escape attention but can have very serious consequences – for example, for the allergic, even in very small amounts. Traces are thus assemblages of bits of knowledge that always remain partial and depend on someone with the kind of knowledge or physical sensitivity to make them present.

To give one more example from my research in the Netherlands, one interlocutor pointed out the postmodern-looking gabion walls enclosing a newly built parking lot in Amsterdam Southeast. ‘They always remind me of the slave walls in Curacao. I find them painful to look at.’ The Curacaoan stone walls, which were built by enslaved Africans, are a tourist attraction in Curacao (they are even shown on a postage stamp), but not everyone would link gabions to slave walls. The history is there, it is real, but it needs to be traced to become meaningful.

Examples such as this show that the trace cannot be understood outside the modes of perception established in the present; in the case of the tapir, the appreciation of ‘nature’ and the rise of conservationism, the touristic gaze, perhaps even religious systems; in the case of the slave wall, the public memory of slavery. This does not change the material factuality of the trace: it is really there, in a material sense.

My notion of the trace is meant as a way of discussing what people *do* with what the past has left them with – bodies, emotions, other matter and modes of social and cultural relationality. I see this as practices of piecing together, of recombination and reassembly. Traditions certainly need to be invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012), but inventors depend on the raw materials they have.

## Tracing as Cultural Memory

Ruben says that all other groups stand up for themselves, but only Afro-Surinamese don’t. ‘It’s as though they don’t dare to be [as in: exist] in the district council.’ According to Ruben, this is because black people have been ‘alienated from their being’ (*ze zijn van hun wezen ontvreemd*). They were never allowed to be, and their very being has been put into question continuously. ‘They have been infringed upon in their being (*Ze zijn in hun zijn aangetast*). This is why they are afraid to speak for themselves, now.’ ‘If you look at the district council, then you see that Afro-Surinamese always speak for the entire community, whereas

Hindostani Surinamese speak for themselves, just like all the others. Only the Afro-Surinamese don't.

This is reflected in art, John adds. He points out the poet Rudy Bedacht, and also Eddy Pinas, who writes in one of his poems: 'I am copyright 1863.'

We then talk about the statue of Anton de Kom. John says: 'It's exactly the same with the statue of Anton de Kom.' According to John, the whole issue shows the lack of political representation for Afro-Surinamese. He finds the naked rendition of Anton de Kom unacceptable. He tells a story of an old woman whom he overheard talking to someone at the bus stop. She was shocked by the statue, and felt deeply hurt, but not only because of the statue's nakedness, but also the fact that the statue was made out of a piece of wood. Apparently, this was quite terrible for many Afro-Surinamese. John and Ruben tell me about a Surinamese *odo* (proverb): *A no bon prit' mi* (I am not born from a tree). I think this can be understood as a claim for humanity – I am not some kind of jungle plant; I am a human being. From this perspective, the fact that the statue is made from a tree trunk is basically a slap in the face. John, too, finds the tree unacceptable; after all, De Kom was a *leriman*, an intellectual, who always wore a suit and a hat. Ruben is also angry about the fact that the artist, Jikke van Loon, recited a poem De Kom had written to his mother. This was entirely inappropriate. De Kom stands for putting slavery on the agenda, not for some pretty poems to his mother. 'This is really the essence of this man. He has provided insight into slavery.'<sup>9</sup> (Field notes, 7 June 2010)

John and Ruben's narrative has two dimensions, namely the dynamic between history and memory, and the cultural registers through which people relate to the past. The first dimension – the relationship between the monumental and the bus stop, or history and memory – has been a vexed question in memory studies. It evokes the much discussed tension between history, or the formalized, institutionalized and canonical knowledge of the past, and memory, or the embodied, everyday and unstructured recollections of individuals (Nora 1989; see also Olick and Robbins 1998).<sup>10</sup> John and Ruben's narrative, of course, shows that the distinction between memory and history proposed by Nora, in which history is aligned with modernity and memory with the pre-modern, is untenable. Ruben and John refer to the racialized history of modernity, evoking the grand narratives of humanism and the infra-human and what it means to locate black subjectivity in these narratives. He feels that Afro-Surinamese have been deprived of their individual rights and have adopted a way of referring to themselves only in typologies. In looking for a particular past, he is looking for a different sense of self, thus raising

fundamental questions about the liberal individual of the modern humanist tradition. When it comes to the statue of Anton de Kom, from John's point of view nothing less is at stake than humanity itself. The discussions about the adequacy of the material forms in which to cast the memory of slavery are thus about belonging in the most fundamental sense – belonging to humanity.

Their narrative, then, demonstrates a kind of memory that moves back and forth between the monumental and the bus stop (there is a literal bus stop right next to the statue of De Kom). It is a meandering mode of memory that goes beyond dichotomous notions of history and memory or public and private memory (see Gable and Handler 2000). Instead of adhering to a neatly delineated *milieux de mémoire* and *lieux de mémoire* as famously suggested by Pierre Nora, my aim is to convey a sense of how people move between those domains. As I will show in Chapter 5, cultural heritage resonates on different frequencies that range from the high pitch of public performances to the infrasound of clandestine rehearsal studios.

Ruben and John are engaged in a practice of tracing. They regard the present as a historical present that can reveal the traces of the past to those apt to find them. These practices of tracing – that is, the explorative movements of uncovering the past – entail a particular notion of memory that understands collective memory as embodied practice. Paul Connerton (1989), for example, who writes in Pierre Bourdieu's paradigm of practice, proposed a three-partite model of personal, cognitive and habitual memory in order to move beyond a Cartesian distinction between body and mind. Connerton critiques Halbwachs for failing to understand memory as it is practised. He therefore proposes to focus precisely on the performativity of memory; in the performance of ritual, he argues, it becomes clear how the distinction between personal (biographic), cognitive (experiential, 'I was there') and habitual (the capacity of reproducing an action) memory becomes blurred. As I have argued above, bodies and their histories have played a central role in the unveiling ceremony of Anton de Kom's statue.

Similarly, with their corresponding notions of the communicative and the cultural memory, Jan and Aleida Assmann have looked at the relatedness of the domains of public and personal memory. Communicative memory includes:

those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications. . . . Everyday communication is characterized by a high degree of non-specialization, reciprocity of roles, thematic

instability, and disorganization. Typically, it takes place between partners who can change roles. Whoever relates a joke, a memory, a bit of gossip, or an experience becomes the listener in the next moment. (J. Assmann 1995: 126–27)

This contrasts with the institutionalized and highly structured domain of cultural memory, which is stored in museums or heritage institutions and which follows a significantly different set of rules and conventions compared to communicative memory. Cultural memory, in Assmann’s understanding:

comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity. (J. Assmann 1995: 132)

Whereas in Assmann’s understanding the transition between communicative and cultural memory ‘is so fundamental that one must ask whether the metaphor of memory remains in any way applicable’ (J. Assmann 1995: 128), my aim is precisely to examine this transition more closely. I am interested in how the boundaries between the public and the private are maintained, negotiated or eroded as people engage with objects such as the statue of Anton de Kom.

