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Memory as resource and property

Tracking the intimacies between ways of remembering the past and governing the present

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INTRODUCTION

Intimate knowledge, inhabitable promises.

On June 1st, 2020 I found myself on Dam Square along with thousands for a protest in solidarity against anti-black violence in the US following the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin. The date was chosen also to signal the beginning of Keti Koti month – the annual celebration of the abolition of slavery during a year in which, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no public celebrations were allowed.[1] This was the first time that I left my apartment to knowingly go and be around a lot of people: in the months prior I, like many others, led a very insular life. At that point, so much of what we have come to define as the public sphere had been moved online whilst the tension inside the idea of 'going back to normal' continued to reach new heights. As I tried, working from home, to build up an acceptable writing rhythm I found myself at once too close and too far away from the subject of my analysis. Too close because as I spent more and more time indoors, often by myself, the protective barrier made of 'real life' stuff – like going out, planning travels, and seeing friends and family – became so thin. At the same time, I also started to feel more and more detached from keeping track of what was going on in the Netherlands, since the focus of my anxiety was pulsating miles away – where my family and friends were. Even though my ability to focus flickered and dimmed, I continued to push forward trying to connect my lines of thought to the here and now especially as it looked like in 2020. Because, if the roots of the topic of this thesis can be found in the advertised 'failure' of the multicultural project in the 2000s, it is the second half of the 2010s – the time period going roughly from the 'refugee crisis' to the pandemic – to have witnessed a growing intensity in how cultural memory is staged as a resource and property. This function of memory as a tool to ground identities and give substance to right claims has been evolving along with a 'late liberal' politics of recognition that makes use of different kinds of social difference to govern and manage populations (see for instance Povinelli 2002; and 2011). In this introduction, I first present some of the key concepts that have helped me give form to my research and the questions

1 Keti Koti, which means 'broken chains' or 'the chains have been broken' in the lingua franca Sranan Tongo, has been celebrated in Suriname every year on July 1 following the abolition of slavery in 1863. Since the creation of the national slavery memorial in Amsterdam in 2002 the commemoration, which until then had a mostly private dimension, has been turned into a festival taking place in the city's Oosterpark where the monument is located. The large event, which attracts several thousand visitors every year, begins with the Bigi Spikri (big mirror), a parade that see people dressed in traditional clothing marching for an hour from City Hall to Oosterpark. In recent years, cultural organizations have been developing a program devoted to the memory of abolition throughout the month.

at its center, then I explain my methodology and positioning, and finally, I outline the structure of the chapters.

Back on that day in June 2020, I stood on the side of the square surrounded by mostly young people from different ethnic backgrounds: I was uneasy because of the proximity to a crowd larger than I had anticipated and because I felt out of place. I suspected that many people *like me* – white, cisgender, able-bodied – felt compelled to attend because of the social media-augmented need to be seen protesting. I wanted to put a distance between me and them, between me and performative activism and virtue signaling. Yet there I was in that square, looking at the people around me but also, in a way, still seeing the images of the protests in American cities: burning buildings, water cannons, screams. From where I was standing I could not see who was giving speeches on the small stage in the center of the square – though I recognized some of their names. At one point, Mitchell Esajas from Amsterdam's The Black Archives gave a speech in English. He showed a book from the Archives' collection – Assata Shakur's autobiography – and invited the bystanders to chant her words. He then raised several points: anti-black racism is also rife in the Netherlands and Europe and not a US phenomenon only; structural racism is not only present in the police force but also in many other institutions; for example, he highlighted how anti-blackness also surfaces in the European Union' migration policy and in the way states implement it through the illegalization of, predominantly black, migrants who then are more vulnerable to economic exploitation (fieldnotes 2020).

Esajas's speech helps me frame the fraught temporality that characterizes the 'drowned memory space' that silently shapes the narratives surrounding the contemporary migrant crisis by creating a wedge between contemporary migration flows and 'the context of Europe's constitutive history of empire, colonial conquest, and transatlantic slavery' (Danewid 2017, 1679). Whilst this linkage remains at the border of dominant discourses about migration, identity, and Europeanness, both contemporary expressions of the memory of colonialism and slavery as well as first-hand accounts of the so-called 'refugee crisis' are increasingly being heritagized. Ann Laura Stoler has asked whether the wave of 'intellectual and political labor on the colonial past' in recent years serves the purpose, not of historical reckoning, but as 'an act of closure and of completion, as a new benchmark of virtue', conferring 'a new sense of moral and national conscience – precisely when the borders of Europe and who belongs in it are contested and racism across Europe is at once denied and celebrated…' (Stoler 2016, 155–56). This dissertation

pushes this insight further by examining projects that center the memory of colonialism and slavery together with initiatives that make use of personal accounts of the experience of migration. The Netherlands, and the city of Amsterdam in particular, offer a rich terrain for this type of study. Different waves of migration have characterized the post-war history of the country, each bringing in new types of *migrants* – 'postcolonial', guestworker, asylum seeker. But these categories oversimplify the tangled histories behind the movement and resettlement of people in a country that did not happen to be their destination by chance. A precise 'economy of affirmation and forgetting' (Lowe 2015, 3) establishes the hierarchy between desirable and undesirable subjects as natural. How to question this naturalness? Which are the intimacies between ways of governing the present and ways of commemorating the past? This phenomenon can only be examined as multiscalar and multi-sited: it is not a product of the Dutch context, though it has been shaped by the country's particular brand of colonial aphasia (Stoler 2011; Bijl 2012; Balkenhol 2014).

