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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 5

Connecting the present and past of activism in The Black Archives

Introduction

Mitchell Esajas: Black Lives All: Matter!
Black Female Lives All: Matter!
Black Queer Lives All: Matter!
Black Undocumented Lives All: Matter!
Black Muslim Lives All: Matter!
All Black Lives All: Matter!

(Mitchell Esajas #BlackLivesMatterNL Amsterdam (Improvised) Speech 2020 @mitch_positivity)

When on June 1st, 2020, Mitchell Esajas took the floor on Dam square, in front of approximately fourteen thousand people, he opened his address with this chant. He then admitted to not having prepared a full speech since the demonstration had been organized only a day prior. But he still wanted to voice his reflections upon the death of US citizen George Floyd, killed by police officer Derek Chauvin a few days before, on May 25th in Minneapolis. He wanted to express solidarity with the ongoing Black Lives Matter protests in North America but also wanted to point out that institutional racism is a problem in the Netherlands as well. He proceeded to lead the crowd in another chant quoting the words of Assata Shakur, a former member of the Black Panther and the Black Liberation Army. In his hand he had Shakur's autobiography, a book that he underlined is part of the collection of The Black Archives, the place where he works. After, he remembered Mitchel Winters and Mitch Henriquez who died at the hand of the Dutch police in 2016 and 2015 respectively.¹ Esajas also paid tribute to Perez Jong Loy who

1 Mitch Henriquez, an Aruban citizen vacationing in the Netherlands, was killed by Dutch police at a music festival in the Hague on 27 June 2015. He was restrained by five police officers and was choked to death. The official narrative that Henriquez had died at the hospital was disputed by videos taken by bystanders. The killing led to four days of rioting in the Hague, which resulted in hundreds of arrests and a ban on public assembly ("Killing of Mitch Henriquez" 2022). Mitchel Winters died on May 30, 2016 in Schiedam: he called the police from Beatrix Park and reported an armed robbery in which he gave his own description. The police officers that responded found Winters on location and warned to shoot if he didn't show his hands. The officer then fired seven bullets at Mitchel, provoking his death. Other victims of police violence were remembered during the demonstration like Rishi Chandrikasing, a 17 year old Dutch citizen, who was shot dead on November 23, 2012 by a police officer arrived on the scene at the Hollands Spoor railway station, after receiving a call stating that there was someone who was making threats with a firearm. The police waited for one minute before attempting to resuscitate him and he was then rushed to hospital where he died. He was not carrying a firearm and had only keys and a mobile phone in his pockets. The police took eight hours to contact Chandrikasing's family, even though his mother's telephone number was on his keychain ("Killing of Rishi Chandrikasing" 2022). On March 14 2020, Tomy Holten, a Dutch citizen of Haitian descent, died in police custody after being arrested in a supermarket in the town of Zwolle. His death was ruled as an overdose, but footage from the arrest shows police officers violently tackling Holten and pressing him on the floor.

had passed away in 2019, a beloved Afro-Surinamese activist and community organizer behind several campaigns around the memory of slavery – like the one highlighting 1873 as the real year in which slavery ended in the Dutch West Indies. In his semi-improvised speech, memory is the thread connecting past and present violence: a *long durée* that enjoins the racist world order created through colonialism and the enslavement of people, to current manifestations of police brutality and structural inequality, to anti-blackness intrinsic to migration policies at EU and national level (fieldnotes 2020). In a way, his speech effectively condenses the phenomenon I have sketched out throughout this thesis. Memory in Esajas' words has also multiple functions: it works as embodied testimony of history, it is a political act in the case of the remembrance of victims of state violence, and is a mean to offer a tribute to a previous generation of activists, who have also campaigned for recognition and rights through memory work. This final chapter focuses on The Black Archives (henceforth TBA) to continue to explore the thread connecting memory to present manifestations of unequal, racialized, and precarized versions of citizenship. As we have seen, TBA is a cultural organization located in the same neighborhood as the Tropenmuseum that is establishing itself as an alternative center of knowledge production on the legacies of colonialism and anti-racism activism in the Netherlands. This chapter reads as a coda to the dissertation: it follows my attempts to connect the different threads running through it to a specific 'here and now'. My analysis is derived from fieldwork between 2019 and 2020 that, because of the pandemic, had to shift from direct observation during exhibitions and tours, and interviews with key informants to utilizing and examining online sources. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first part describes how The Black Archives was founded and examines its positioning within international discourses on the colonial past and slavery and how the organization attempts to historicize itself in a longer tradition of anti-racism activism in the Netherlands. As the function of memory evolves to fulfill the needs of diasporas and the nation, what is the role played by TBA in producing and circulating notions of belonging, black subjectivity, and citizenship? The second part looks at the temporary project The Black Archives Bijlmer, which run between 2020 and 2021, in Amsterdam South East: a location particularly important in the postcolonial history of the country and where different configurations of blackness and belonging intersect. Connecting today's struggles with those of celebrated black radicals and black Dutch activists appears to be fulfilling the need to exit