Aleida Assmann distinguishes between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ memory, a distinction comparable to that of the storage (the backstage) and the exhibition (the front stage) of a museum (A. Assmann 2008: 98). In the case of slavery, however, it was precisely the hiddenness of slavery, the fact that particular items have been stashed away in the storerooms, that activated the push to include slavery in the heritage canons. Hence the institutionalization of slavery as an item of cultural heritage derived from a sense among black communities that the established canons did not resonate with the lived realities of everyday life.

Jan Assmann has pointed out that despite its high degree of disorganization communicative memory is also structured in certain ways: ‘There are occasions which more or less predetermine such communications, for example train rides, waiting rooms, or the common table; and there are rules – “laws of the market” – that regulate this exchange. There is a “household” within the confines of which this communication takes place’ (J. Assmann 1995: 127). In other words, the communicative memory, too, is structured according to conventions. It would be misleading to conceptualize the everyday as inchoate and beyond social and cultural conventions. I therefore take cultural memory to include the everyday.



This brings me to the second dimension Ruben and John touch upon, the role of culture in relation to the past. Tracing, that is moving between formal and informal, past and present domains, is a practice, and as such it is culturally coded. Ruben, for example, always kept an eye out for clues such as songs, proverbs, gestures, or the smallest mannerisms that would reveal the past in the present. Similarly, people's experiences with and of the De Kom statue are mediated through cultural forms and practices, like *odo*, or the particular history De Kom embodies. I therefore argue that we ought not talk about 'the' memory of slavery in a generic way, because this memory, like any memory, is informed by culturally and historically mediated ways of perception and experience.

These are not academic debates but issues negotiated at the bus stop. As people discuss these large issues in small places, they do so in particular cultural registers. In Afro-Surinamese cultural idiom, the wooden material of the statue carries the traces of a history of dehumanization. To the women at the bus stop, the wood of the tree speaks of bodies that were marked as infra-human. Ironically, this history of dehumanization was involved in the creation of a statue that aimed to address and transcend it. This is what I refer to as the cultural memory of slavery – the cultural idioms, practices, rituals and meanings through which slavery becomes perceptible.

Aby Warburg, in his work on the art of the Renaissance, has understood the past as a kind of energy preserved in and accessible through cultural form. With his notion of *energeia*, Warburg 'set out to investigate in detail the precise mechanisms that produce what we so nonchalantly call the "life" of a work of art' (A. Assmann 1996: 123). To Warburg, the central concept through which this life of a work of art could be understood was through its symbolism, in the widest sense of the term, in which 'we find preserved those energies of which it is, itself, the result' (Gombrich 1986: 243). In my terminology of the trace, Warburg's notion of *energeia*, the energy of the pathos as preserved in the symbolism, can be understood as an indexical relation to past emotions. Importantly, for Warburg such a relation is structured in the cultural forms in which it is expressed.

Such a notion of culture, and thus cultural memory, emphasizes the culturally informed interactions between people and objects. Such an idea of cultural memory understands people's relation to the past as mediated, and thus focuses on the culturally informed practices of *recherche* in Andreas Huyssen's sense or 'passionate research' in Fanon's – an active search for the past, through which the past itself takes shape, rather than an act of retrieval:

The mode of memory is *recherche* rather than recuperation. The temporal status of any act of memory is always the present and not, as some naive epistemology might have it, the past itself, even though all memory in some ineradicable sense is dependent on some past event or experience. It is this tenuous fissure between past and present that constitutes memory, making it powerfully alive and distinct from the archive or any other mere system of storage and retrieval. (Huysen 1995: 3)

The past, in other words, needs to be pieced together, and this practice of piecing together is culturally informed. Ruben, for example, was constantly looking for clues that point to the presence of slavery in everyday life: in the district council, in Afro-Surinamese art or the representation of blackness in ‘Western’ art, even among his West African neighbours.

This practice of piecing together is precisely what interests me here as a culturally informed practice in everyday life. For Ruben’s concern is not merely to piece together the past but in doing so piece together a sense of self in the present that is different from the typologies offered in dominant paradigms of blackness and whiteness.

Ruben’s practice of piecing together relates to a broader modality of modernity that is captured by the notion of the trace. Carlo Ginzburg (1979), for example, has viewed the trace as a broader scientific paradigm that took shape in the nineteenth century. Freud’s notion of the symptom, Sherlock Holmes’ criminological search for clues and Morelli’s investigation of pictorial traces are all expressions of the same idea that propositions that broader phenomena can be inferred from small details.

Tracing the past is as much about piecing together what one was as it is about piecing together who one is now, or aspires to be, a political subjectivity. As Ginzburg argues, the kind of subjectivation implied in the fingerprint merged a biographical past and a present persona: the fingerprint made it possible to address the increasing problem of recidivism in the late nineteenth century. Ginzburg sees this as the inauguration of the modern secular individual:

This example [of the fingerprint] shows the deep connection between the problem of individuality and the problem of social control. In fact, it can be said that the individual, born in a religious context (persona), acquired its modern, secularized meaning only in relation with the State. Concern with an individual’s uniqueness – as taxpayer, soldier, criminal, political subversive and so on – is a typical feature of developed bureaucracies. Most aptly, in the nineteenth century, traditional figures of those who control everyday life in society, such as priests, were increasingly superseded by new ones: physicians, policemen, psychiatrists, later on

psychoanalysts and social scientists. It is in this context that we can understand the pervasive influence of the model based on clues – the semiotic paradigm. (Ginzburg 1979: 284)

Ruben's and others' investments in the grand narratives of public memorials can thus be seen as piecing together a sense of self and political subjectivity by way of piecing together the past. Here, I take as a point of departure the idea that history (i.e. the formalized and sanctioned forms of relating to the past, including monuments, historical canons, museums, etc.) is deeply implicated in the formation of communities, whether supranational, national or within the nation state. This means that the power of these representations reaches into the everyday, but this is not a self-evident and automatic process. Rather, it is a process of negotiation in which officially sanctioned narratives are constantly re-evaluated, adopted or dismissed and continuously have to struggle for recognition. This is not to say that such master narratives are not powerful – quite the opposite. In order to understand how they unfold their power, we need to examine how they manage or fail to appeal to and persuade the people they address.

