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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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CHAPTER 2

Amsterdam’s Tropenmuseum between colonial memory and post-colonial, migrant belonging

Introduction

This chapter introduces the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam as one of the stages in which the Netherlands 'unfolding "national story"'(Hall 2005) about who can and cannot belong, has been developing and taking a variety of shapes. The role of museums in 'making-citizens' is no longer the product of the nation-state's cohesive disciplinary program (Bennett 2005; 2013). Sharon Macdonald notes that, even before the ripple effect of postcolonial theory and globalization, this function of the museum should be seen 'as more or less calculated and more or less effective attempts or bids rather than determinacies'(Macdonald 2016, 4). Today, after decades of thorough criticism, 'their historical role in citizenship formation' is being reprised 'to help with the enfranchisement and recognition of "new citizens"'(2016, 4). As we have seen in Chapter 1, the cultural difference of these new citizens positions them as strangers whose belonging to the nation is rendered unstable and conditional In the muddled context of shifting politics of belonging and recognition, museums appear as (more) stable interlocutors in providing a stage, or a safer space, in which minoritized groups can perform their identities while challenging too constrictive or Eurocentric ways of telling their stories. But this positioning is not unproblematic as the next pages will show.

This chapter is based on two years of fieldwork, between 2017 and 2019, and uses a variety of sources to examine the role of the Tropenmuseum in relation to its complex positioning within the discursive space of Dutch identity and belonging. These years were a moment of transition for the museum: as the biggest institution within the newly founded National Museum of World Cultures (NMWC henceforth), the Tropenmuseum had been consolidating its identity around a new mission that emphasized, on one hand, its societal role and, on the other, the notions of colonial afterlife and implication. The first section of the chapter traces how the new course inaugurated after the creation of the NMWC entity finds its roots in previous attempts at rethinking the museum's relationship with the colonial in the 1990s and 2000s; the second section offers a reflection on the notions of 'safe space' and 'implication' and the consequences of being deployed in/through an institutional actor like the museum; the third and fourth sections analyze two temporary projects – set in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood where the museum is located – and provide a counterpart to how the museum, by meta-historicizing its recent past and work, positions itself within debates about postcolonial and migrant belonging. Does the museum's ongoing exploration of matters of belonging and citizenship find a correspondence in its own participatory projects?

A museum from 'today and around the corner'

The Tropenmuseum – literally Museum of the Tropics but also sometimes translated as Tropical Museum – occupies an imposing neo-renaissance building in the East Amsterdam neighborhood called Oost. The building itself has been designated a national monument and, as then director Stijn Schoonderwoerd calls it, can be considered the 'number one object in the collection' (Schoonderwoerd 2019). He uses this expression to highlight how the museum's relationship with the colonial is being examined in a different light, which does not shy away from confronting the past. The creation of the National Museum of World Cultures was overseen by Schoonderwoerd, who was at the helm of NMWC until 2021 when he stepped down from the position and was replaced by Wayne Modest in the role of Content Director and Marieke van Bommel as General Director.[1] When in 2014 the Tropenmuseum merged with the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden and the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal, later incorporating also the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam, Schoonderwoerd describes it as a 'wake-up call' and a 'life-threatening crisis' (Schoonderwoerd 2019). The launch of the NMWC came in fact after a turbulent period started in 2011 when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the major funder of the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) since the 1970s, announced the intention to cut all its funding by the beginning of 2013. Since the Tropenmuseum was part of the Institute this news was met with concern about the future of the museum and its staff. After a long period of negotiations, the Dutch government agreed to continue to fund the museum if a number of conditions were met: a structural reorganization that had to culminate with the merger with the other two museums; the passage under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science instead that of Foreign Affairs; and finally the museum's collection, which until that point was property of the Royal Tropical Institute, had to be nationalized (Iervolino and Sandell 2016).[2] Although accounts of this particular moment

1 Sharon Macdonald observes how the adoption of the "world" label by several ethnographic museums in Europe was regarded as' more likely to be resonant with a public already attuned to terms such as "world music" and "world art"'. The author posits that '[i]n a climate in which museums increasingly have to show their public worth either to gain city or state funding or paying visitors, replacing the more academic terms "ethnographic" and "ethnological" seems to make sense. Harris and O'Hanlon warn, however, that "world" in these cases "actually refers to those 'cultures' that can be most readily accommodated into the long established paradigms of the West"'(Macdonald 2016, 11)

2 Currently the museum is funded through the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (the structural fund that in 2020 amounted to 17.465.209 Euros) and other entities that sponsor

in the history of the museum might differ, the immediate result was to rethink the mission of the newly formed NMWC according to its societal value, and toward becoming

> a museum that inspires world citizenship . . .we wanted to change from being a museum 'from a long time ago and far away' to being a museum 'from today and around the corner'. It all came together in the slogan: to be a museum about people . . . (Schoonderwoerd 2019)[3]

As part of this new course, in 2015 the Research Center for Material Culture (RCMC going forward) was launched as NMWC's flagship research institute providing a platform across all four museums for studying how objects in the collection are connected to issues of heritage, cultural identity, and belonging.

The museum 'from a long time ago and far away' was the inheritor of a complex history that started when in 1864 the Koloniaal Museum was founded in the neighboring city of Haarlem, and then opened to the public in 1871, to make the Dutch public and potential investors aware of the many commercial opportunities that the colonies offered. Later it took the shape of a more centralized institution named Koloniaal Instituut in Amsterdam – comprising an exhibition space, a library, laboratories, a theatre, and reception halls. The venue opened its doors to the public in 1926, inaugurated in the presence of Queen Wilhelmina, who in her speech underlined how the Institute would be a symbol of unity between the motherland and the colonies.[4] During World War 2 the building was used by German police while the country was under

individual projects or departments (for example the TEFAF Museum Restoration Fund for the upkeep of items of the collection; the Tropenmuseum Junior received a grant from the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts of 212.185 Euros to enlarge the offer for schoolchildren). Another source of revenue comes from selling tickets for exhibitions and events, from commercial partners and donations (National Museum of World Cultures 2021)

3 Being a museum 'about and for people' was then one of the official taglines and the core notion behind the museum's vision until the fall of 2019, when it changed to 'about world cultures'.

4 At that point, however, the relationship between the Netherlands and its overseas territories looked very different from the serene scenes portrayed in the friezes that decorate the building. Whereas a concern for the welfare of the colonized was the official rhetoric behind the so-called Ethische Politiek (ethical policy) of the Kingdom, in practice this resulted in capillary control over the local population, a 'biopolitical program' analogous to the French 'mission civilisatrice' and the British 'white man's burden' (Bijl 2012, 445). The Dutch East Indies were, according to historian Henk Schulte Nordholt, a 'state of violence' (in Bijl 2012) characterized by 'many wars, repressive labor regimes, excessively violent state responses to local resistance, and the close ties between the colonial administration and local criminals who in exchange for their services were given free rein' (Bijl 2012, 445).