The interplay between past- and present-ness of colonial structures is a key concern of this dissertation but, by thinking through multiple time and space locations, I am not attempting to establish a 'logical teleology in which one form of state morphs into the other': colonial, then postcolonial, then neo-colonial (Alexander 2006, 211). Critics like Stoler and Derek Gregory have challenged with their work the notion of a postcolonial world and have argued against the spatial separation between colony and metropole (Gregory 2004; Stoler 2016). Following this line of thought, I want to draw attention to how colonialism's 'multiple projects' cause to 'rescramble[s] the "here and now" and the "then and there" to a "here and there" and a "then and now"' (Alexander 2006, 211). This 'rescrambling' does not mean to collapse historical eras, but it does seek to make evident how notions of humanness always coexisted with definitions of non-human, and the expansion of citizenship rights always evolved together with the tools for withholding them. Lisa Lowe underlines how 'the longevity of the colonial divisions of humanity' is visible in how

> in our contemporary moment . . . the human life of citizens protected by the state is bound to the denigration of populations cast in violation of human life, set outside of human society. Furthermore, while violence characterizes exclusion from the universality of the human, it also accompanies inclusion or assimilation into it. Such violence leaves a trace . . . (2015, 6)

In *The Intimacies of Four Continents* Lowe's enacts a 'project of tracking' of the ways in which social differences – engendered through concepts like race, class, nationality, religion, gender, sexuality, and geography – become 'elaborated as normative categories for governance under the rubrics of

liberty and sovereignty'(Lowe 2015, 7). Inspired by this and other works, I started to reflect on how coloniality resurfaces across locations and operates not just through division and exclusion but also through a particular way of absorbing, assimilating, and inviting in. The locations from which I start my analysis are therefore not that of exclusion and abandonment: the memory of colonialism and slavery is becoming a central aspect of the discursive space on heritage and belonging; the 'refugee crisis' has been memorialized across multiple projects and most of them have sought to include the voices of refugees themselves. These shifts are still unfolding and the progress they signal is unevenly distributed within the economy of attention in which memory works as resource and property.

My intention has been to track the different ways in which cultural difference becomes the cornerstone of policies that are exclusionary and, at the same time, the most valid mean to combat them: it is at once mobilized as a sign of the fundamental incompatibility of certain subjects, it determines why certain citizens are not proficient enough in the culture of their 'hosting country', and yet it is also depicted as an asset.[2] By reflecting on the politics motivating recent gestures of inclusion through interventions in the shared heritage of the nation, I developed a framework to help me bring into relief the tensions and disconnects behind the conditional welcome directed at old and new 'Others'. Whereas unassimilable *D*ifference is determined through criteria that are racialized, classed, and gendered, the measurement of cultural *d*ifference is presented as merely a practical tool to assess the level of 'success' of minorities and the potential to integrate migrants according to a degree of cultural compatibility (see for example Lentin and Titley 2011; and for the Dutch context Duyvendak, Geschiere, and Tonkens 2016; Bonjour and Duyvendak 2018). By bringing together an interdisciplinary theoretical approach with an empirical focus on some of the locations in which the

2 In Strange Encounters (2000) Sara Ahmed employs Derrida's concept of conditional hospitality to address the politics of multiculturalism in which the nation is imagined as 'ours to give', which shifts the position of guests into that of 'hosts' as in those who can decide whether to be welcoming to strangers. (190). Further, in The Cultural Politics of Emotion (2004) she argues that the multicultural nation offers 'hospitality and even love to would-be citizens as long as they return this hospitality by integrating, or by identifying with the nation'. In On Being Included. Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life (2012) Ahmed returns to this concept to make visible how when diversity 'becomes a form of hospitality' organizations become 'hosts' who 'receive[s] as guests those who embody diversity' whereas to 'be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home. Conditional hospitality is when you are welcomed on condition that you give something back in return'. Therefore she posits that in 'white organizations' people of color are 'welcomed on condition they return that hospitality by integrating into a common organizational culture, or by "being" diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate their diversity (43).

interplay between belonging and recognition takes place, this dissertation seeks to answer the following questions: how do different memories can function as a *resource* and *property* for the groups whose belonging and citizenship rights are precarized and rendered unstable? Which politics does this function of memory serve? What are some of the locations in which current constellations of memory, belonging, and safety are formed? These broad interrogatives are connected to a set of sub-questions that directly relate to the case studies explored in each chapter, which are collected in the outline of the dissertation at the end of this introduction.

An evolving function of memory

During the 1980s and 1990s, the discipline of Critical Heritage Studies emerged as a growing body of scholarship that began to look at the social, political, and cultural dimension of heritage, gradually shifting focus from an idea of heritage as a collection of things to be preserved to that of something actively produced – and always undergoing negotiation. Understanding the processual dimension behind the designation of heritage means becoming aware of how manufacturing a shareable and recognizable version of the nation's past runs parallel to producing subjects as either entitled to that past and belonging to that nation – or positioned outside of it. Stuart Hall observed that heritage is above all a 'discursive practice' that binds together a nation and only 'through identifying with these representations that we come to be its "subjects" – by "subjecting" ourselves to its dominant meanings' (Hall 2005, 5). Hall maintains that nations construct their identities by operating a selection of which 'high points and memorable achievements' coalesce 'into an unfolding "national story"' (Hall 2005, 5). The institutions in charge of producing and maintaining such a 'selective tradition' mature 'a deep investment in their own "truth"' (2005, 6). The reason why certain individuals belong while others do not is one of the 'truths', enacted by referencing a common heritage, through deep symbolic investments.