This link between tracing and subjectivity is crucial because slavery in particular is felt by the descendants to have deprived them of 'who they are'. In order to find themselves, they need to connect the fingerprints their ancestors have left throughout history to their bodies and selves in the present. This tracing holds the promise of reconstituting the person.<sup>11</sup> In this forensic paradigm, the trace has a distinctively ethical dimension. Not only is the integrity of the person an ethical imperative and a fundamental human right in democratic societies; Sherlock Holmes follows clues not only to establish the identity of a suspect but to bring them to justice. Tracing, therefore, also establishes guilt and punishment, a dimension that is crucial for many descendants of the enslaved. In that sense, it is not surprising that the work of historians, despite an insistence on factual 'evidence', is more often than not enmeshed in questions of ethics.

## Diaspora and/as Tracing

Tracing, then, implies a dynamic of active (re)search and historical conditions. In *Jazz*, Toni Morrison engaged poetically with this dynamic between past and present. The past might haunt us, she writes in the preface to the 2004 edition, but it does not entrap us

(2004: xvi). The narrator's epiphany in the final chapter, then, is not so much an act of liberation, of closure, but empirical evidence: the facts have simply proven wrong the assumption that the past dictates the future:

So I missed it altogether. I was sure one would kill the other. I waited for it so I could describe it. I was so sure it would happen. That the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle. I was so sure, and they danced and walked all over me. Busy, they were, busy being original, complicated, changeable – human, I guess you'd say, while I was the predictable one, confused in my solitude into arrogance, thinking my space, my view was the only one that was or that mattered. I got so aroused while meddling, while finger-shaping, I overreached and missed the obvious. (Morrison 2005: 220)

People may be haunted by the past, but they are also people: dancing, walking, busy being original, complicated, changeable. Who they are emerges out of this doubleness of an imposed direction and piecing together one's own perspective. This is expressed in diaspora scholarship as a dynamic between roots and routes. As Katharina Schramm has argued, this is 'a critical pairing that . . . has retained its analytical value despite its being excessively used' (Schramm 2010: 23), which implies that the analytical value of it lies in the *dynamic between* the two terms, rather than in either one by themselves. As Stuart Hall has argued, cultural identity is 'a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being". It belongs to the future as much as the past.' He continues:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall 1989: 225)

Cultural identity, in this understanding, is fundamentally shaped by, even disfigured or 'ruined' (Stoler 2013) by, colonial experience, but there is no fixed origin to which one can make a definite return. Cultural identity is not a 'fixed essence' but a 'positioning' (Hall 1989: 226).

The notion of the trace I develop here picks up precisely this dynamic of a present that is *haunted* as well as *becoming*. Traces, in this understanding, are not linear, connecting an origin with a destination

in a straightforward, determined way. Traces can meander (the tapir may have changed direction, walked in circles, or encountered other tapirs). Perhaps in the way of a rhizome<sup>12</sup> they have multiple entry points and are not encountered necessarily at their beginning or end. As one begins to trace them, they can disappear and reappear, go backward, forward or in circles. Traces are not beaten tracks; they need to be *pieced together* rather than followed like one would do with a signposted trail.

Traces are thus not monodirectional and singular: tracking one set of footsteps one discovers other footsteps – the tracks do not run in a straight line but may go back and forth, in circles, etc. It is what Édouard Glissant (1997) called a form of ‘errantry’, literally the quality, condition or fact of wandering. Glissant’s errantry is a form of nomadism that is non-invasive and does not strive to establish a ‘totalitarian root’, ‘a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it’. He likens the ‘wanderlust’ of errantry to the idea of the rhizome, developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1987):

an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other. (Glissant 1997: 11)

As Rosi Braidotti has argued, Glissant’s ‘becoming nomadic’ marks ‘the process of positive transformation of the pain of loss into the active production of multiple forms of belonging and complex allegiances’ (Braidotti 2011: 288). This means that the practice of tracing simultaneously moves backward and forward in time: the footsteps were left in the past, but they also lie ahead of me.

Especially in the present context in which earlier notions of racial difference are increasingly expressed through an essentialist view of cultural difference (Balkenhol et al. 2016; Gilroy 2019a), it seems crucial to me to insist on a relational understanding of identity. The notion of the trace, for example, helps me to reframe a popular misconception according to which advocates of the commemoration of slavery are stuck in the past and should rather ‘move on’. Tracing slavery, as Saidiya Hartman has argued, is not ‘an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory’ but a critique of its afterlife: ‘skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment’

(Hartman 2007: 6).<sup>13</sup> In that sense, tracing a past that includes but is not limited to slavery is ultimately concerned with a better future in which this ‘racial calculus’ and ‘political arithmetic’ will have been overcome.

In a broader sense, then, racial formations are something people *do*, not something people *are* (Balkenhol and Schramm 2019). As the debates surrounding the statue of Anton de Kom show, phenotype is a highly unreliable indicator of how someone experiences the past. What I found with regard to what slavery meant to people, then, cannot be reduced to the experience of racism alone. Indeed, looking at the ways in which people deal with the histories of determination they embody, I have found, next to racism, also forms of solidarity and conviviality that may go beyond reified and clearly delineated racial formations. Hence I see ‘racial formations’ as the specific, dynamic and intersubjective modes by which people relate to one another in reference to the past, which includes, but is not restricted to, racist relations. For what is put at stake in the statue of Anton De Kom, and as I will show in the cultural memory of slavery in general, is not only the uneven and skewed colonial imagination of racial difference and its afterlife but also forms of solidarity and conviviality.

Ethnography has an important part to play in teasing out the traces by which people link up with the past. Looking in more – ethnographic – detail at the ways in which race emerges in everyday practice, to evoke once more Toni Morrison’s metaphor, can draw attention not only to the groove of the record of race but also to the moments in which the needle refuses to follow the groove and begins to jump and scratch, thus leaving new traces. I therefore argue in this book that if we aim for an understanding of racism we need to give full weight to the ethnographic complexity of the situation.

## On Ethnographers and Experience

At the end of the event, a woman who has been sitting in front of me turns around. She asks me: ‘So? How do you feel when you hear all this?’ I ask her what she means, and remark that I thought the lecture was interesting. ‘Well, what do you feel when you hear about everything your people did?’ I reply that they were not ‘my people’ and that it wasn’t me who did this. She retorts that these people were white, after all, and that they did it to black people. I try to explain that I am not convinced about these stories of black and white, and that to me, it is much more important to talk about these things *together*, instead of about one another. I tell her that I don’t believe in such separations. I ask her how to explain the phenomenon of the *Redi Musu*<sup>14</sup> if one insists on distinctions of

black and white. She insists that the *Redi Musu* were forced into service under the threat of death, otherwise they would not have done this.