Nazi occupation, then fell into disrepair during the post-war years. From the time Indonesia declared its sovereignty in 1945 de facto starting the process of political decolonization that, after a four-year, ended with the Netherlands finally recognizing the country's independence, the museum mostly served as a propaganda tool;[5] after being renamed Tropenmuseum in 1949, it was incorporated into the *Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen* (Royal Institute of the Tropics) specializing now in socio-economic development.[6] In the 1970s the focus of the museum shifted and diorama-like displays portraying life in the 'Third World' were used to provide the backdrop to learn more about Dutch policies in the field of international cooperation.[7] It was during these years that objects connected to the former colony that belonged to the permanent collection of the museum were put into storage. Gradually, and as the memory of colonial times started to re-emerge in the public sphere from the 1980s on, a more ethnographic approach was reintroduced in the curatorial department with exhibitions being able to showcase not just developmental aid projects but also to engage 'with both the aesthetics and politics of culture as well as broader interest in seeing collections long hidden in the museum's depot' (Hildering, Modest, and Aztouti, 2014, 327). In the 1990s, the museum started to develop a program that privileged a 'cultural diversity' approach, highlighting a narrative that connected different cultures through their differences and similarities.[8] Between 1994 and 2008, under the leadership of the head of the curatorial department Susan Legêne, the museum underwent

5 The same year in which the Netherlands launched the euphemistically called 'police actions', the museum, which had reopened with the name Indisch Museum, received increased subsidies from the government in the East Indies and the Dutch Ministry of Education, Art, and Science as a mean to increase the interest in the colonies and the support for the military intervention.

6 Although the name of Museum of the Tropics was adopted to signal separation from the recent past, this denomination is not neutral: as David Arnold points out, the 'conceptual space' of the tropics has been deployed to indicate 'something culturally alien to, as well as environmentally distinct from, Europe' (Arnold 1997, 306).

7 This shift had also consequences for the museum's exhibitions policy, which could not focus on aesthetic or cultural value and instead needed to provide a representation of '"everyday life" of Third World countries' (Hildering, Modest, and Aztouti 2014, 316)

8 This followed the trajectory introduced in the 1990s, with the New Museology (Vergo 1997), which focused on critique and concepts like governmentality, the public sphere, human rights, and identity politics; and which continued in the 2000s with a renewed focus on the societal function of the museum, centered on ideas like inclusivity, participation, community co-production, and the expanded contact zone (Brown and Peers 2005).

an extensive process of refurbishment. The exhibition resulting from this was called *Eastward Bound! Art, Culture and Colonialism* and described as 're-activation': the items that had been in the museum's depots were placed back 'in the spotlight as universal heritage' (Van Dijk and Legêne 2011, 15). The curatorial team had aimed to make visible how 'the Colonial Museum created visible and invisible borders related to Dutch citizenship'(2009, 230) since its displays until then had focused 'on the presentation of those who did *not* belong to the nation' (2009, 238 emphasis in the original).[9]

9 The Tropenmuseum attempted with the temporary exhibition White on Black, which ran from December 1989 until August 1990, to reflect on the stereotypical representations of black people in popular European culture. However the critique of the images exhibited was not explicit enough (Pieterse 1990).

Fig. 1'The Seamstress'. Photograph of one of the old mannequins from the museum's permanent collection restaged in Eastward Bounds!. Photographer: Valerio Cerasani. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum

Fig. 2 'The Explorer'. Photograph of one of the life-sized mannequins in the Colonial Theater. The transparent limbs are supposed to make them less 'realistic'. Photographer: Valerio Cerasani. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum.

When I visited the museum in June 2017 for the first time, *Eastward Bound!* was still on display. I could not find an accompanying text that made explicit the rationale behind it and, therefore, I was able to gain an understanding of it only a posteriori by searching for the curators' account of the process that led to the exhibition. Legêne observes that after the dissolution of the Netherlands East Indies, coming to the motherland meant for repatriates to discover that 'they had not belonged to the nation of which they thought they were part' (2009, 238). Until 1949 in fact, the museum had been celebrating the colonial enterprise by displaying the art and culture of Others 'disconnected from "real" people and attributed to imagined ethnic types'(2009, 238).[10] To reflect on this element of the history of collecting, the team devised the new exhibition around the creation of the *Colonial Theatre* located between the two aisles that comprise the first floor of the museum. An archival photograph was selected as starting point: part of the Colonial Museum's 1938 Jubilee exhibition, it showed Queen Wilhelmina's empty throne surrounded by wax figures representing colonial subjects as anonymous, essentialized characters. Three of these mannequins belonged to the museum's permanent collection and were restaged in the new display: portraying instead of generic 'natives' Indonesian people who played a role in colonial society – a teacher, a seamstress, a clerk. The central section of the display featured an installation in which seven mannequins portraying 'historical archetypes' were displayed in a semi-cylinder recreating a jungle-like environment even featuring bird sounds.[11] Through headphones, Dutch-speaking visitors could listen to their stories about 'how these characters were 'simultaneously part of both colonial and Dutch societies, and thus recognize that colonialism is much more than a political and economic history belonging to the past' (Legêne 2009, 240). This way I learned that the goal of the display was to make visible how identity and difference had been staged through the technology of the museum so that visitors could be aware of how 'colonial identity, with all its implicit and

10 The existence of an "Indo" population, meaning individuals of mixed descent, and their biographies in the difficult years post-independence did not feature in the museum, whose 'main function had been to confirm the Dutch elite's family tradition of living in two worlds, a tradition that in its Euro-centeredness as such did not allow for many shades of "white"' (Legêne 2009, 239).

11 The seven other life-sized mannequins at the center of the installation were supposed to represent archetypes who had previously been invisible within the museum's collection: a governor general, a tobacco planter who also became one of the founders of the Colonial Institute, a missionary woman and an explorer; two other figures represented instead an Indonesian man and woman who worked for the Dutch colonial regime.

explicit mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, resonates in current debates on Dutch transnational identity'(Legêne 2009, 241).