the constrictive categories that define our ‘historical present’ (Berlant 2011). At the same time, archiving the current movement seems important to avoid that other parties appropriating its narrative. But what can memorializing activism ‘as it happens’ achieve? And which politics does this specific type of producing cultural memory serve?

‘A space to feel safe . . . not only in our bodies but in our thoughts’

Among all the newly opened restaurants and cafes, hairdressers, and clothes shops that form now the backdrop of the Indische Buurt in Amsterdam East some places appear as they could speak of a different history. Less than a kilometer away from the Tropenmuseum, the Vereniging Ons Suriname (V.O.S., Association Our Suriname) has since 1973 found its permanent home in a former school building. The association, established in 1919, is one of the oldest Surinamese organizations in the Netherlands and throughout the decades has provided a meeting place for the Surinamese and Caribbean diaspora. What started as a platform to promote cultural exchange between the colony and the motherland, became in the 1950s a center for political activism. In particular, after the Surinamese students’ organization *Wie Egie Sanie* (our own things) joined the board, the association moved decidedly in the direction of Surinamese nationalism and socialist internationalism. And after Suriname’s independence in 1975, V.O.S. campaigned for the welfare of the thousands that left the country. Only in the 1990s, the association started focusing again primarily on Surinamese cultural heritage, arts, literature, film, and music in order to bring together older and second generations, who identify as Surinamese-Dutch but wanted to maintain a link to the country of origin of their parents and relatives. In 2016, a section of the building that V.O.S. has owned since 1994 has been made available for a new organization in Amsterdam’s busy cultural landscape called The Black Archives.

In the words of two of its founders, Jessica de Abreu and Mitchell Esajas, TBA operates as an “‘alternative archive” which encapsulates counternarratives to the dominant Eurocentric narrative (Esajas and Abreu 2019). It originated from the work they started through the New Urban Collective (NUC): a network of students and young professionals with ethnic minority backgrounds that aims to support young people by bridging the gap between local communities, grassroots organizations institutions, and local government. De Abreu and Esajas started this platform to combat the sense of isolation they had been experiencing during their studies since ‘[h]igher education can feel inaccessible for people of color, especially black people in the Netherlands’, with NUC they were looking to create ‘a space to feel safe

at the university, not only in our bodies but also in our thoughts’(de Abreu in Pitts 2019). The decision to expand the work of the network by also focusing on the history and heritage of different black diasporic communities in the Netherlands grew organically from this need. The first large acquisition of books consisted of a donation from Thiemo and Miguel Heilbron, the sons of the Surinamese sociologist Waldo Heilbron, who had passed away in 2009. To honor the legacy of their father, who had been committed to studying the aftermath of slavery and colonialism, they were looking for ways to make the collection available to the public so they donated a part of it to NUC. Together with Esajas and de Abreu, they opened the New Urban Café in Amsterdam North as a space where to hold events and where the books could be freely accessed. Soon after, however, due to the area’s rapidly increasing rents, they had to start looking for another suitable location. NUC was offered a space in the building of Vereniging Ons Suriname in exchange for taking the reins in managing the association’s extensive collection of books, documents, and artifacts about the history of the Surinamese community in the Netherlands: The Black Archives was born. Shortly after moving into the new space, they found several boxes containing books and objects collected by Hermina and Otto Huiswoud, two Dutch-speaking communist militants from the Caribbeans. The Huiswouds lived in Amsterdam in the latest stage of a life spent fighting against imperialism, and would then become the protagonists of TBA’s 2017 first exhibition titled *Zwart & Revolutionair* (Black and Revolutionary), which aimed to retell the story of these semi-forgotten figures by centering their position as descendants of the enslaved who then became ‘revolutionaries’.