At some point in the conversation, I realize that the front lines are softening somewhat. She tells me how she had always admired white people, and that she got along with them just fine. One day, however, she wanted to have 1 July off work.<sup>15</sup> That wasn't a problem, but her colleague gave her a 'slave book' for the occasion. Only at that point did she begin to be interested in her own history. Although she got along well with her colleagues, she began to think: 'How can I continue to work or live with these people?'

A colleague, she tells me, married a German. Her other colleagues were shocked, especially a Jewish colleague. The Jewish colleague said, 'maybe your husband killed my father or my grandfather!' With slavery, it's just like that, she tells me. Maybe one of my ancestors tortured and enslaved one of her ancestors. She wonders why the Dutch still celebrate 4 and 5 May [the national day of liberation], whereas the abolition of slavery is not being celebrated. (Field notes, 3 June 2010)

Ethnography is personal, and as my short exchange with Jane shows, this was more often than not made explicit during my fieldwork in Amsterdam Zuidoost. I quickly learned that my presence, indeed my body itself, was often read as a trace of the very history I was researching. Yet what I learned just as quickly was that the way people (including myself) feel about slavery is not self-evident but informed by positionalities and allegiances that are durable but can also *shift* at particular moments. The tracing I undertook with my interlocutors included not only historical or vertical depth but also political or horizontal width.

The field notes quoted above, jotted down right after I came home from the event, are as raw as they come. They document not only Jane's particular mode of addressing me but at least as strongly they convey my reading of Jane's question at the time, and the annoyance with which I reacted. I was annoyed because I felt both wrongly accused and as though she had left me no room to be anything except a criminal. Rereading my field notes from that stage of the fieldwork, it seems that I was fed up with a sense of having to apologize, and with a feeling of being coerced into admitting guilt. This sense was only in part due to a sense of discomfort at being confronted with slavery in this way; my discomfort, indeed my annoyance, also derived from a growing confidence I felt doing this research. Whereas at the beginning of my fieldwork I was almost afraid to even approach people, issuing pre-emptive apologies for my presence, which, I felt, reproduced the uneven structures of the white hegemonic gaze, as the project progressed I began to appreciate the complex structures

of feeling that I and my interlocutors were enmeshed in. I began to see exchanges such as the one with Jane as ritualized, and the more I acquired proficiency in these rituals, the more I was able to navigate positions other than that of apologetic and defensive whiteness. My growing knowledge of these ritual exchanges sometimes allowed a degree of playfulness in which positions could be switched, caricatured and subverted.

How feelings and emotions can be experienced but also mobilized demonstrates a core concern of this book, namely the emotional, political and social proximity of slavery and the ways in which it informs social relationality in the Netherlands today. I think that with this question, people addressed what is at the heart of the remembrance of slavery in the Netherlands today: *Bij wie leeft de slavernij?* (For whom is slavery ‘alive?’), which for me begs the question of what that means, to be ‘alive’?

At least since *Writing Culture* (Clifford 1999; Clifford and Marcus 1986), it has become common in anthropology to reflect the position of the researcher-self within the research, and I would say correctly so. As Mustafa Emirbayer and Matthew Desmond have argued: ‘our understanding of the racial order will forever remain unsatisfactory so long as we fail to turn our analytic gaze back upon ourselves, the analysts of racial domination, and inquire critically into the hidden presuppositions that shape our thought’ (Emirbayer and Desmond 2012: 574). In other words, the partiality and situatedness of all knowledge, and in particular ethnographic knowledge, must always be part of the object of research. As Donna Haraway has argued, scientific ‘objectivity’ only goes as far as the reflection of its partiality:

I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make relational knowledge claims. These are claims on people’s lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. Only the god trick is forbidden. (Haraway 1988: 589)

The field notes about my first meeting with Jane certainly represent a ‘view from a body’ – my body, my emotions. Such a view is a particular scientific practice, which, according to Henrietta L. Moore, requires ‘a clear sense of position and of the politics of location’, or the ‘necessity of speaking out, declaring one’s politics’: ‘Who and what do we represent when we speak out, and how do we negotiate the inevitable problem in the social sciences of having to speak about



people whilst trying not to speak for them?’ (Moore 1994: 8–9). This book is not first and foremost *about* me, but it is also unthinkable *without* me, as I am incorporated in structures of power through a position of relative whiteness/privilege/masculinity/nationality. Hence this book is unthinkable without a rigorous thinking through of my own positionality in relation to interlocutors.

The challenge, however, is to do so without relapsing into a kind of identity politics that as Emirbayer and Desmond (2012) argue has run its course. For what exactly does it add to my analysis if I declare that I am white, a German, heterosexual, middle-class, an academic, a critical scholar, a man, good with languages, or whatever else I find important to mention?<sup>16</sup> What exactly does this say about my privilege? Which *et ceteras* do I mention, which do I leave out? Such confessions, Sara Ahmed reminds us, can easily lead to ‘declarations of whiteness’ – a blanket claim that one’s position is tainted by definition – that in the end ‘do not do what they say’, namely address racism (Ahmed 2004a). An overemphasis of subjective experience, as Henrietta L. Moore points out, can result in further depoliticization: ‘Positionality is too often reduced to individual experience and/or to representation: “I know because I’ve been there” and “I know because I am one”’ (Moore 1994: 2). These ‘slippages’, Moore continues, ‘are particularly troublesome when linked to grounds for authority’ (*ibid.*), in particular because their introversion ultimately makes impossible what they demand – a critical analysis of *social*, as opposed to psychological-pathological, processes of subjectivation.

In my understanding, this means taking emotions seriously as *social* phenomena, as they emerge through intersubjective transactions. Jane’s emotions and my own are relational; they emerge in and through our particular transaction. I see emotions as traces, a notion akin to Sara Ahmed’s relational concept of *affective economies*, which examines a dual movement of emotions: they reach backwards in time – they have histories – and they ‘slide’ sideways in affective economies (Ahmed 2004b). My interaction with Jane is embedded in histories of determination and relatively durable social hierarchies, but the durability of these histories can be understood only by looking at the particular situation through which Jane and I relate. Whiteness and blackness emerged in this situation as a practice and as interpellation, and I propose to look at the frameworks and formations that make such practices and interpellations possible.