At least until later in the fall of 2017 when the exhibition *Afterlives of Slavery* opened, explicit references to colonial violence and race were not present in any of the wall texts across the displays making up the permanent collection. During that first visit, I felt that subtler technologies like the 'distribution of sentiment' (Stoler 2010a, 58) and 'choreography of the everyday' (Stoler 2010b, 17) that regulated the intimate sphere of colonial subjects were only hinted at. There was also no mention of how people resisted, of the war of independence, of 'police actions'. Only later the photographs of massacres conducted by the Dutch Army during the Atjeh war, on which Paul Bijl based his research, were added to the Colonial Theater with an accompanying text filling this particular gap. Thus, the role that ethnographic museums played in construing the 'conceptual heritage' (Hesse 2007) of race through collecting and exhibiting the 'Other' is implied but never fully explored. Instead, a new narrative is produced in which the formerly Othered are brought back from storage and dressed over in a new costume: from unnamed Javanese woman to school teacher, from racial stereotype to 'historical archetype'. As we will see in Chapter 4, in 2015 Hodan Warsame, Simone Zeefuik, and Tirza Balk from the group Decolonize the Museum extensively critiqued these omissions pointing at how the museum had been 'speaking from and for the white gaze' by 'privileging the perspective and stories of (white) colonizers' but also 'assuming that visitors are white Dutch' (Warsame 2015). Without the possibility of reading and reflecting on Legêne's reconstruction beforehand, only certain visitors with a much broader and deeper system of references would be able to perhaps access the meaning of the colonial theater. The issue with this is, as Mieke Bal observes, that if the interpretative materials accompanying exhibitions do not change to include the museum's 'critical consciousness' then they fail in pointing 'at their own discourse as not natural, as a sign system' (1992, 562). In this case, the 'critical consciousness' was only retrievable through research while the discourse of the museum not only continued to appear 'natural' but also gave way to a new timeline: the refurbishment had been necessary to upend the essentialized representation of the formerly colonized as an active effort to reinscribe them as subjects and not objects of a shared heritage; reflecting on the omissions and silences in the museum's past, however, still does not account for the continuities between colonial taxonomies and the racial undertones of the Dutch citizenship regime; ultimately, the refurbishment stopped at the threshold and failed to interrogate, in a way

intelligible for a public of non-experts, how colonial articulations of race re-emerge in elite discourses on identity, belonging, and citizenship. As the next pages will show, because of the history of its collections and role as a national institution the museum feels 'conscripted . . . as potential agents of change' (Balkenhol and Modest 2019, 188) but the timeframe in which this change has happened needs to be thoroughly questioned.

A new timeline of change

Whereas the curatorial approach behind the reactivation was quite sophisticated, it remained largely invisible in the outcome of the process. At the same time, through the refurbishment the museum is still not renouncing its authority in producing a timeline of progress in which 'postcolonial' citizens, who were excluded from the Colonial Museum, are reinstated as full citizens in this new, self-reflexive iteration of the museum. But the series of inclusionary gestures directed at different postcolonial groups have always been subjected to gradualism and conditionality expressed through comparisons with changing definitions of who represents the Other. The limitations in what the museum was willing to say through *Eastward Bound*! are a product of the time in which the 1994-2008 renovation was being developed: the central themes of the refurbishment in fact mirrored the discourses on citizenship and belonging that were being produced and circulated outside of the museum. The late 1990s and 2000s are depicted as a turbulent time in the Dutch political landscape in which a shift took place from a Dutch way that envisioned 'practical' multiculturalism as a tool for social cohesion, to a post-9/11 culturalist turn that saw increasing demands for cultural loyalty to an ideal notion of 'Dutchness'. In this context, *Eastwards Bound!* represented an attempt through which the museum began to situate itself as a trustworthy interlocutor in the discourse on how to expand the borders of belonging. This type of positioning started in the 1980s when the Tropenmuseum began to include through its public programming not only 'postcolonial' citizens coming from Indonesia, Suriname, and the Antilles but also, after the arrival and settlement of guest workers mainly from Morocco and Turkey, 'new' Dutch citizens predominantly of Muslim background. As the politics of recognition grew more and more complex ethnographic museums in particular, because of their 'world heritage' collections, have been engaged in rethinking their representational strategies to highlight the importance of the cultural diversity of their newer constituencies. Further, they 'have been imagined, indeed mobilized, as institutions with a central role to play in

connecting with diverse postcolonial and post-migrant communities within European changing polities, as spaces of recognition or sites for *belonging work*' (Modest 2019, 13).

The Tropenmuseum that I encountered as I approached it as a case study was not simply the result of the caesura brought about by the merger and the creation of the NMWC. Throughout the period during which I conducted fieldwork, the museum had been communicating the intention to reflect on its 'implicatedness in the Dutch colonial project' as part of a process of critical engagement with the colonial past (Balkenhol and Modest 2019, 186). This self-reflexive move found a theoretical companion in Michael Rothberg's concept of 'implicated subject' prefigured as a collective *we* that could be able to acknowledge a degree of complicity in the legacies of past violence, like colonialism. However, implication does not coincide with perpetration or with juridical definitions of guilt. The value of recognizing our implication lies in the fact that '[c]ultural memory and discourses on the past do not themselves constitute institutionalized agencies capable of redressing injustices' (Rothberg 2019, 137). Nonetheless, they allow for the possibility of creating 'arenas where injustices are recognized and new frameworks are imagined', which are 'necessary if not sufficient' for reparation (Rothberg 2019, 138). The prospect of redress that Rothberg proposes is largely based on 'cultural and symbolic politics', which are able of going 'beyond the material realm' and towards a 'more capacious notion of implication'(2019, 142). And yet the scholar acknowledges that becoming aware of 'one's position as an unwilling perpetuator of injustice does not necessarily result in a radical critique of that injustice' (2019, 145).[12] The limitations of Rothberg's argument are built precisely in how it lends itself to be employed by institutions and not just subjects. Especially in how, through it, institutional actors can rewrite their recent past according to a timeline of progress rendered more believable by publicly recognizing their past mistakes while stopping at the threshold of radically evaluating how, if not actively perpetrating injustices, they can still uphold an unjust status-quo.