Rodney Harrison remarks how 'nation-states have used heritage to produce and exclude subaltern minorities and to define what constitutes citizenship, allowing them to eliminate and persecute those who do not share the histories, values or ethnicities of majorities' (Harrison 2012, 230). Within the European project, born out of post-Holocaust ethics and the human rights paradigm it originated, heritage and memory have been used for the upkeep of a common identity based on a common past; but also to influence access to EU membership. And, as Rob van der Laarse notes, 'European [populist]

parties succeeded in winning the popular vote for a heritage crusade against multiculturalism, refugees, and Islamism on behalf of Europe's "original", white *Leitkultur*' (van der Laarse 2019, 106). Arjun Appadurai has argued that the past is a 'symbolic resource' that has 'cultural limits' structured on the need for credibility of history (Appadurai 1981, 281). The focus of this dissertation is not 'the past' or 'History' but an expanded notion of memory that moves between events from a long time ago and others that are still happening but that are already being made into objects of remembrance. The scale in which this process takes place does not coincide with the State, rather it moves between local, national, and transnational expressions of the same mode of governance. To order and manage subjects through differentiation contemporary forms of governmental rationality also need to narrate them: to connect each group to a story – and a particular memory space – that sets them apart from an Other. This Other is produced as failing to be fully knowable and thus must be kept under surveillance or kept outside of the nation/city/Europe. Recognizing yourself in the symbolic representations of the society you belong to – meaning also in its heritage – is granted, by design not chance, to some and not all. The designation of something as heritage of the nation, or of Europe, therefore runs parallel to the production of a shifting set of rules on what it truly means to be, for instance, an Amsterdammer, Dutch, or European. In fact, as De Cesari et al. point out that 'the progressive, inclusive, 'post-national' qualities of European memory and heritage' differ greatly from its '"actually existing" constructions'(De Cesari, Bosilkov, and Piacentini 2020, 42): which are instead easily mobilized to produce 'the fiction of the closure of culture and heritage by territory and the naturalisation of a normative isomorphism nation/Europe-culture-territory'(2020, 42); at the same time, '[c]ontemporary dominant narratives of Europeanness tend to obscure the long, tentacular history of colonial domination and the ways in which these global entanglements have forged Europe's past and present' (2020,43).

Whereas several authors focus on the relationship between heritage sites and practices with the making and self-making of citizens what is yet not fully examined is the type of politics this relationship serves. Looking closely at these processes a specific *function* of memory comes into view: for individuals and groups who are 'embodied in difference' (Desai 2020) specific cultural memories can act as a tool to ground identities and make them cohesive enough to appear as stable enough interlocutors for the state, and state-like formations. This is necessary for a complex politics of recognition that allows for belonging to be unequally distributed among citizens and

prospective citizens and that pushes the question of structural change and redistribution of resources in a near future – while making it dependent on slow, trickle-down, and unevenly directed progress. In the push-pull between minoritized subjects and governing institutions that build the criteria of what is considered an acceptable bid to citizenship and belonging, memory acts as a resource: by claiming a connection to a specific past, these groups can both reinforce rights-based claims and prove to be 'competent' enough in the values and beliefs at the core of the nation. But it also functions as property: an endowment that needs to be curated, preserved and guarded from appropriation because its value lies in what it can be exchanged for. Using Gloria Anzaldúa's poem *Borderlands/La Frontera* to punctuate her reflections, Trinh T. Min-Ha summarizes how difference and identity are articulated when occupying the particular position of being *'at home, a stranger'* (Anzaldúa in Trinh 2010, 50 original emphasis).

> You are wounded, lost in action/ dead, fighting back. The question as to when one should 'mark' oneself (in terms of ethnicity, age, class, gender, or sexuality for example) and when one should adamantly refuse such markings continues to be a challenge . . .
>
> If you win, you lose. When multiculturalism and cultural diversity (as defined by the West's liberal tradition) become sanctioned, the danger faced, expectedly enough, is that of control and containment. Authorized marginality means that the production of 'difference' can be supervised, hence recuperated, neutralized and depoliticized. Unless they 'force' their entry, therefore, marginalized 'interpreters' are allowed into the Establishment only so long as the difference they offer proves to be locatable and evaluable within the ruling norms (Trinh 2010, 51–52)

The largescale trade-off behind the evolution of this type of 'authorized marginality' is to enclose any type of struggle within discursive rules that establish preemptively what can be said and what can be gained: relevance for visibility, respectability through recognition, the love of the nation in exchange for another enemy to fear. While it remains important to highlight the agency of individuals and groups in producing counterdiscourses that question hegemonic versions of a nation's heritage, we also need to draw attention to why, in the first place, heritage and memory are presented as effective resources for identity-based mobilization for recognition. Which politics are enacted through making culture – and heritage production – a privileged domain in which to articulate the demand to eventually belong?