For an anthropological analysis, this ought to be seen as an opportunity rather than something to be overcome. Since ethnography is

always about degrees of immersion (Schramm 2005; Wekker 2006), out of necessity ethnographers themselves must become one of their own most important assets: our presence and our degree of immersion and immersability prompt responses and change the situation but also force us to reflect on relationality and the ways in which we are implicated in our own research. In a similar vein, Moore therefore proposes a notion of the ‘lived anatomy’ and of bodily praxis as a mode of knowledge that draws on an understanding of experience as a form of ‘embodied intersubjectivity’: ‘The very fact of being present as an embodied subject gives a particular character to the ontology of experience, which emphasizes the degree to which social interactions are embodied ones taking place in concrete space and time’ (Moore 1994: 3–4).

This is how I propose to understand my interaction with Jane. She was the author of the situation just as I was; it was an act of interpellation in which we both situated ourselves vis-a-vis one another *and* vis-à-vis the histories of determination already in place.

I, for example, opted for a particular reading of Jane’s question by the response I gave. I refused to be addressed in terms of guilt, and I articulated this refusal by mobilizing a particular argument of liberal individualism that is well known in this context. That is, I chose to read Jane’s question as a personal indictment (‘You and your people are guilty’), which is easily disavowed within a paradigm of individual rights (‘I was not there, I did not commit the crime personally’). As Saidiya Hartman has argued, such an emphasis on the individual locates claims in the realm of judicial redress, which then ‘must satisfy the demand for identifiable victims and perpetrators, unambiguous causation, limited and certain damage, and the acceptance that the agreed remuneration shall be final. This [is a] reduction of collective appeal to the forms of grievance common to the paradigm of individual rights’ (Best and Hartman 2005: 8). As such, it is easily disavowed because ‘the victims and perpetrators have been long dead’ (ibid.). Arguments such as this relegate slavery to the pre-modern; in this kind of argument, slavery appears as a sign of barbarism, as not a part of modernity, and therefore irrelevant to the present. Of course, even at the time I would not have claimed that slavery had no relevance today. Yet, at least to a certain extent, in my response to Jane I unwittingly accepted a history of disavowal by locating my argument inside a paradigm of liberal individualism that makes slavery appear as a kind of anachronism not of our time. Thus I performed a position of privilege, informed by a hegemonic kind of knowledge or conviction about modernity’s moral righteousness,

in which it is really quite easy to undo claims about slavery and accountability.

At the same time, this has been prompted at least to a certain extent by Jane's interpellation. By referring to 'your people' on the one hand and 'us' on the other, she performed what Michel-Rolph Trouillot has called 'genealogical construction': her statement requires not only the existence of a clear-cut collective that can operate as a historical agent but also the impossible assumption that this historical agent is both the same *and* different (i.e. both unrepentant perpetrator and repenting defendant). Trouillot argues that this is highly problematic because it transfers to collectivities the 'attributes that a dominant North Atlantic discourse had hitherto assigned to the liberal subject' (Trouillot 2000: 173). In other words, Jane's interpellation of 'your people' can be read as a substantialist claim that treats collectivities as if they were persons with individual affects such as remorse, guilt or embarrassment. Understood this way, Jane's interpellation paradoxically engages in the same discourse of liberal individualism my disavowal engaged in.<sup>17</sup>

Yet what if Jane was not looking for an apology, or an admission of guilt? What if she was genuinely interested in my feelings? What if she was looking for solidarity, a common ground? Could I not read Jane's claim in these terms? Not in terms of guilt and victimhood but in terms of responsibility and, indeed, solidarity? Having grown up in Germany, I am of course familiar with such a distinction. While I am not *guilty* of the Nazi crimes in a legal sense, as a German national I am – in my view correctly – expected to take *responsibility* and 'never forget'. In fact, this expectation is particularly relevant in a country such as the Netherlands, where I continue to be addressed as a German (e.g. recently, one of my students said that: 'If I was my grandfather, well, I would probably refuse to talk to you').

Thinking about the scene with some more distance, then, I now choose a different reading of Jane's claim, as responsibility rather than guilt. As Trouillot has argued, '... historical responsibility cannot hark back to an original sin that the collective-individual supposedly committed. Rather, it needs to take into account the structures of privilege unleashed by a history of power and domination and to evaluate the current losses induced by the reproduction of these structures' (Trouillot 2000: 183). Evidenced by the ensuing conversation in which she candidly described her own struggle both with this past and how to relate to her white colleagues and friends, she was interested in dialogue, not a match of moral or legal wrestling.

Jane and I became acquainted, and I met her frequently during my research. The question of guilt began to recede quickly, making room for the more complex but also more interesting question of what it means in everyday practice to take responsibility for the past, and, more importantly, to ‘take into account the structures of privilege unleashed by a history of power and domination’ is a matter of ongoing negotiation.

For example, if Jane problematized my *involvement* in history, many others were concerned with the fact that I was *insufficiently* involved in this history. Having been trained as an anthropologist in New Zealand, where I became fascinated with the negotiations of the colonial past, I took this fascination to the Netherlands aiming to do ‘something on colonialism’. The intellectual interest that developed out of this eventually led me to apply for the position in the NWO research project *Heritage Dynamics*.<sup>18</sup> The subproject I applied for had been entitled in the proposal: *The Trauma of Slavery: The Aesthetics of Blackness in the Netherlands*. It proposed to analyse how ‘carrier groups’ have been ‘striving to have the “traumatic” history of slavery recognized as part of the country’s national and colonial heritage’ and to:

... show how these particular articulations of cultural heritage are authenticated by the emotions and sentiments evoked in an aesthetics of persuasion that highlights suffering, thus inviting the Caribbean Dutch (numbering a modest two percent of the Dutch population) to signify and explain happenings in their everyday lives in terms of the traumas suffered under slavery.

Hence this project was not initially ‘my own’. And while I owned up to it soon enough, many thought that a clearly perceptible link between me and the topic was lacking. During my research, with quite some perplexity and wonderment, the question most people asked me time and again, sometimes curiously, sometimes suspiciously, and sometimes even in a hostile way: *What made you choose this topic?* One might say that this should come as no surprise. When I moved to the Netherlands in September 2006, I knew next to nothing about the Dutch colonial past in general, or the Dutch involvement in racial slavery in particular. I had never been to or heard of the *monument van besef* on Surinameplein in Amsterdam, and I was even unaware of the more widely known national slavery memorial in Oosterpark (Amsterdam). So why would a white German man who has no clue about the Dutch and their past be interested in Dutch colonialism and slavery? What, to paraphrase a similar argument made on my

Facebook timeline, could white people contribute to an understanding of the presence of slavery?