12 The final goal would be, the author posits, to 'transfigure' implication, which could make us able to enact 'long-distance solidarity', which is 'premised on difference rather than logics of sameness and identification' (Rothberg 2019, 13). Therefore, through this 'differentiated' solidarity, subjects that are implicated in structures of domination and oppression can take responsibility for dismantling them by 'acting in concert with others' (2019, 200). And while the 'self-reflexivity of implicated subjects is not sufficient for the construction of durable solidarities' it 'remains a necessary component of coalition building'(Rothberg 2019, 203)

In a 2019 text, Markus Balkenhol and then- RCMC director Wayne Modest use a series of rhetorical attacks against the Tropenmuseum from the right-wing party PPV (Party for Freedom) as a starting point for their analysis. They argue that the narratives built through right-wing populist discourses make a case for a 'differential economy of care' based on the 'presumed right to citizenship' under which 'racialized and culturalized others' are framed as 'deserving of a different kind of care, based on benevolence, tolerance, and compassion' while simultaneously 'postcolonial and (post)migrant citizens are either regarded as not caring enough about the nation or even a threat to the nation's future, its values, and its culture' (Balkenhol and Modest 2019, 175). Like other heritage institutions, the museum finds itself being 'conscripted' by right-wing commentators 'into these narratives about love for the nation and for "its' people"' in which museums 'occupy an ambivalent position of being both conscripts in the populist project and potential agents of change' (Balkenhol and Modest 2019, 188). My analysis departs from Balkenhol and Modest's from this last point, since I do not see museums and other cultural institutions necessarily as 'conscripts' but rather as one of the stages in which to act out the issues connected to belonging and care. In the years that preceded and followed the merger, the Tropenmuseum and the public discussion on its function in society replicated the notion of what Ruth Philips has called the 'museum-as-theatre': meaning that the institution offers a microcosm in which to play out 'real political dynamics' and where to gain new insight into 'these performative and public dimensions of professional practice' (2005, 88). Writing from the context of Canada as a settler-colonial state, Philips argues that this function of the museum could hopefully inspire activism capable of shifting 'public opinion and changes in institutions, laws, and professional practices' (2005, 88). Indeed, the Tropenmuseum is among the organizations more actively involved in creating a space in which to stage dialogues about difficult topics, like the legacies of colonialism; whilst also both inviting and responding to critique and contestation about the museum's implication with the histories and epistemologies that have contributed to present inequalities and exclusions. This is a decisive shift: from the institution as exhibitionary complex, governmental assemblage, and 'differencing machine'(Bennett 2013), to uncritical contact zones of neocolonial collaboration (Boast 2011), to a new *new* museum that is emerging from decades of academic criticism and activist work.

Whereas political arenas are dominated by the high-octane and volatile 'culturalist drama', the cultural sector and heritage institutions in particular offer a safer space in which to allow multiple voices to make the case for

softer, less constrictive notions of citizenship and belonging. This safe space, however, even if opposes nuance to the excesses of populist right-wing discourse, nevertheless reinforces a model of institutionally-sanctioned redress and reform that ultimately stalls action by devaluing any political claim or gesture that is not articulated through proper means and in proper avenues. Should museums then be one of these avenues? Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp and Chris Wingfield offer a reflection on the consequences of positioning the museum as a 'safe space' by analyzing the debate surrounding the restitution of a Benin bronze owned by one of the University of Cambridge's colleges. Their analysis concludes that in this and other cases in which 'making-safe' to resolve tensions was deemed necessary, the 'real assumption of "safe space" in the ethnographic museum' is 'a safety that emerges from saying the right things while being able to do very little' (2019, 26). Further, in a 'context where action, instead of words, is demanded by contemporary political realities' (2019, 26) the institutional safe space stalls concrete measures by acknowledging the need for radical action while also postponing it indefinitely. This sobering conclusion alludes to a decoupling between what the museum knows and what it does not know about its own functioning: the fact that taking action to provide a safer platform in which to discuss thorny issues results in institutional paralysis is seen as a paradox, an unwanted and unexpected result.

If this insight is applied to the Tropenmuseum's work around the notion of implication, we can see how it acquires a new dimension. During an online talk in the summer of 2020 titled *Thinking With Michael Rothberg: The Implicated Subject* and hosted by RCMC, first a member of the audience then Wayne Modest asked the author what role the category of implication can have within museums. Rothberg first emphasized that his 'approach tends to be human-focused and subject-focused' but then expanded on his view acknowledging that institutions are sites of implication since 'subjects are entangled with structures through the mediating form of institutions' (Rothberg 2020). Ultimately, however, he believes that educational organizations like universities and museums 'are also spaces for counter-hegemonic projects . . . and for hopefully producing different kinds of subjects and, through them, different types of institutions' (Rothberg 2020). Whilst it is important to acknowledge that institutions are made of people, on whom depends the support and deployment of progressive ideas, they are not people. The idea of a museum, and not a being, as implicated in harmful structures – but not *intentionally* being a perpetrator – enacts a double-register in which an organization and its reach are shrunk to possess individual-like attributes.

Like a person, the implicated museum can know and not know, it can decide to act on previous ignorance by recognizing its degree of complicity and thus 'hopefully' produce subjects who in turn will be able to make the institution anew.[13] This results in a disorienting suspension between what the museum wants to achieve and the reason why it might fail, which creates a new timeline of change: the institution openly recognizes its role in the violence of the past and in failing to properly address inequality in the present over and over again; each time, the declaration of implication is more sophisticated as its output is in terms of exhibitions and public programming. What is erased through the resonance given to criticism coming both from within the museum and through welcoming outside voices (instead of attempting to suppress them), is how these moments of reckoning are recurring and built within a precise economy – in competition but also in accord with other museums and cultural organizations. They have been happening on the occasion of each refurbishment, in parallel with a range of societal shifts, yet somehow each breakthrough has not been accompanied by the structural overhaul it had advertised. Whereas some of the exhibitions and public talks within the Tropenmuseum attest to the willingness to ask difficult questions, the different parts of which the NMWC is made are not all moving at the same speed. The next pages will explore whether the museum's ongoing exploration of matters of belonging and citizenship finds a correspondence in participatory projects in the Indische Buurt, the district in which the museum is located. Here a history of multiple displacements highlights the presence of another worrisome degree of implication: with a current vision of the neighborhood that mobilizes cultural memory to produce the borough as a destination within Amsterdam; and that homogenizes the hyphenated identities of the borough's residents to support a cosmopolitan vision of the borough in which diversity is merely a happy byproduct of migration.