Unsafe citizenship

By examining the evolution of elite discourses in the Netherlands after decolonization, Guno Jones notes how rarely the meaning of citizenship has been examined from the position of colonized citizens. Scholars have focused on the different ways subjects can access rights even without possessing national membership: cases in which '*non-nationals…* are partly treated as *nationals* by the polity' (Jones 2014, 210). But to understand how unstable the status of a citizen can be, Jones suggests looking instead at the cases in which 'states (begin to) treat *nationals* as *semi*- or *non-nationals*': as the colonized in the overseas territories and their offspring in the European motherlands could experience' (emphasis in the original 2014, 210). Contrary to dominant notions of status citizenship as granting a fixed modicum of rights and safety, Jones' analysis focuses on its fissures along race but also gender and class lines. Political elites, first through appeals to biological differences and then by highlighting cultural incompatibility, create an 'ever changing construction of "we" and "the others"' that 'makes the ideal of equal citizenship for all difficult to realize' (2014, 332). Therefore

> The possession of formal membership of a nation-state does not guarantee anything in itself. The political will of dominant groups in society, and the government, to include or exclude people, regardless of citizenship status, is much more important in determining social positions (Jones 2014, 332)

For this reason, I privilege a conceptualization of citizenship that does not focus only on rights and duties but that instead looks at the consequences of experiencing nationhood as not fixed, not always granted, whose fullness can be deferred to the future and that is predicated on knowing that others might fail to *achieve* it.

Becoming a subject is always defined through the exclusion of others. At the same time, being included always comes with a cost since subjection 'applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him' (Foucault 1982, 781). If we apply this insight to various configurations of citizenship we can see that the processes of 'self-making and being made by power relations' are constructed not only through biopolitical 'schemes of surveillance, discipline, control, and administration' (Ong 2013, 747) but also through affective tools. Proper citizenship is not only a matter of respecting a social contract but it also hinges on how this compliance is demonstrated and how appealing 'real' belonging is made to look: the only ticket into safety, into

entering a life free from the daily grind of worrying for survival. Although referring to national frames might appear as somewhat anachronistic, national membership appears still as the most straightforward path to security: whoever is positioned at its borders – the refugee, the homeless, the dissident – becomes an iconic figure warning citizens of what could happen to them. The expectation at the basis of contemporary citizenship, therefore, revolves around ideas of what constitutes a *good* Amsterdammer/Dutch/European, but also a *good* migrant with enough potential to integrate. Goodness as a vague but compulsory requisite is measured through parameters that are economic, and moral but also intimate: the request is not only to be productive, to obey laws, and fulfill civic duties, but to also be worthy of the unconditional love of the nation (Ahmed 2000; and 2013). This love, however, is reserved only for those deemed its legitimate children: those who look like the majority, who look like the protagonists of the nation's history and their effigies in museums and squares, and that can claim the past as theirs.

For instance, Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz employ the term 'memory citizenship' to describe the engagement of a group of migrant women in Germany with the cultural memory of the Holocaust (Rothberg and Yildiz 2011). The particular ways in which this memory has been operationalized to provide the European Union with its 'never again' telos has also resulted in how the adherence to a joint commemorative effort has become the entry ticket that determines whether a country can enter the Union (van der Laarse 2013). The post-Holocaust ethics that disproved the category of race as scientifically sound served also to affirm Europe's post-national but also post-racial essence. David Theo Goldberg calls this process one of 'racial Europeanisation' in which race disappears from public discourse whilst 'racist implications' become 'always lingering and diffuse, silenced but assumed, always already returned and haunting, buried but alive' (Goldberg 2006, 336). Rothberg and Yildiz then stress how full citizenship requires 'both memory work and affective labor across society' to eschew what Rothberg and Yildiz call the 'double bind' through which migrants are kept separated from the official commemoration of the Holocaust and then reprimanded as anti-Semitic for their supposed indifference to it (2011, 36). They recognize the bind as an example 'of the potential disciplining function that Holocaust discourse has come to take on in a unifying Europe, especially with respect to minorities considered "Muslim"' (2011,36).[3] The authors link the women's

3 Nicholas de Genova examines how 'the European racial order produces and sustains a permanent suspicion and (at least) latent hostility towards 'Muslims' in a manner that nonetheless appears to uphold the official 'anti-racism' that has become an ideological fixture of post-Holocaust

efforts to the notion of 'acts of citizenship' meaning 'collective or individual deeds that rupture socio-historical patterns' and work to 'create a sense of the possible and of a citizenship that is "yet to come"'(Isin and Nielsen 2013, 2–4). Rothberg's later work focuses on the concept of multidirectionality of memory that accounts for how the capacity to remember past tragedies does not operate as a 'struggle over scarce resources': instead, memory is always 'subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing' (2009, 3); thereby collective memories of different violent histories 'emerge in dialogue with each other' (Rothberg 2019, 20) and can become a resource to activate against nationalism and populism with the potential of creating 'new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice' (2009, 5).). But scarcity is precisely the mean through which the capitalist systems of governance exert control by endlessly producing comparisons: some are entitled to the promises and affordances of safety while all others must wait for their turn. Ultimately, what this and other future-oriented analyses seem to overlook is that a citizenship 'that is yet to come' or 'new visions of justice' through memory, or similarly the potential to 'create alternative future heritages' (Harrison et al. 2020, 7), hinge on the suspended time of the wait. What are the consequences of entering the contest of who deserves to belong *more*?