Others again found my insufficient involvement an advantage rather than a problem. They welcomed the fact that I was not as ‘emotionally involved’ and could thus provide a critical contribution to an ongoing debate many experienced as gridlocked. My involvement as a critical intellectual for many held (and still holds) the promise to bring in fresh perspectives into a debate many feel is already exhausted.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, while a question such as this had sometimes brought me close to throwing in the towel, there was always also a sense that giving up would be even ‘worse’. In fact, this play with intimacy and distance in which I was so enmeshed began to interest me as a focus of the investigation. I began to wonder about what it was precisely people were asking me with this question. If it was this unnatural for me to do this research, could somebody have been found for whom it would have been natural, self-evident and unquestionable to do it? Who would that person have been?

So sometimes when people asked me why *I* was doing this research, I would answer with the question: *Why not?* To gently point out my background, my skin colour or my privilege seemed increasingly less satisfactory to me as a reply. In fact, this question of why I chose this topic in fact demonstrates the urgency for this study, which seeks to understand the afterlife of slavery in people’s practices of everyday life.

This question gives insight into the fundamental role of slavery in processes of social positioning and subjectivation. As my juxtaposition of Jane’s question and that of many others shows, whether I am addressed as a white man, a German or a critical intellectual matters in crucial ways. If I am certainly speaking from a social position of privilege that needs to be acknowledged, this does not automatically mean that my analysis is tainted by definition. Indeed, privilege may be seen as a practice rather than a position alone – it is always also something we *do*, not only something we *are*. Making my privileged position explicit is a necessity, but more important still is to examine what I do with it and how I apply myself to the issue at hand.

If this project was an academic enterprise at the beginning, over the years it became quite personal. I met people I came to care about, and I felt hurt (like in the scene with Jane), and thus a purely abstract and hypothetical engagement in the issue became less and less possible. At the same time, it became clear to me that slavery and the colonial past affected me in more fundamental ways. For posing the

question of the presence of slavery in the Netherlands also necessarily implies a critical reflection of the ideals I was raised to embrace – the possibility of antiracist democracy, the meaning of freedom and of equality. It is now clear to me that these values, which I grew up with and that touch on the very process of my own becoming, cannot be thought and lived without a rigorous understanding of the historical situation in which they emerged. The history of colonialism is not ‘black’ history; it affects the way I am positioned and position myself in the world, and this includes, but is not limited to, race. What we share is the obligation to work out a sense of responsibility for these different positionalities and their histories. While this has often been understood as a historical and philosophical undertaking, I now know that it must also be an ethnographic one. In order to understand these core human values that we maintain, we need to understand the presence of those historical legacies through which they continue to emerge. I firmly believe that this is a project that can only be achieved collectively.

## An Ethnography of Past Matters

The statue of Anton de Kom, one of the greatest Afro-Surinamese heroes, has settled firmly into the urban landscape. It overlooks the large and open square bearing De Kom’s name in the heart of Amsterdam Zuidoost. Several days a week, there is a colourful and bustling market that sells everything from clothing and bicycle locks to meat and tropical produce, including *botervis*, *antroea* vegetables and spiritual *winti* necessities imported from Suriname, to Ghanaian *fufu* flour and *kibbeling* from the North Sea. The diversity of products reflects the diversity of Zuidoost’s residents, who hail from Suriname, the former Dutch Antilles, West Africa and the Netherlands. (Field notes, summer 2010)

Colonialism in general, and transatlantic slavery in particular, has been such a fundamental element in the formation of the Dutch nation that its legacies can be found virtually everywhere: *grachtenpanden* have been built with money earned in the slave trade and from the plantations, as have the *buitenhuizen* along the river Vecht between Utrecht and Amsterdam, and many of their façades still speak of this past (Blakely 1993).<sup>20</sup> Dutch modes of being-in-the-world cannot be seen in isolation of maritime imperial expansion, the ships, the dykes and the very idea of cultivation and ‘making land’, and many families’ genealogies and biographies are entwined with the colonial past. Last but not least, former colonial subjects and masters live in

close physical proximity in the Netherlands. As many have argued, slavery and colonialism have been a constitutive element of the very concept of modernity on which Europe has been built (Gilroy 1993; Isin 2012), and the Netherlands are no exception.

Traces of colonialism and slavery are, as it were, everywhere in the Netherlands (Van Stipriaan et al. 2007). Yet this pervasive presence also makes for its ordinariness; it has become part of normality to such an extent that it does not strike as unusual. Hence the history of slavery may be hidden, but like Dickens' *purloined letter*, it is hidden in plain sight. The fact that traces of slavery are everywhere implies that they are nowhere in particular: the memory of slavery, it seems, does not have a particular place in which it can be found and researched. My research could have been conducted in the Jordaan, as well as, say, in a bowling alley in Purmerend; in a museum, an archive, around the monuments, or a *grachtenpand*. So how to approach the memory of slavery methodologically?

The ethnography I employ here is one of tracing – that is, I follow the traces of slavery as they are made perceptible in particular places by particular people. Yet my notion of the trace implies that traces cannot simply be followed; they need to be recognized as such in order to be followed. In other words, if I wanted to understand how to trace slavery, I had to learn that skill myself.

During my seven-month apprenticeship in 2010, I had many teachers, among them Yvette and Edouard, whom we will meet frequently throughout the book, both explicitly and implicitly. They invited me to weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, funerals and all kinds of other occasions, both ordinary and extraordinary. We spent countless hours 'hanging out' (Geertz 1998) in what has been called folk seminars (Gwaltney 1980; Wekker 1998a): informal gatherings that differ from more structured focus group interviews because they are spontaneous – conducted on the fly and in spaces people are familiar with. These folk seminars took place in Edouard's and Yvette's living rooms or on their balconies, with their families and friends. There were folk seminars in bars, cafés and restaurants, or even while driving. Many of these seminars also took place in the rehearsal studio with Edouard's band, or in the car on our way to gigs.

Folk seminars and ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979) also took place at the Kwakoe Podium cultural centre, one of the oldest cultural centres in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Kwakoe Podium was founded in the 1970s by Surinamese Dutch moving to the Netherlands as a place to meet and greet, party, but also to organize politically. The

name Kwakoe signals some of the pervasive and self-evident mnemonic presence of slavery. The name Kwakoe is inspired by the West African name given to boys born on a Wednesday, and here serves as a reference to the day of abolition on Wednesday, 1 July 1863. At Kwakoe Podium, I spent countless hours hanging out with the centre's staff and frequent customers. We sat in the office upstairs or in the bar downstairs, talking endlessly about Afro-Surinamese proverbs, music, history and what it means to be black in the Netherlands.

I also went to meetings and commemorations and on excursions. I participated in a political campaign and helped in the organization of a film festival (which did not materialize in the end, for various reasons). Last but not least, I participated in the multitude of commemorative ceremonies on Surinameplein, in Oosterpark, on Kastanjeplein, in Middelburg, in Abcoude and in several neighbourhood centres.