Good food, good neighbors and racial-colonial undertones

Due to the global provenance of its collection and the ambition of being a museum 'from today and around the corner', the NMWC has seen its audiences multiply exponentially: from 'postcolonial' citizens to newer migrants to

13 In the context of analyzing the non-performativity of diversity and anti-racism work in institutional settings, Sara Ahmed uses the concept of an institution 'being posited as like an individual, as someone who suffers from prejudice and who can be treated, so that he or she can act better toward racial others' (Ahmed 2012, 45 italics in the original).

neighbors – all are connected in the museum's vision of world citizenship.[14] Exhibitions and other forms of public programming often feature personal memories of arriving and settling as starting points to prompt a conversation on identity, culture, and what forms the shared heritage of the Dutch nation. But whilst the lived reality of what constitutes Dutchness continues to change along with the lived multiculture, a classed, gendered, and racialized notion of an ideal 'good citizen' continues to be opposed to Other identities. Heritage becomes the tool through which to shorten the distance from this ideal subject: it can be used for claiming the experience of migration as universal and thus enjoining 'new' and 'old' Dutch citizens in a cosmopolitan polity; and/or it can be employed to reclaim cultural difference as enriching for the nation, which is rendered more 'flavorful' through the influx of different cultures. The question of how to engage different publics – and publics that are embodied in difference – is further complicated by the physical and symbolical location that the Tropenmuseum occupies within the public imaginary of Amsterdam as the most diverse city in the Netherlands.[15] But also with the position that the museum occupies within the city, away from the Museumplein pole where the flagship Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk, and Van Gogh museums are situated. The Tropenmuseum is in fact located in a formerly working-class and immigrant neighborhood within the Amsterdam East district. This area is comprised of smaller boroughs and among them, the most widely known is the Indische Buurt (the Indies borough). At the borders of the district lies the museum and the beautiful Oosterpark, where the National Slavery Monument is also located. Incidentally, the street separating the museum and the park from the rest of the area is the same where the murder of Theo van Gogh took place. For the first two years of my PhD (2017-2019), during which I conducted the majority of my fieldwork in the Tropenmuseum, I lived less than five hundred meters from it: in a shared house located in the Dapperbuurt, which is the portion of the neighborhood separated by train tracks from the Indische

14 World citizenship, however, is a contested concept based on cosmopolitan ethics that needs to be analyzed as a 'historically produced discourse – anchored in particular material interests and relations of power' (Danewid 2018, 17).

15 Some critics have argued that the type of participatory approach developed under the influence of New Museology or, in general, with a focus on source communities and the engagement of local groups has been inconsistent at best; and, at worst, that it has reinforced reductive understandings of 'community' and re-inscribed fixed and static ideas of culture and difference (see Crooke 2006; Watson and Watson 2007; Golding and Modest 2013). The commitment to inclusion has also often been characterized by a focus on individual projects rather than on structural issues within the institution, whereas the focus on multiculturalism and migration has not been immune from culturalist assumptions that further reify cultural difference.

Buurt. At that time, I was often traveling to attend the seminars organized by CHEurope project's partners and would rarely spend more than three or four weeks in a row in Amsterdam. Whereas my attachment to the city felt tenuous, the neighborhood became crucial: the only way I could feel at least partially tethered to my new home was tied to knowing where to shop, work and relax in my immediate surroundings. When I had to look for another apartment I felt anxious at the thought that I probably could not find an affordable one in that same area, since the Indische Buurt has been one of Amsterdam's most rapidly gentrifying areas. It was at this point that I noticed that several of the listings targeting young professionals – showing renovated and light-filled flats –often included a photo of the Tropenmuseum to underline this way the prestige position within an up-and-coming area (see for instance on the topic of heritage and urban movements De Cesari and Herzfeld 2015).

Originally built for the lower-middle class, the Indische Buurt – whose name and streets refer to the Dutch East Indies and specific locations across the Indonesian archipelago –started to decline in the 1960s. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s cheap housing attracted guest workers from Morocco and Turkey, whose relocation to the area was also a consequence of unofficial *spreidingsbeleid* (spreading policies) that closed-off central areas of the city to non-white residents (Ernst and Doucet 2014; Hagemans et al. 2015). At this time, the Indische Buurt began to be portrayed by Dutch media and political discourse as a dangerous ghetto (Akkermans et al. 2013). This narrative remained predominant until the 2000s and worsened further in the aftermath of van Gogh's assassination, but then, in 2009 and 2016, two waves of state-led regeneration projects began to radically change the area causing the displacement of several of its original inhabitants. Because of the overlapping between my experience of the neighborhood and the themes I was exploring in my research, I could not limit my analysis to the museum's approach to exhibition-making and curatorship. I also sought to understand which shapes would 'belonging work' take in the district in which the Tropenmuseum is situated. In the fall of 2018, I was able to attend one of *Food-Verhalentours Javakwartier* (Java quartier's food and stories tours) that resulted from a collaboration between the Tropenmuseum and the entity called Javakwartier, a placemaking and branding project instrumental in the 2016 urban regeneration strategy.[16] The two editions of the project, in the fall

16 Elisa Fiore reconstructs how The Javakwartier initiative came to be: it started in 2016 and funded within the framework of the municipality's program Experiments City in Balance (Gemeente Amsterdam 2015) and after, within the 2018–2022 City in Balance policy (Gemeente Amsterdam 2018), which 'meant to tackle the mounting touristification of the inner city of Amsterdam'. The-

of 2018 and the spring of 2019, were advertised as born out of the 'idea of celebrating history, migration and entrepreneurial stories through delicious food' (Tropenmuseum 2019). The tours took place on Sundays and were led by freelance guides for a maximum of ten people and lasted, depending on weather conditions, between three and four hours; the €35 participation fee included admission to the museum. After numerous attempts, I was finally able to book a spot in the often sold-out tours in October 2018. I arrived at the meeting point in front of the fountain on Javaplein where I was greeted by a group of participants consisting of seven adults (all white Dutch), two preteens (accompanying their parents), and an Afro-Dutch woman, who identified herself as our guide for the day. At the time, my knowledge of the Dutch language was quite limited so I could not follow the bits of casual conversations taking place around me. Instead, I concentrated on the stories told with each accompanying dish: from Surinamese's pom in Ricardo's restaurant, the creolized rendition of a Portuguese oven dish first introduced in Suriname by Portuguese-Jewish plantation owners; to the baklava in the Divan patisserie, which I normally frequented, where the success of the dessert across the Middle East was explained as stemming from the belief in the aphrodisiac powers of the spices used in its preparation; to assisting to how the traditional lavas bread is prepared in the Nour kebab restaurant, also a place that I had often visited. From what I could gather the stories being told were mostly referring to the origin of ingredients and cooking techniques while also centering on celebrating the owners of the establishments for bridging the gap between their cultures and the Netherlands. The tours could have been a chance for the Tropenmuseum to insert an element of doubt into the experience by, for instance, allowing participants to reflect on how the activity of consuming 'unfamiliar' cuisines in gentrified districts is tied to the commodification of food cultures; and by taking apart the marketing devices aiming to seduce a public of urban 'explorers' that still rely on colonial tropes related to discovery and authenticity.