Up until the forced break caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Archives’ programming has revolved around exhibitions and monthly tours of the collection along with events catering to the needs of a range of audiences. From hosting local politicians during the electoral period to networking events aimed at young people to organizing activities and workshops related to particular themes and occasions like the annual Ketu Koti festival. In September 2019, I attended one of their Saturday tours in English together with a small group of international participants, and, shortly afterward, I joined a workshop organized for students of the University of Amsterdam that followed a structure similar to the tours. Both times the group was greeted at the entrance by Mitchell Esajas and then led to the upper floor where the public-facing portion of TBA’s archive is located. Among the rows of bookstands, a small seating space has been created: there Esajas began his presentation, standing between two small tables where some of

the most interesting items of the collection are on display. He explained how the histories of slavery and colonialism have been largely absent by Dutch public discourse and school education. Then, he directed the group's attention to the portion of the room dedicated to a collection of books, objects, and memorabilia portraying racial caricatures: from children's books and toys to coffee tins, to advertising posters, to playing cards. Esajas showed some of these artifacts to explain how ingrained racial stereotypes are in Dutch culture but also in the cultural archive of other former colonial powers like Britain – as the popular black face character of the Golliwog, of which TBA owns a puppet and a book, demonstrates. Despite even showing a pair of shackles that were used to constrain enslaved people, slavery was discussed not so much in terms of trauma or pain but as part of wider imperial and capitalist formations. Esajas' talk carried on moving between global contexts and local histories: by showing and discussing objects and books that were part of private collections assembled by intellectuals belonging to the Surinamese and Caribbean diasporas, he sketched a captivating portrait of how private mode of remembering intersect with the production of public knowledge on the afterlives of slavery and colonialism, which in turn provide a point of reference for the heritage Netherlands' Afro-Dutch communities.

Already from its name, TBA positions itself within a particular constellation of identity and meaning. However, it is important to point out that the notions of black and blackness do not refer to a homogenous group, nor are adopted and supported by all people of color living in the Netherlands. In her analysis of heritage-making practices of young Afro-Dutch people of Caribbean and Ghanaian descent, Marleen de Witte observes that '[c]ross-cutting the notion of (and struggle for) black citizenship' there is 'a distinction made between (Afro-Caribbean) postcolonial belonging and (African) postmigrant (non)belonging' (de Witte 2019, 617). The oldest and largest group of Dutch citizens of African descent stems from a 'double diaspora' that consisted, first, of the displacement of enslaved people from Africa to the Caribbean during Dutch colonial rule; later, different waves of migration from Suriname and the Antillean islands brought back these overseas national to the 'motherland' (de Witte 2019). Migration from sub-Saharan African regions instead started much more recently, in the 1980s: not all members of these communities have managed to access the naturalization process and some also do not possess official residency papers. The connection to an African heritage and notions of blackness has different meanings then for Surinamese and Antillean-Dutch versus groups with 'living connections to concrete places in Africa' (de Witte 2019, 614) – such as the Ghanaian