Ethnography as a scientific method itself, of course, carries traces of colonial modes of knowledge production; the fact that many of my interlocutors were acutely aware of these traces warrants some clarification on this point. As a discipline, anthropology has emerged in an ambiguous relationship to colonial regimes of governance, and an ethnography of slavery has to take this history into account. At the same time, anthropology has certainly been among the disciplines where the entanglements of scientific knowledge and power have been critiqued most thoroughly (Fabian 2002; Said 1978), not least by anthropologists themselves (Asad 1973; Clifford 1999; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Fabian 2000, 2002; Harrison 1997; Pels 1997; Pels and Salemink 1994). It is perhaps not necessary to rehearse an entire subfield of scholarly critique in which anthropology as a whole and ethnography in particular has been reappraised since the publication of these classics.<sup>21</sup> The value of these debates, to me, is less that they can be invoked as disclaimers but that they call for and put at stake a particular ethnographic practice. The issue here is, therefore, no longer to critique or defend ethnography but to reflect on the kind of knowledge it produces. If anthropology is indeed the science of 'othering' and othering is a mode of power, the goal must be to develop this tool as a powerful mode of critical knowledge – of making 'the strange familiar and the familiar strange' (Malinowski 1922; O'Reilly 2009: 140). Hence if there is any declaration I could make at the beginning of this book, it is a pledge to understand the practical logic of slavery's afterlife in the Netherlands today – it is one for ethnography.

The memory of slavery in the Netherlands has so far been historians' business (Brandon and Bosma 2019; Fatah-Black 2018; Oostindie



1989, 2001; Van Stipriaan 1993). Although some anthropologists have engaged with the memory of slavery (Lamur 2001), ethnographic approaches to the memory of slavery have not established a field of scholarship comparable to the historiographic study of slavery and its afterlives. This is unfortunate because this way the considerable body of ethnographic work on Afro-Surinamese culture, both in Suriname and in the Netherlands, is bypassed in the understanding of commemorations of slavery. With this book, I want to show that we are missing important dimensions of the memory of slavery if we do not pay attention to the rich cultural frameworks of which the memory of slavery is part and through which the articulation of political subjectivity takes shape. Building on both classical ethnography (Herskovits 1990; Herskovits and Herskovits 1936; Price 2002; Thoden van Velzen and Wetering 2004; Wooding 1972) as well as more recent work (Hoogbergen 2009; van der Pijl 2007; Wekker 2006), I want to show how the articulation of political subjectivity through cultural heritage is enmeshed in cultural systems of gender (Janssens and van Wetering 1985; Wekker 1998a, 1998b, 2009), religion (Gelder and Wetering 1991; Sansone, Soumonni and Barry 2008; Wetering 2012; Van Wetering 1997), music (Bilby 1999; Sansone 1993, 1994) and street culture (Sansone 1992, 1993). Precisely because the memory of slavery is so deeply ingrained in Afro-Surinamese cultural systems and practices, I find ethnography an indispensable tool to understand how diasporic identity is articulated by tracing slavery.

## Structure of the Book

The first chapter is an analysis of the earliest public commemoration of slavery in the Netherlands on Surinameplein. Taking as a point of departure the idea implied in the notion of the trace that identities are pieced together and articulated not static, I follow Roy Ristie, one of my most important interlocutors, to Amsterdam Zuidoost, his home for more than forty years. The marginalization of this place as a ‘black ghetto’ but also the struggle by Surinamese settlers to make this place home must be seen as the motivation behind commemorating slavery on Surinameplein in the early 1990s. I unpack how identities of the ‘descendants’ emerge through an engagement with racialized colonial geographies that define them as ‘not belonging to the soil’. Roy and the people behind the Surinameplein project critically engage with the politics of autochthony in the Netherlands in their claim

to Dutch soil, but significantly they do not reject them. Rather, they claim autochthony for themselves. This implies a broader argument about the politics of autochthony in the Netherlands that has so far remained implicit in anthropological analyses. In the Netherlands, autochthony – being born from the soil – implies whiteness, which becomes manifest in the marginalization of Surinamese in the Netherlands, and which is contested through the commemoration of slavery.

The second chapter zooms in further, showing how racial geographies play out between different ‘white’ and ‘black’ neighbourhoods in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Although at first glance it looks as though these geographies have been translated more or less unchanged to the level of the neighbourhood, a closer look shows that they also result from very specific local histories. While race relations in Amsterdam Zuidoost cannot be explained without taking into account the Dutch colonial past and slavery, that past alone does not explain how, why and under which specific circumstances these histories are mobilized. In this chapter, I show that the political mobilization of slavery and the colonial past took place in the context of very specific political-economic interests that surfaced in a large-scale project of urban renewal. Here the political-economic position of Surinamese in the Netherlands was *traced* to slavery and colonialism. This tracing, whether understood as a success or not, permanently changed the political landscape in Amsterdam.

In Chapter 3, I investigate yet another racial dynamic in which slavery was mobilized politically. Amsterdam Zuidoost can be seen as the Atlantic world in a nutshell because it is home not only to Surinamese and Antilleans but, next to white Dutch, also to a significant number of West African migrants and postmigrants, mainly from Ghana and Nigeria. In this chapter, I show how the Surinamese self-identification as ‘descendants’ can sometimes lead to conflict because West Africans and Surinamese of African descent are positioned differently in the history of slavery. At the same time, notions of shared Africanness also lead to new forms of conviviality. Here the notion of tracing is crucial because it allows me to unpack the diverse ways in which people actively and creatively search for and decide about their own relation to oppressive historical conditions.

Chapter 4 deals with slavery as a form of memory that is transmitted through the cultural forms of music and proverbs containing, for instance, messages about trust and honesty. These messages constitute a kind of implicit knowledge about the past and inform

how people see themselves and the world. The paradox of these cultural forms, however, is that they place a high value on secrecy: cultural knowledge that should not be shared. This contrasts with the very public nature of cultural heritage, which by definition entails some kind of publicity. The obligation for secrecy, then, creates a different kind of silence than the Orwellian silences produced by historiography. These cultural forms require a specific kind of knowledge to articulate or trace them to the terror of slavery.