Whereas in the 2009 urban regeneration phase the primary focus was to create a 'mixed neighborhood' by favoring homeowners over renters, from 2016 on the policy goal has become to establish the Indische Buurt

refore, the goal of Javakwartier was 'a substantial branding operation that would market the Javastraat and surroundings as "just another piece of authentic, cosmopolitan Amsterdam"(Gemeente Amsterdam 2018, 3; author's translation)' (Fiore 2021, 184). Ultimately, the project was meant 'to strengthen and retain the multicultural character of the Javastraat' while using it 'as a unique selling point to promote the area to visitors and tourists and thus contribute to the distribution of tourism [across the city]' (2021, 184).

as an attractive destination for both dwellers and tourists by highlighting its multicultural offer. As shown by Elisa Fiore and Liedeke Plate, a key element of this process has been the valorization of ethnic food (2021). In particular, in her analysis of the tours, Fiore (2021) points out that the stories told, which followed a script written on cards, did not mention the historical and geopolitical causes that made the Indische Buurt an immigrant district. In her critique of the Javakwartier initiatives she concludes that

> [a]lthough appearing as a process fostering ethnic life and ethnic value through the creation of a space for diversity consumption, Javakwartier has in fact contributed to further the institutional vision for the Indische Buurt based on 'an 'economy of otherness'(Hage 2000, 128) whereby racialized groups feature either as excessive bodies to be administered or – once regulated – as exotic exhibits for the use and consumption of white middle-class tourists and consumers (Fiore 2021, 194)

While the involvement of the Tropenmuseum had been limited to contributing to the texts describing the food items and their colonial connection, the fact that it followed the celebratory script of the Javakwartier initiative needs to be problematized. Despite the commitment to avoid an essentializing style of representation, the model of memory as resource: in this occurrence, stories regarding food and migration aid to construct a simplified version of the identity of the Indische Buurt and making it readable for a public. A migrant neighborhood becomes this way almost incidentally connected to the phenomenon of migration and the causes behind it: without historicizing it, it appears as more connected to how ingredients and recipes travel than to why the people carrying this knowledge have moved from their countries to the Netherlands. And yet the memory of migration is also a property, meaning an attribute that characterizes the entirety of someone's identity and confirms what we, as the audience, have come to expect: the food is different because the people and their culture are different. As Fiore remarks 'making the "other" — and the Javastraat as itself a place of "otherness" — feel as though spatiotemporally dislocated from Western modernity' (Fiore 2021, 194). As a result, difference is connected to the authenticity of the culinary experience despite the ordinariness that the actual food presented during the tours has come to occupy in Western food culture. This inconsistency is superseded by the format of the tour, which aims to attract urban explorers that are still not familiar with what the Javakwartier has on offer: to 'taste the world' by savoring *their* food and *their* stories.[17] Stories that cannot be easily incorporated within

17 There are multiple layers behind this notion, which bell hooks has unpacked in her article

the image of the ‘good’ migrant becoming successful through their resilience, inventiveness, and entrepreneurship cannot enter the space of consumption and pleasure, as they would spoil the taste for difference.

When I asked then-director Schoonderwoerd whether he had the impression the museums are called to contribute to quick-fix solutions for issues perceived as affecting local neighborhoods, he explained the relationship between cultural institutions and policymakers as not one in which one party forces the other to act. In particular, when cultural organizations plan to engage with local communities, he suggests a cautious approach but ultimately sees these projects as a sign of progress in line with the Dutch tradition of working together to solve common problems. However, he also stresses that museums and cultural organizations are not directly controlled by the state, which has a limited say in their work:

> The other side of it is that in the Netherlands politicians don’t have a direct influence on our policies, or me for instance. The city alderman for the arts cannot call me and say ‘you should be doing this or that’, which is different in many if not most other European countries . . . where the involvement of state and local politicians is much higher.
>
> We don’t work like that here. It’s more like no one forces you to collaborate it’s like how can we seek together to make our city better. We think that’s one of the responsibilities that we have ourselves (Schoonderwoerd 2019)

Thus in Schoonderwoerd’s statements, the museum oscillates between self-reflexivity on the purpose and range of its work with local neighborhoods and proactiveness in collaborating with politicians and policy-makers to ‘make our city better’ (2019). But the contours of what ‘better’ means in a place like the Indische Buurt are shaped by a history characterized by displacement: first as a consequence of migration and then of gentrification. The Java Quartier food tours have not been successful only in terms of audience but also in how many restaurant owners have decided to adhere to the project. This type of cultural participation – time-limited and surface-level – appears to have a transactional character: being featured in a museum’s project is accompanied

Eating the Other: ‘[w]ithin commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture’ (1992, 21). Sara Ahmed points out that ‘exotic and strange foods’ have been employed to symbolize difference that can be ‘consumed’ and therefore ‘valued’: ‘difference is valued insofar as it can be incorporated into, not only the nation space, but also the individual body, the body-at-home (this body does not have to leave home to ‘eat’ difference). By implication differences that cannot be assimilated into the nation or body through the process of consumption have no value, (Ahmed 2013, 117–18 emphasis in the original)

by an inherent value coming from the prestige of the institution. It is a way to increase the visibility and appeal of a street filled with businesses. But the reason behind being selected for such projects still lies in a particular element of the identity of the participants: in the fact that they are not from 'here'. Even if the museum endeavors to not replicate essentializing ways of representing the 'neighbors', these initiatives cannot be separated by how the cultural memory of being from 'elsewhere' is mobilized to build homogenous identities that must fulfill the range of possibilities established by state and state-like institutions.

When the Indische Buurt was still being described as a ghetto, these identities and their charged past were employed to portray 'bad' citizens to juxtapose with 'good' ones. Now, as urban renewal transforms the district, participation in this type of project – even when critical – offers an avenue through which to be represented and recognized. But from the standpoint of policymakers and funders, it also helps to provide an image once again of 'good' engaged neighbors to oppose 'bad' and problematic subjects keeping other neighborhoods from fulfilling their potential. More than a collaboration established with residents, the tours appear as an exercise in place-branding glossing over the longevity of a colonial grammar to produce racialized notions of what constitutes a 'good citizen'. Colonial echoes are present in the rhetoric used first, to pathologize the neighborhood as a ghetto in need of intervention; and then, by exoticizing its inhabitants and their culinary cultures, to create an image of the borough as a multicultural destination to explore. The popularity of the tours then should be dissected against these understandings and perhaps used not to produce similar successful events but to reconsider how the museum has been engaging with the neighborhood and whose interest these projects serve. The next section will make emerge more of the tensions related to these issues by focusing on another temporary project: a pop-up museum about the rituals of 'neighbors'.