Dutch for example. This nexus ‘complicates the primacy of the dominant-whiteness versus subaltern-blackness opposition and the singularity of notions like black citizenship and “the black struggle”’(de Witte 2019, 617). In addition, several intellectuals have expressed their concern about adopting the discourse on blackness derived from US-based scholarship and activism: Gloria Wekker invites Dutch researchers to take into account ‘the differential geopolitical, national, and academic spaces that we inhabit within the Black diaspora’ (Wekker, 2009, 280). Similarly, Francio Guadeloupe challenges how certain US scholars ascribe being black as a ‘condition’ befalling only ‘brown-skinned sub-Saharans’ and their progenies (Guadeloupe 2022). Instead, the author proposes a manifold concept of ‘Blackness’: which can be used to ‘designate those who are being treated as waste regardless of their phenotype or ethnicity’; or, as ‘urban Blackness’ to describe an ‘emerging commercial identity signifying style, comfort, and success for those who can afford it’ (Guadeloupe 2022, 129). What is important to highlight for now is that it is mostly the current generations of activists that mobilize being *black* in relation to identity and political consciousness, but as Balkenhol and Coenders point out the contours of the ‘meaning of blackness’ continue to be ‘a site of political struggle amongst antiracists’(2020, 2). Also, the hyphenated identity of ‘Afro-Dutch’ is not uncontested: while its usage is increasing, especially among Afro-Surinamese citizens, it does not refer to a cohesive group. In the case of TBA using the denomination ‘black’ (and not the Dutch word *Zwart*) for the organization’s name and throughout a significant part of communication through the organization’s social media channels reveals the intention of connecting the Archives to a movement and genealogy that is internationalist in its intentions. It also seemingly ties in with Paul Gilroy’s conceptualization of the ‘black Atlantic’ which departs from essentialized notions of blacks as a group in opposition to whites, to instead produce an idea of blackness as enjoining different cross-Atlantic diasporas not constrained by national boundaries (Gilroy 1993).

Balkenhol and Coenders argue that engaging with the black radical tradition and the mobilization of the memory of slavery ‘have become “diasporic resources”’, which ‘are constantly reassembled and newly articulated’ (2020, 4). The authors also posit that the success of this strategy in recent years cannot be solely attributed to the influence of US-based scholars and activists in the Netherlands, but should be looked at instead as ‘a metahistory in which earlier uses of the past are re-interpreted and re-articulated for contemporary political purposes’ (Balkenhol and Coenders 2020, 10). Differently from their predecessors in the 1990s and early 2000s, the current generation of activists

– with whom TBA aligns in terms of objectives – are not solely concerned with making historical truths emerge; they are also engaging with “non-canonical intellectual traditions in the Netherlands and elsewhere capable of doing justice to the colonial past and slavery” (Balkenhol and Coenders 2020, 3). Building on the work of Hayden White, the authors employ the term ‘metahistory’ to describe how Afro-Dutch organizers attempt to foreground the racial-colonial dimension of structural inequalities ranging from the lack of opportunities in education, employment, and housing to police violence; but also behind the permanence of *Zwarte Piet* in blackface and Eurocentric curricula in schools and modes of representation in museums. By linking with international movements like Black Lives Matter the challenge then becomes ‘translating globally circulating discourses to local contexts, searching for ways to connect with, but also find their own positions within, these international arenas’ (Balkenhol and Coenders 2020, 2).). This objective runs parallel to also locate TBA along/within this Dutch anti-racist activism but also in opposition and/or watchful collaboration with bigger institutions that are interested in maintaining their relevancy through speaking on societal shifts. Following these insights, the next section will look closely at how TBA negotiates its position across institutional collaboration and activism on the ground; and at how they attempt to make the recent past of anti-racism activism known while also positioning the organization itself as an integral part of it.

Meta-historicizing the Archives

Since the inception of its public-facing activities, TBA grew its profile by alternating more grassroots activities with institutional collaborations. The first round of public-facing events inaugurated by *Zwart & Revolutionair* attracted both visitors and media attention and less than a year after their inauguration, TBA partnered with several other organizations for a special event titled *Moving Together: Activism, Art and Education – A Week with Angela Davis*. The week-long program was initiated by SNDO - School for New Dance Development in the context of the artist in residence program of the Amsterdam University of the Arts together with the Research Center for Material Culture. Davis visited the Archives and, during her keynote at the Vrije University, urged attendees to visit ‘this important place’. The participation of TBA in a project supported by several of the Netherlands’ most prominent institutional actors contributed to raising the profile of the newly founded organization, which in the same year also won the *Stimuleringspreis*