Finally, Chapter 5 looks at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and nation in the dynamics of cultural heritage and the cultural registers through which they are negotiated. For example, an understanding of the strong position of women as culture bearers in the realm of Afro-Surinamese culture needs to take into account the ways in which women's social position is informed by the status of the female in the Afro-Surinamese Winti religion. Once more, the trace helps me to see the historical conditions that have shaped African-Surinamese gender and sexuality while at the same time pay attention to the rich cultural practices and cosmologies that have had and continue to have an equally important influence on sexuality and sexual relations. While these cultural forms were shaped in fundamental ways during slavery, reducing them to the experience of slavery would also reduce a very complex dynamic to social pathologies. If the formation of cultural heritage can be understood as a trace, or better as an activity of tracing, such an activity, I show in this chapter, cannot be entirely controlled. While following a trace, one chances upon things, one crosses other traces. Collecting evidence for one case frequently turns up evidence for subsidiary or even unrelated cases that may nevertheless influence the original case.

## Notes

1. The title of this section is inspired by Stuart Hall's (1999) article.
2. 'Anton de Kom riep alle Surinamers op / tot eenheid en gelijkwaardigheid / keerde zich tegen het koloniaal bewind / en was actief in het Nederlandse verzet 1940–1945.' Inscription on a plaque that was replaced by the statue.
3. Letter to the District Council, 29 July 1999, personal archive Markus Balkenhol.
4. 'We hebben niet gehad waar we voor gingen. . . . Het is niet óns ding. Zij zeggen, dat wat we nodig hebben, vanuit díe Afro-Surinaamse cultuur,

- vanuit dát erfgoed, vanuit die spiritualiteit, vanuit die identiteit, vanuit die identificatie, dat inspireert ons niet.’ Interview 4 June 2011.
5. Toko is an Indonesian term for a small grocery store selling produce from Asia and the Caribbean. In Suriname (and the Netherlands) they are often run by Chinese people. The toko is a well-known institution in the Netherlands.
  6. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/the-slave-route/>, emphasis MB, accessed 19 March 2013.
  7. International year of the struggle against slavery, Oostindie 2005.
  8. The following argument is strongly informed by David Scott’s critique of narratives of redemption. In *Conscripts of Modernity*, Scott argues that romantic narratives of overcoming and redemption are ill suited for an understanding of slavery and colonialism and its legacies. He proposes instead the register of the tragedy in order to point out the agonistic and ongoing – rather than redemptive – legacy of slavery (D. Scott 2004).
  9. ‘Dat is echt de essentie van die man. Hij heeft slavernij inzichtelijk gemaakt.’
  10. Although memory has been an intellectual concern since antiquity, a distinction between personal and collective memory only emerged in the late nineteenth century (Olick and Robbins 1998: 106). Hugo von Hofmannsthal was perhaps the first to explicitly use the term ‘collective memory’ in 1902 when he spoke of ‘the dammed up force of our mysterious ancestors within us’ and of ‘piled up layers of accumulated collective memory’ (Schieder 1978: 2; Olick and Robbins 1998: 106). Although the protean ideas of collective memory existed in the nineteenth century, today Maurice Halbwachs is usually credited with the introduction of memory into sociological inquiry (Olick and Robbins 1998). Halbwachs’s contemporaries also used variations of the term (Olick and Robbins 1998); for example, Marc Bloch (1925) and Charles Blondel (1926), the art historian Aby Warburg (Warburg 1999; Warburg 2008) and Walter Benjamin (Benjamin 2010; see also Buck-Morss 1991).
  11. The flip side of this, in a Foucauldian sense, is that one becomes a subject precisely by being *subjected to* modern regimes of governance and control.
  12. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have developed this term most prominently. They oppose the rhizome to ‘the tracing’, which they see as part of the ‘tree logic’ – as always returning to an origin in a linear way: the rhizome is altogether different, a *map and not a tracing* (‘Make a map, not a tracing’) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 12). My understanding of the trace as relating to a past event as well as a present frame of reference, however, differs somewhat from the image of the trace than Deleuze and Guattari seem to suggest. The trace, to me, emerges through the practice of tracing, and therefore becomes a thing only through such a *practice* or practices. It should be kept in mind that the trace is both a temporal and a spatial relation at the same time. With my notion of the trace as a practice

- of tracing, I want to emphasize the active engagement of finding clues and making connections that is not exclusively a property of the trace but involves those people who are doing the tracing.
13. See also Wacquant (2002), who traces the institutionalization of racial discrimination in the US from slavery through Jim Crow and the ghetto to the system of prisonfare institutionalized today. In the Netherlands, nothing comparable to Jim Crow existed, and the ‘ghetto’ was an ideology that *masked* structural discrimination (see Chapter 1) more than a social reality. Today, although blacks are represented disproportionately in Dutch prisons, this is nowhere near the kind of prisonfare institutionalized in the US (Wacquant 2008).
  14. Literally ‘red berets’; black soldiers who were recruited in the war against the Maroons. They were often lured into service with the promise of manumission, which was often not realized either because the soldiers were killed or the promise was not honoured.
  15. 1 July is the big celebration of Keti Koti, the breaking of the chains, the day that slavery was abolished in the Dutch colonies in 1863.
  16. See Butler (1990) on the ‘etc.’ as a pre-emptive container or an ‘embarrassed admission of a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself’ (Butler 1990: 143 as cited in Yuval-Davis 2006: 202).
  17. Conversely, my reaction demonstrated how risky it is to invoke slavery in (political) articulations of blackness, precisely because it is so easily disavowed in white normativity.
  18. See <https://www.nwo.nl/en/projects/312-99-104>, accessed 8 March 2021.
  19. Matthew Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer have called such a position the scholastic position: ‘The disposition of *skholè*, that is, of scholastic freedom from constraint is shared by all those who, regardless of the disciplinary or other particularities that divide them, have in common the capacity and privilege “to withdraw from the world so as to think it”, a freedom to engage in cultural production under conditions well insulated from practical urgencies and concerns’ (Emirbayer and Desmond 2012: 585). As Emirbayer and Desmond insist, this is an ideal-typical position, but it seems impossible to ignore people’s appreciation of my relative distance as an intellectual from, for example, processes of socialization into modes of communication between black and white Dutch. It is interesting, then, to observe how different social, disciplinary and scholastic positions intersect.
  20. Since 2013 there have been a number of publications listing ‘traces of slavery’ in several Dutch cities. See for instance <https://sporenvanslavernijutrecht.nl/>, the first in this series, and the project Mapping Slavery: <https://mappingslavery.nl/en/>.
  21. The body of work critiquing anthropology’s entanglements with colonialism is by now large enough to have produced an entire subfield with its own scholarly debates and genealogies. Whereas Said (1978) prominently

critiqued anthropology as an agent of colonial power, others have emphasized more the complexities of anthropology's involvement in the reproduction of colonial power (Asad 1973; Fabian 2002), or indeed their mutual constitution (Pels and Salemink 1994).