The 'anti-squat' museum: collecting rituals, exhibiting good citizenship

The *Buurtsalon Mijn Ritueel* (neighborhood's living room: my ritual) was included in a program under the aegis of the RCMC called *HABITAT Practicing Neighborhood Rituals* to establish 'a long-term liaison with different stakeholders in the neighborhood by connecting the minor histories and narratives of the neighbors to the collection of the museums' (Research Center for Material Culture 2019). The project occupied a

formerly empty lot located on Eerste van Swindenstraat, a busy street filled with supermarkets, bars, and restaurants intersecting with the street where the popular Dappermarkt takes place. I visited this pop-up museum shortly after it launched in March 2019 when I met with community programmer Liza Swaving who, together with RCMC's senior research and cultural programmer Amal Alhaag, had been in charge of developing the Buurtsalon. I recall visiting the space in the previous year when it was open a few days a week as a DIY shop selling inexpensive bikes. Swaving confirms that before the museum took over, the shop was the result of an *anti-kraak* (literally anti-squat) arrangement, meaning a type of property guardianship increasingly common in Amsterdam. In a city more and more unaffordable, mostly young people or people with low income are offered to lease accommodations at a reduced price and on a month-to-month basis to impede their squatting. Swaving reflects that the fact that the museum has been given the space is also part of the gentrification process of the neighborhood: on one hand, the municipality made the space available for the Tropenmuseum because a 'cultural goal' was prioritized over a bike shop; on the other, this 'adds to their goal of selling this space for a lot of money' (Swaving 2019). The project in fact was supported by the East Amsterdam municipality; by the VSB Fonds, a funding body specializing in social impact projects improving the *samenleven* (living together, coexistence) of local communities; and by Eigen Haard, one of the city's biggest housing corporations, and player in various projects of urban renewal. At the time of my visit, the floor deliberately presented some remnants of the previous incarnations of the space whilst newly painted white walls showcased photographs featuring the 'protagonists' of their rituals. On the right side of the room, a vitrine displayed objects related to the rituals gathered from residents such as an embroidered dowry and a collection of bibles; in the back, a pink neon light framed a space in which the public could write their stories about rituals on postcards and then hang them on the wall.

As we sat down on a wooden bench in the center of the room, Swaving explained to me the framework they worked on is based on the notion of rituals as the 'heritage people carry within themselves'(Swaving, 2019). In her view, heritage thus has an important function in relation to place-making since it contributes to creating 'a sense of "I belong here: this is how I appropriate this neighborhood and this is how we live together"'(2019). The questions guiding this approach sought to investigate the role that the museum could have for its 'neighbors': 'do they feel welcome in the museum? Do they feel that they co-own the museum?'(Swaving 2019). I interjected by pointing out the optical distance between the neighborhood, with its typical concrete social

housing edifices, and the neo-renaissance building of the Tropenmuseum. The edifice is perched on the district's borders: physically and aesthetically separated from the area through the park on one side and busy thoroughfares on the other. Swaving connects my words to the fact that museums are still not accessible to a variety of publics: 'going in, paying at the desk, leaving your coat somewhere – that's almost a ritual that includes some audiences and excludes others. You create also a barrier with the entrance fee'(2019). In contrast, the free pop-up museum is at street level and close to the market thus, by being close to the dynamics of the borough, heritage can be communicated in a different way. Swaving observes that since the local residents have a strong sense of attachment to the district, symbolized for instance by how densely frequented the market is, the dynamics between them and the institution are somehow reversed: 'we as a museum need to prove that we are part of it, so it works actually the other way around'(2019). As in the case of the food tours, the Tropenmuseum describes its involvement with the neighborhood as stemming from its ongoing exploration of the issues that connect heritage to belonging and citizenship. But even if a project like the Buurtsalon can be successful in building substantial links with local stakeholders, this could be jeopardized exactly by the temporary nature of these ventures: how to keep these relationships alive when it depends on something variables like the availability of funding or the continuity of employment of staff members? Swaving agrees that this represents a risk, in her case she reflects 'I'm a freelancer so when I leave what will be left of those relationships? Can I give them to the institution and will someone else be responsible?'(2019). As we will see in chapter 4, this is an ongoing concern within the museum but also within an entire cultural sector that is globally shaped by the precarious nature of most of its employment configurations: from volunteer work to zero-hours contracts, to reliance on freelance work or temporary appointments. This speaks volumes on how actually time-restricted these projects are, despite being advertised as tools to establish long-term, sustainable liaisons.

For Swaving what motivated the first nine individuals that have agreed to participate in Mijn Ritueel is their ongoing involvement in local community organizations and social work. This network of people was put together with the help of Zeraja Terluin, who worked on a variety of projects in the Indische Buurt with her organization Musea Zonder Muren (museums without walls). Swaving recognizes that the publics of these organizations 'aren't necessarily groups that we don't get in the museum'(2019). And yet she reiterates that the Buurtsalon is a pilot project, which will be used as a starting point to evaluate whether 'it becomes visible that neighbors are interested in heritage and that

they want to get access to the museum'(2019).[18] Through our conversation and the booklet published on the occasion of the launch of Mijn Ritueel, I learn more about the nine 'neighbors' that have shared their stories so far, and about their work with the local community:[19] Mercedes organizes Keti Koti tables, a new 'ritual' to bring together Dutch people 'from all colors' to discuss the legacy of slavery by sharing food and memories (Research Center for Material Culture 2019). Jaika celebrates every year with her family the anniversary of her coming to the Netherlands as a young adoptee and serves as an ambassador for Alle Kleuren Oost, an association that organizes neighborhood gatherings on the occasion of yearly commemorations like Keti Koti of festivities like Iftar. Nooshi, whose ritual consists in listening to music from various countries and thus connecting to her composite heritage, is a manager at de Meevart foundation, a local *broedplaats* (breeding ground): namely an association funded by the municipality to provide the borough with a variety of services in the framework of creating self-reliant citizens.[20] Victor is an actor, writer, and storyteller who is engaged in making visible the history and culture of the indigenous populations of Suriname, and who has a personal connection to an item in the collection of the Tropenmuseum, a wooden sculpture that was made by his grandfather. Jonathan, who teaches dance to local young people, finds confidence in the different braided hairstyles that his sister Samantha does for him: this time spent together reconnects them to their Afro-Surinamese heritage. Afifa is fond of her memories of working on embroidering her dowry with her mother in Morocco and has started the De Bloem foundation, which offers a variety of activities to women who are at risk of social isolation. The three remaining 'rituals' are the only cases in which migration is not explicitly linked to the biography of the protagonists: Eva is a therapist with a passion for traveling and her ritual consists in keeping a dream journal, and meditating and doing yoga in the morning; Greteke is the minister of the local church, the Muiderkerk, who welcomes her international congregation by reciting the Our Father prayer in different languages like

18 Since there is an assumption that people from this neighborhood do not have a relationship with the Tropenmuseum, I ask whether this is measured in any way. The reply is in fact that at that point no data was being collected about whether residents do access the museum and that this is why this project is important – because it allows to ask the question directly (Swaving 2019).