(stimulus prize) in the annual competition held by the *Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst* (AFK, the city's art foundation). The decision to award the prize to the Archives emphasized that the strength of the newly launched organization lies in its impossibility to define it with a single function: TBA operates as an 'art institution, a historical archive, a meeting place for activists or a debate center' and it is this winning mix that, according to the jurors, deserves to reach a wider audience 'hungry for a different perspective' (Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst 2020). Since then, the AFK has continued supporting the Archives awarding NUC with a multi-year subsidy for the period 2021-2024 of € 200.000 per year. This might seem a high sum (the total budget of the plan is € 41.536.070 for four years and spread among 126 cultural organizations), but the AFK recognizes that compared to TBA's sustained range and volume of activities the amount is justified and even conservative in relation to the planned expansion of personnel. During the first four years of activity, TBA has been operating with a very lean structure consisting of Mitchell Esajas in charge of general management, Jessica de Abreu for research and collection management, Camille Parker for production, and Shivani Jagroep as business leader – along with many volunteers, freelancers, and interns. The load of the work for TBA's intensive programming has largely fallen on this core staff and therefore the logistical support provided by institutional partners for bigger events seems to be indispensable. In their application for the fund, the Archives envisioned a yearly multidisciplinary program around a changing theme: in 2021, *Facing Blackness* about the hidden histories of black emancipation movements and the changing representations of people of African descent; in 2022, with *Gentrification* the program explores the notion of belonging in a changing city like Amsterdam where a booming housing market is rapidly causing the displacement of communities from the neighborhoods where they historically dwelled; in 2023, the topic will be *Black Queer Perspectives* and the history, empowerment, and heritage of black LGBTQI+ communities; in 2024, *Dynamics of the Diaspora* will center on the resourcefulness and diversity of various black diaspora communities.

If for AFK the fact that the Archives can work as a 'meeting place for activists' is part of the reason that makes this organization unique, the meaning commonly assigned to this label within mainstream Dutch media, politicians, and academic circles, is not always positive: it is often used as a synonym for too polarizing, too radical. On their part, de Abreu and Esajas are mindful of the risks intrinsic to establishing relationships with institutional actors. During an online talk hosted by Het Nieuw Instituut and titled *Monuments and the*

Reification of Anti-Black Violence in the fall of 2020, de Abreu explained in these terms how she conceptualizes the work done through the Archives:

I basically accepted a couple of years ago that fighting institutions, because that's part of activism. Institutions that are reproducing Eurocentric narratives, which are very toxic to our society because they deliver a lot of unequal power relationships... that's part of activism

But another part that I and many people are doing is to build our own spaces where we can put ourselves central. The thing that I have accepted about institutions is that yes, there will be changes, and thanks to people like Simone [Zeefuik], Quinsy [Gario] and so many activists things are changing... (*Monuments and the Reification of Anti-Black Violence* 2020)

De Abreu reiterates then that despite these achievements, being located in the Netherlands and being part of the European Union means also having to face the fact that 'we will always *not* be at the center of these institutions'; TBA represents then an investment in 'building [our own] monuments' and creating a space in which to 'put ourselves central' and 'where we feel safe, where what we feel and what we think is at the center of our being and our work...' (*Monuments and the Reification of Anti-Black Violence* 2020). But this strategy has another side to it, which is to negotiate with the same institutions responsible for reproducing 'toxicity': '... where the dominant institutions can help is by sharing resources, even funding. They do collaborate with other organizations, so they have not only to give stuff but also support the people that want to have their own narratives' (2020). Writer and organizer Simone Zeefuik, also invited to the talk, pointed out that certain institutions seem to advertise their collaboration with TBA as proof enough that they are dealing with societal issues: '... what they do is ask: but what should we do? We have The Black Archives, as that relieves them from responsibility' (2020). She is referring to the fact that, as the significance and 'name recognition' of the Archives has grown within Amsterdam but also in the national and international context, Dutch institutions have been inviting TBA to be part of their programming in a way that often resembles tokenism. In addition, Zeefuik highlights how the success of TBA and its efforts to center the black experience does not mean that it can be considered 'an alternative archive', De Abreu concurs that 'it has also been called an activist archive but no it's not. Why are you calling it that, you have to ask yourself' (*Monuments and the Reification of Anti-Black Violence* 2020). TBA's founders are also mindful of the risks intrinsic to establishing relationships with institutional actors: for instance, Esajas relays being invited to a talk on the topic of diversity organized by the Museum Vereniging (the Dutch museums association)

in 2019 and quickly realized that he was ‘the only black person there’ and that several participants appeared to be completely oblivious to what Keti Koti is (fieldnotes 2019). When I ask him about TBA’s collaboration with the Tropenmuseum, Esajas frames it as stemming more from a ‘relationship with Wayne Modest’ than with the institution as a whole (Esajas 2019). He elaborates on the difficulties related to working with an organization as layered as this ethnographic museum:

sometimes I think we are being used to legitimize certain projects within the museum, but we use them as well. We are using each other...it’s a process. I do think some people are doing their best, I think Wayne [Modest] is trying to do some good stuff (Esajas 2019)