Waiting to belong

Throughout this dissertation, I employ different terms to describe the groups of individuals that are stuck in the *waiting room*, to paraphrase Chakrabarty, of not knowing whether they will be considered good enough candidates for the type of full, unconditional belonging that would guarantee long-term safety from precarized versions of citizenship; this is the type of inclusion that also allows for joining in aspirations of what Lauren Berlant has called the 'good life', meaning the continued investment in promises of 'upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy' even 'when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear cost abounds' (2011,

racial Europeanism. This ostensibly race-neutral ideological short-circuit is achieved through the hegemonic demand for 'integration' on the parts of migrants and their European-born 'second-generation' progeny, racially minoritized as being 'of migrant background'. As in the larger metaphysics of antiterrorism, the dominant theme has consistently been not an indiscriminate 'clash of civilizations' against Islam as such, but rather a persistent and unrelenting impulse to sort and rank 'Muslims' as "good" ones or "bad", "integrated" or "communitarian", "friend" or "enemy", "with us" or "against us"' (De Genova 2018)

2-3).[4] Under the constant pressure of recurring crises – financial, political, of public health but also the climate crisis engulfing all others – these fantasies have started to crumble and become untenable even for those individuals that because of their class, gender, race, and ability were able to expect at least a degree of security. In this heightened atmosphere, the stakes behind the possibility of inclusion into the polity of both potential and 'unsafe' citizens are higher and higher. Conversely, I often refer to a *we/us* to highlight a particular positioning: we, meaning people that because of our appearance, passport, and national identification number can expect a certain degree of safety. Examples of what happens when you have the wrong appearance and papers are all around us: cautionary tales in the form of people, strangers to fear, or maybe to help.

As citizens of the global North, we are able to enjoy a degree of protection but each of us is made aware of the limits to that protection: some are limited by their gender, some by their class, some by their ability, some by their 'origins' or their parents and grandparents' origins – most by a combination of all these elements. These limits are there to exert control but also to subvert, bend, refuse. In this *we* I encompass processes of identification and disidentification in relation to a variety of 'homes': the city, the nation, Europe. Only a minority of individuals never need to question feeling at home in their personhood, nationhood, transnational affiliation and within the affordances gifted by these locations. Trinh T. Min-Ha has explored the opacities within the process through which someone is defined as a stranger: '[t]o be named and classified is to gain better acceptance, even when it is a question of fitting in a no-fit-in category'(2010, 30). Since '[f]oreignness is acceptable once I no longer draw the line between the others and myself' the road to follow is to '[f]irst assimilate, and then be different within permitted boundaries'; and yet this is not a linear progression: '[a]s you come to love your new home . . . you will immediately be sent back to your old home (the authorized and pre-marked ethnic, gender or sexual identity) where you are bound to undergo again another form of estrangement'(2010, 30). Or a reading of this predicament that focuses instead on 'its enabling potential' would point at how 'strangeness as confinement' can be unlearnt since 'the home is here, there, wherever one is led to in one's movement'(2010, 30).

4 The fragmented temporality based on the wait has been analysed by different authors, among them, Dipesh Chakrabarty elaborates the idea of the 'waiting room' to describe how the idea of Europe has the original site of modernity has been used to justify both the denial of 'self-government' to the colonised countries 'not yet' ready for independence, and later, in the so-called 'Third World' as the period of time that is needed before transitioning to 'capitalist modernity' (Chakrabarty 2009).

But even from a position of relative safety we must contend still with the uncomfortable thought of knowing to be both injured parties and accomplices in the labor of 'reproducing life in the contemporary world' while 'being worn out by it' (Berlant 2011, 28). As Berlant explains this condition 'has specific implications for thinking about the ordinariness of suffering, the violence of normativity, and the "technologies of patience" that enable a concept of the *now* to suspend questions about the cruelty of *later*' (emphasis in the original 20112011, 28). If the now hurts a little it does not matter because the later will be better: this is the foundational promise of the 'good life' under an ever-evolving capitalist rule that, by providing an infinite succession of ugly bargains masked as hopeful outcomes, keeps warding off the question of what the future is going to look like. With this I want to make visible how certain promises are produced and distributed across society: someone is entitled to the promise of permanent belonging, others are not; individuals and groups hinge their sense of self and their 'good life' prospects on a bundle of promises and expectations related to their feeling at home in society – even, as Berlant warns us, such promises might be 'an obstacle to our flourishing' (2011, 1) or 'the problem in the first place'(2011, 49); finally, these attachments – persistent, indispensable even when damaging – shape our ability to think about the future and participate in its creation.

There is one antecedent, which in the last twenty years has been increasingly coming into focus, that shows how a minoritized group can enter the mainstream by both surpassing and making use of their 'difference'. Studies of the politics of gender and sexuality have examined this process from different angles: Lisa Duggan investigated the notion of 'homonormativity' as a form of neo-liberal sexual politics that 'does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (Duggan 2003, 50). David Eng (2010) describes as 'queer liberalism' the desire for 'liberal inclusion' of gay and lesbian 'citizen-subjects' that is coeval and complicit with the rhetoric of color-blindness and that signals a move away from oppositional queer politics that questioned state-based legitimacy and recognition. Jasbir Puar has called 'homonationalism' the process through which gay rights have been reordered into an 'optic, and an operative technology' through which 'acceptance' and 'tolerance' of *some* gay and lesbian subjects function as 'a barometer' measuring whether the Muslim Other possesses 'the right to and capacity for national sovereignty' (Puar 2013). Jin Haritaworn et al. use the term 'gay imperialism' to describe another

facet of this phenomenon in which racism becomes a ‘vehicle’ for white gays and feminists to enter the political mainstream and gain recognition through ‘hyper-assimilationist arguments’: few ‘exceptional’ individuals are brought forth as examples of Muslims that have ‘emancipated or liberated themselves from their repressive culture, by embracing the gender-progressive culture of the “liberal West”’(Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem 2008, 21). Sara Farris (2017) coined the term ‘femonationalism’ to describe the processes by which right-wing nationalist political parties but also neoliberals policy makers align with certain claims purported by feminist pundits, which argue that immigrants, and in particular Muslim men, are inherently sexist and thus a threat for women and LGBTQI+ subjects; this assumption is used to justify anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim policies and racist and xenophobic positions by reinforcing the notion that Western society is entirely egalitarian; Farris’ analysis also importantly emphasizes the economic function of these discursive strategies since neoliberal civic integration policies with the aid of some feminist groups direct Muslim and non-western migrant women into the segregating domestic and caregiving industries, under the guise of promoting their emancipation.