19 These stories were recorded by Nina van Hattum, a screenwriter and podcast producer, while photographer Nadine Stijns took portraits of the protagonists.

20 For a critical discussion of the function of the broedplaats in the context of Amsterdam's creative economy see Peck 2012 and Uitermark 2004.

Farsi or Sranan Tongo; Jechiam is the owner of Baking Lab, a local bakery with a social mission who employs mostly university students that want to learn how to bake while also studying a model of circular economy; one of them sees a similarity in the process of bread-making composed of different elements and ingredients – a 'high diversity just like Amsterdam East. A multicultural community where many nice things emerge: different tastes, different people' (Research Center for Material Culture 2019).

Towards the end of our conversation, Swaving opens up about some of the internal criticism the Buurtsalon received during the preparatory stages of the project. For instance, RCMC's director Wayne Modest expressed how the theme of rituals in itself could be problematic because of its link to how historically anthropologists have used it to exoticize the Other. He suggested that before continuing with the project the team should build a framework able to address the meanings and power relations behind the notion. Modest also argued against employing in the promotional material the image and story of Jonathan about the connection he feels with his ancestry through styling his hair in braids: publicizing the project through this particular story could risk reducing an entire cultural identity as this particular gesture. The director also wondered whether there was a similar representation with white participants as protagonists. Swaving counters that the hair story was not prompted by her or the team but came as the response to a general question about personal connections with a ritual:

> what I find difficult about the critique is that if you were to think about what kind of cultural stereotypes there are and which ones to avoid then you're curating stories in the direction that you want to tell them, so stories that defy cultural stereotypes (Swaving 2019)

This, according to her, goes against the goal of the project: the 'cultural representation' of the different groups of residents without curating the direction in which the stories they share are told. Swaving argues that

> I can't tell if this way you're pushing them to tell a particular story but what I do know is that when he came [up] with this ritual I wouldn't have told him 'I'm sorry that's a cultural stereotype, can you tell another ritual? Is there something else that doesn't fit being a black young man?'(Swaving 2019)

As Modest suggests, the issue of how to de-essentialize the representation of individuals who are embodied in difference must be properly addressed. However, we need to also question the discursive space in which the 'neighbors' personal connection of coming from an 'elsewhere' is formalized as a ritual: whilst this notion and the idea behind the project entail a more or less private,

Fig. 3 Promotional photograph of the Food and Verhalen Tours published on the Tropenmuseum's Facebook page. Photographer: Marvin Duiker. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum.

Fig. 4 View from the Buurtsalon installation used on the Tropenmuseum's Facebook page. Photographer: Kirsten van Santen. Courtesy of the Tropenmuseum.

intimate dimension, these moments of reconnecting with their heritage are collected and exhibited for a public. Some of the participants have already been using a particular aspect of their memories as a resource: like in the case of Mercedes and Victor. For the others, participating in Mijn Ritueel is a step forward in grounding their identity as an essential part of the life of the district. But whereas neighbors that belong to a diaspora need to represent and codify their difference through their rituals, thus mobilizing their memories of not being 'from the Netherlands', others do not have to refer to their origins because they are a given, a non-factor in how they present themselves and their ritual to the public. The pop-up museum is not, however, the first or only instance in which this differential mode of representation occurs. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the context of increasingly sophisticated politics of recognition cultural memory functions as resource and property. It allows citizens with an unsafe, unstable position in the recent past of the country to strengthen their bid to be formally recognized as belonging fully to the present and future of the Dutch polity. But to achieve this, their identity must look cohesive and their heritage readable enough to forgive its mixedness.

The public narrative surrounding the Indische Buurt celebrates how the neighborhood has left behind the past to become a successful example of multicultural *samenleven* (living together). The successfulness of this operation is measured through the participation of citizens in local organizations and participatory projects, which are supported through municipal funds according to a neoliberal model of active, responsible citizenship (see for example De Koning 2015; and De Koning, Jaffe, and Koster 2015). Whereas museums cannot produce citizens they can contribute to curating a notion of good, active citizenship that works along with the desires of policy-makers and urban managers: as Swaving stated the reason why the empty lot was given to the museum is to reinforce the appearance of the area as up and coming for new, wealthier residents and investors alike (on the instrumentalization of cultural and heritage projects to service state-led gentrification see for instance De Cesari and Dimova 2019). At the same time, even though the pop-up museum seeks to avoid essentialized or stereotypical representations, ends up reinforcing the distance between residents that can celebrate and enjoy the diversity of their neighborhood, and residents that need to embody that diversity for a public. As the Tropenmuseum continues to endeavor for improving the way it represents and includes its constituencies, internal friction on how to best do this is to be expected. Projects like those I have examined, which only allow for a cursory engagement with the

neighborhood, end up playing into modes of governance that make use of cultural participation to distinguish between good, active citizens and an unreachable Other. This modality of limited and uncritical involvement implicates the museum in something deeper than the typical ways in which heritage organizations and cultural projects are instrumentalized by public policy for window-dressing operations. It implicates it in the production of the Indische Buurt as a reconquered space, safe enough to enjoy for visitors and dwellers and yet increasingly inhabitable for its original residents.

Conclusion

This perspective of this chapter has moved between inside and outside, long-term visions and temporary projects, museum management, and fixed-term employees. The first section has examined how the post-merger Tropenmuseum originated from a longer history of engagement with the colonial roots of the institution and its history of collecting and exhibiting. Whereas the second section examines the issues related to the museum's attempts to evolve along notions like implication and making-safe, the third and fourth sections offer a counterpoint through the example of two participatory projects that took place in the Indische Buurt, the neighborhood where the museum is located. It is not surprising or paradoxical that these projects happened in the context of a museum that has been refocusing its mission to carefully reflect on its implication with the ongoing legacies of colonialism. However, I do think it is important to recognize that this process of reckoning might be more uneven, and perhaps easier to detour than it appears – but not simply on account of individual members of staff or individual projects, or due to the leadership of then-director Schoonderwoerd.

As is the case for most institutions making the transition towards becoming more diverse, inclusive, and socially relevant, if we look closely at what museums say they do and what they actually do we are bound to find discrepancies. The problem, however, does not lay in what publics and counter-publics expect of museums or cultural organizations – or at least not only; but in how despite decades of reform, the notion of belonging that emerges from big and small projects can ultimately not exceed the range of possibilities envisioned by state and state-like formations: 'good' citizens, 'good' migrant, 'good' life. Exploring what this means is the thread connecting the following chapters: in particular, Chapter 3 will focus on the museum's exhibit Aleppo and the canal tours of Rederij Lampedusa, two projects that rely on the presence of 'real refugees' to expand the knowledge of the public on the issue of migration.