In the Dutch context, Gloria Wekker (2009b), drawing from Rosaldo’s understanding of imperial nostalgia (Rosaldo 1989), calls ‘homonostalgia’ the longing for a time – before multiculturalism – when gay liberation was not yet under threat by Islam. This mythological time is produced through political discourses that paint the acceptance of homosexuality as intrinsic to Dutch culture, and this way problematize the presence of Muslim populations within the Netherlands and Europe while justifying racist reactions triggered by it (see also the work of Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens 2010; Balkenhol, Mepschen, and Duyvendak 2016; Mepschen 2017). In addition, Sarah Bracke (2012) dissects a variety of ‘rescue narratives’ typical of the 2000s ‘civilizational agenda’ that have been differently mobilized for Muslim women – who require saving from Muslim men; and for Muslim men – in the case of asylum seekers escaping from regimes in which homosexuality is criminalized; but also for ‘white’ Dutch gays – who need protection from Muslim men essentialized as violent extremists.

This phenomenon, which takes multiple shapes across different spatiotemporal locations and that is further compounded along not only race and gender but also class lines, has paved the way for a particular understanding of how belonging works: instead of a private feeling, it needs to become visible and measurable. The minoritized subject that can prove their feeling at home within liberalism, whiteness and Eurocentrism, patriarchal bonds and

capitalist extraction is one step closer to salvation. Subscribing to a fantasy of permanent inclusion entails, as Agathangelou et al. observe, a mechanism of 'seduction toward something better' that promises

> an end to pain, marginalization, and violence in exchange for being recognized as legitimate subjects who can potentially participate in global capitalist relations and its futures – collusion becomes the cost of belonging.
>
> Lest we slip (back) into the realm of the hated, the despised, the killable, and the disposable (that is, if we ever had a chance to leave), we must actively support and often embody the threat of force that lies on the other side of this tenuous promise, or so the logic goes (Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira 2008, 129; emphasis mine)

The promise behind this bargain – that things will be unquestionably better and you will be safe– is, purposefully, broken. And yet subscribing to this fantasy is not really a matter of choice: who can afford to choose to stay with the hated, despised, killable? This is perhaps where the spreading of 'making safe' strategies comes from: the necessity to creating of small bubbles in which to find a respite from the grind, from having to perform an identity good enough to avoid permanent violence. But what happens when safe spaces are offered by the institution and when power encroaches on the language of radical thought? The next section delves into the methods I have employed as well as why I chose them and from which epistemological positioning.

Methods

This dissertation is the final output of a Ph.D. training program called 'CHEurope- Critical Heritage Studies and the Future of Europe', funded through the EU scheme Marie Sklodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) – Innovative Training Networks (ITN), which run between 2017 and 2021. The training portion of the project consisted of a series of week-long seminars during which my fourteen colleagues and I would often discuss what does it mean to do critical theory today: interdisciplinarity was soon established as a key feature of the work we were embarking on. In the case of this thesis, I use the Critical Heritage Studies perspective as a starting point and expand it by drawing insights from memory studies, migration and citizenship studies, affect theory, critical race studies, and queer and decolonial thought. I envisioned my research project being case studies based and employing several data sources such as document analysis, observation, and interviews with informants. In particular, I relied on unstructured interviews along with direct observation but I did not seek to report in detail the lived experiences

of my respondents; rather – aware that interview data reflect ‘a reality constructed by the interviewee and interviewer (Rapley 2001, 4) – I employed our interactions as a starting point to examine how cultural memory, across different heritage settings, becomes the focal point of changing definitions of what belonging means and what citizenship looks like. In addition, I heavily utilized document analysis, which ranges from policy documents to newspaper features to YouTube videos, as my way of filling in the gaps between what institutions and organizations say they do and what they actually do. But as the outbreak of COVID-19 spread and we started living a more and more online-based existence, I had to switch gears and use a new slate of documents provided by recordings of talks, workshops, and interviews that could no longer take place in person.

While there isn't a univocal definition of case study methodology (see for instance Yin 2003, Flyvbjerg 2011, Byrne and Callaghan 2014), I developed my approach starting with the need of keeping ‘abstract, decontextualized theorizing in check’ while interrogating ‘what passes as knowledge’ (Schatz 2013, 312) – and especially which theories of change are used to motivate the need for specific types of knowledge.[5] I was made very conscious of the risk of losing myself in too abstract theorizing and therefore I sought to ground my project by selecting specific sites that would act as cases: the Tropenmuseum, Rederij Lampedusa, and The Black Archives. I picked these organizations not all at once but gradually as I began to explore the ties and blind spots between the commemoration of colonialism and different but connected memories of migration in the Netherlands and between postcolonial and (post)migrant forms of belonging. The Tropenmuseum – an institution in flux, everything but monolithic – provides the main setting of my investigation as an ethnographic museum at the forefront of rethinking its own role in relation to the legacies of colonialism and slavery; at the same time, the museum has being experimenting with different ways of communicating the fractures and negotiations behind a changing notion of national belonging through its programming and community outreach projects; Rederij Lampedusa – a very small but durable organization – has

5 Schatz argues that there are two ideal types of ethnographic case study work: an extrinsic-value form and an intrinsic-value form. In the first case, ethnography acts as a corrective on the process of theory building by keeping ‘abstract, decontextualized theorizing in check’ by continuously interrogating ‘assumed causal relationships, and raising the possibility that what passes for knowledge can be based on specious conclusions’ (2013, 312). In the case of intrinsic-form case studies, ethnography is used to capture insider meanings and complex contextuality so that the concerns of individuals that are being studied become central, in ‘an exercise that gives voice to the powerless, the subaltern, and the under studied’ (Schatz 2013, 315)

been offering to tourists and locals 'alternative cruises' over the Amsterdam's canals featuring refugees and asylum seekers as tour guides in the attempt of questioning stereotypical representations of 'newcomers' and predetermined views of who should belong in the city; The Black Archives and their newest iteration, The Black Archives Bijlmer, is a grassroots organization located in the same neighborhood of the Tropenmuseum, which is establishing itself as an alternative center of knowledge production on the legacies of colonialism and on anti-racism activism in the Netherlands.

I selected these cases because of their heterogeneity in terms of size, structure, and missions since my goal was not to compare them but to underline how, as diverse as they are, they all operate and are enveloped within a precise configuration of memory, belonging and safety – that is constantly being renegotiated but that exists beyond individual organizations. Swanborn (2010) argues that cases can be located at the micro (persons and interpersonal relations), meso (organization, institution), or macro levels (communities, democracies, societies) and involve one actor or multiple actors. My way of examining organizations and their programming – zooming in between their position within larger power/knowledge configurations and a specific event or exhibition – travels between the levels: as organizations, the cases are located at the meso level; but through interviewing I gained access to the micro level of the personal relationships of the people working on a specific project; both individuals and organizations exist with larger structures such as the city of Amsterdam, but also Dutch society and even more broadly, the European Union; and across these macro levels the politics of heritage and belonging are played out through a variety of policies, stakeholders, publics, and counter-publics. My reasoning has been that a multilevel and multiscalar approach would allow me to place a practice – heritage and memory production – within specific sites – a museum, a grassroots archive, and a tour – into a wider context shaped not only by explicit policies but also by ways of envisioning the political.

Positioning

Increasingly case study research has been employed by action research and evaluation as a tool for gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics of certain groups, processes, or locations in order to instruct future action by governments, policymakers, and community organizers. But as I began to explore the ties between the commemoration of colonialism and different but connected memories of migration in the Netherlands, I knew I could not

apply an evaluative model to my case studies. I believe that ethnography can be a valuable tool for collaborative or co-generational action research aimed at social change. My intention, however, has been to intentionally take a step back from looking at solutions and alternatives to instead focus on reflecting on the nature of change and in particular, on what *we* accept as change. The first step for me was to become aware of and engage with the precise culture of scholarship that surrounds research done about the lives and cultures of racialized minorities in the Netherlands. Examining the closed circle connecting social research and public policy, Philomena Essed and Kwame Nimako observe that the data produced on ethnic minorities throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s focus largely on non-natives' 'migration and their degree (or lack) of economic, social and political integration in the Netherlands' (Essed and Nimako 2006, 286). The funding of this type of research depended largely on governmental schemes and was also heavily influenced by the notion of a '*grey middle ground* based on compromise, tolerance and majority consensus' (2006, 289) and the avoidance of 'radical' or polarizing – meaning critical – point of views. For this reason and until recently, critical race theory was displaced at the margins of mainstream academic discourse. In the years I have been based at the University of Amsterdam I could sense a change of direction: for instance, scholars that had been considered *too* radical started to receive invitations together with people and organizations that had been labeled *activists* – within Dutch academia a not-so-coded word to devalue their knowledge (Jones 2018). These signals should have convinced me that around me change was finally happening but what I could also sense was a familiar sense of worry creeping in: was this change an example of the non-performativity of institutional promises of diversity (Ahmed 2012)?

Therefore, as I progressed with my project, I constantly questioned my position within what Sarah Demart has called the 'extraction politics' of knowledge meaning an underexamined, 'double-process of appropriation and devaluation' (Demart 2020, 146). In approaching a subject matter that directly refers to the experiences of racialized individuals within Dutch society, my biggest fear was to become the one that 'fills in the blanks'(Trinh 1989, 80): to appropriate experiences not mine to share and substitute *their* voice with *my* words. Therefore, whenever my interviewee had a biography of migration I carefully structured my questions to be restricted to the experience of, for instance, working as a volunteer and as a storyteller, and, at the cost of clarity, I tried to avoid labeling respondents according to their *legal* status. At the same time, since their full names had been already made public across promotional material, news coverage, and internal reports – all widely available online – I

chose not to anonymize their names. Also, since the question I asked referred to their work for an organization I did not want to further the divide between migrant volunteers only identified with letters and Dutch employees of that organization identified instead with their full names. Yet I still worried that in the end, my work would end up being just another example of the 'theorem of low-hanging fruit' (Tuck and Yang 2014, 234):

> '[d]octoral programs, dissertations, and the master's thesis process tacitly encourage novice researchers to reach for low-hanging fruit. These are stories and data that require little effort – and what we know from years and years of academic colonialism is that it is easy to do research on people in pain . . . (Tuck and Yang 2014, 234)

As I inhabited both blindingly institutional spaces and myself, my biography, I felt awkward in both. I labored to gain access to what for me represented a route into safety – a paid and prestigious Ph.D. position – only to find myself struggling to feel 'at home' in my own research-ness. And this work stems from this feeling, from having to come to terms with the fact that some of the knowledge I produce will be extractive – it will lead me to fill in the blanks and to reach for fruit that is low-hanging. But as alienating and anxiety-inducing as this thought is, holding onto it represents my attempt to refuse academia's 'irrepressible irresponsibility' (Tuck and Yang 2014).

Chapter outline

The following chapters discuss how a specific function of memory is emerging across some of the sites where the sense of belonging of different types of both 'postcolonial citizens' and migrants that have arrived during the so-called European migrant crisis is produced and articulated. Chapter 1 expands the conceptual framework outlined in this introduction by looking at how the histories of migration toward the Netherlands are intertwined with competing memory regimes in the Dutch public sphere. The chapter surveys how in the Netherlands, the narrative of hospitality to *strangers* has evolved in relation to and/or in opposition to the country's self-image of 'tolerance' and, later, of multicultural 'success'. Then it examines how the memories of colonialism become a *resource* to articulate political claims (even as it constricts them within a symbolic terrain) and *property*, meaning a transactional object since, in order to gain political currency, private modes of remembrance need to become public. Through overlapping discourses, the promise of safety gets differentially distributed among the population according to a precise grammar carrying the traces of colonial genealogies. In this context, which

specific memories have or are emerging as catalysts of political claims? And how?

Chapter 2 introduces Amsterdam's Tropenmuseum as one of the stages in which the 'unfolding "national story"', about who can and cannot belong, has been developing and taking a variety of shapes. It then charts its evolution from *Koloniaal Museum* to a 'museum about people' to now: a museum 'about world cultures'. As multiculturalism progressively lost its appeal as a buzzword and whilst populist movements gained terrain in the Netherlands and Europe, the museum began to look like a safer space in which to reflect and represent the lived experience of Dutch citizens from different diasporas. The chapter is divided into two parts that look at these issues from a dual-angle: first, how the museum positions itself within debates about postcolonial and migrant belonging by meta-historicizing its recent past and work; and then the second part analyzes two temporary projects set in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood where the museum is located and whose long-term residents embody the layered heritage of (post)colonialism. What are the implications for an institution such as this one to be 'conscripted' in engaging with current political issues? Does the museum's ongoing exploration of matters of belonging and citizenship find a correspondence in its own participatory projects?

Chapter 3 focuses on the museum's exhibit *Aleppo* and the canal tours of *Rederij Lampedusa*, two projects that heavily rely on the presence of 'real refugees' to expand the knowledge of the public on the issue of migration. This chapter will use two examples that, albeit different in scope and scale, represent how the memories of the journey to Europe are mobilized according to a script that mirrors the culturalized norms and values that determine what constitutes a 'good' citizen and a 'good' migrant/refugee. The chapter will connect the threads tying together the complex usages of personal memories of migration to a wider European (and EU) framework of conditional hospitality that hinges on unidirectional demands for authenticity and openness. Sharing stories that are both personal and painful represents a ticket into safety, but what does collecting and staging these memories ultimately achieve?

Chapter 4 contextualizes recent developments in how the memory of slavery is being mobilized in the Netherlands using as a backdrop the Tropenmuseum's exhibition *Afterlives of Slavery* and the institution's engagement with a wider decolonial framework. By emphasizing histories of survival and not of victimhood, and by focusing on the ambiguities of freedom, the exhibit works to eschew a feeling of hopelessness while also carefully avoiding provoking feelings of guilt. But what does engendering

empathy mean when taking into consideration the discursive space from which the exhibition has emerged? To answer this question the chapter zooms in on the issues raised by the inclusion in the display of items referring to the contemporary movement against Zwarte Piet, a blackface character in the annual Saint Nicholas festivities. Then, the chapter looks at recent examples of how the museum has been collaborating with activists as part of its commitment to a decolonial approach. The demand to decolonize museums has been, in recent years, gradually absorbed by institutions but not in the sense the activists had perhaps hoped for since it still privileges models of inclusion that are temporary. Can the Tropenmuseum, not only through its programming but also at a structural level, reflect on the 'coloniality within'?

Chapter 5 focuses on The Black Archives in Amsterdam and how this relatively new organization in the city's cultural ecosystem is attempting to historicize itself in a longer tradition of anti-racism activism in the Netherlands. What is the role played by this 'alternative archive' in producing and circulating notions of belonging, black subjectivity, and citizenship? The chapter further deepens this interrogative by looking at the temporary project The Black Archives Bijlmer, which run between 2020 and 2021, in Amsterdam South East. This district represents a location particularly important in the postcolonial history of the country where different diasporas and different configurations of blackness intersect. In the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in the summer of 2020, which saw unprecedented participation of the Dutch public, the Archives have been highlighting the lineage connecting today's generation of anti-racist activists to previous ones and also to a celebrated and international tradition of black radical intellectuals. At the same time, The Black Archives have been actively collecting and curating the history of contemporary expressions of anti-racism in the Netherlands to avoid that other parties appropriating its narrative. But what does memorializing activism as it happens achieve?