Esajas also considers whether ‘white institutions’ can ever change since they are structurally entangled with the colonial legacy (2019). He also reflects on the position of TBA concerning activism and whether they are able to effect change in the institution:

Different people have different perspectives on it: some people see us as activists some people see us as a cultural center...to others, we don’t matter that much.

Our mission is partly to make hidden histories visible, partly our own activities, but also partly influencing other institutions: we don’t have the illusion that will change the whole world but it can contribute to a bit more awareness and understanding that we need to make more steps (Esajas 2019)

But like other people who, in and outside museums, are endeavoring for long-term change, Esajas is also wary of the many setbacks and a political climate that favor populist parties and right-wing movements:

Ultimately ... we want more radical change, institutional change, transformation even, redistribution of resources but these are large ideals that we hope for. But the reality, especially in the Dutch context is, that it’s already taking us ten years to change one stupid national tradition. So radical transformation will not be easy (Esajas 2019)

The ‘one stupid national tradition’ Esajas refers to is Zwarte Piet and how the efforts to raise awareness on its racist nature at the time of our conversation in 2019 had still not produced the desired change: Saint Nicholas festivities without the blackface character or a softened version of it. As we have seen in Chapter 1, Zwarte Piet is a pivotal figure in both the aggressive denial of racism that characterizes Dutch self-representation and the – always lingering – threat of unassimilable difference for whom refuse to participate

in the denial (Wekker 2016). The protests against Zwarte Piet have become a pivotal moment in the historicization of the new wave of anti-racism activism in the Netherlands, but also in how TBA is positioning itself within it.

In September 2020, shortly before the Archives were forced to forego public activities because of a resurgence in COVID-19 cases, I visited the exhibit titled *Surinamers in Nederland: 100 Jaar emancipatie en strijd* (Surinamese in the Netherlands: 100 years of emancipation and struggle). It opened in December 2019 and then, to make up for the months in which it was closed during several lockdowns was extended until June 2021. The dense display retraced the century-spanning history of the Vereniging Ons Suriname and connected it with the larger socio-political context of the Netherlands and Suriname's relations. Wooden panels are tightly positioned in the center of the room and feature texts, newspaper clippings, photographic and video material, and objects that anchor the story as it unfolds in front of viewers. On the wall next to the entrance, a big map shows the process of political decolonization throughout the 20th century and within it, a smaller map of the city of Amsterdam represents all the different locations occupied by V.O.S. before finding a permanent space in its current location.² The most striking part of the exhibition comprised three large textile artworks by Dutch-Surinamese visual artist Patricia Kaersenhout, hung in between the panels and portraying the *Vrouwen van VOS* (women from V.O.S.). Each printed canvas puts together two women belonging to different generations of activism: such as TBA's Jessica de Abreu together with Polly Levens, a board member of the association, who in the 1970s worked for the advancement of women organizations both in the Netherlands and Suriname. In the intention of the artist, this work – part of a series that started in 2018 – provides a visual representation of how every generation of activists stands on the shoulders of their predecessors. The exhibition does not only figuratively refer to this lineage but actively (meta)-historicizes the foundation of the Archives within

2 Behind a curtained door that leads to a smaller room, visitors can find the video installation *Aka Vuurmond* by multimedia artist Shertise Solano. The work is visible by looking at the ceiling on which shifting images of eyes, lips and smoke are accompanied by the sound of a *tambú*: a protest song about the Trinta di mei uprising in Curaçao on May 30, 1969 what started as an oil industry workers strike developed in a popular uprising that lasted until the following day: three hundred soldiers of the Dutch army were deployed to suppress it, leading to the death of two protesters while dozens were injured. The event was an important turning point in the relations between the Antillean island and the Netherlands: the military intervention by a former colonial ruler in a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands damaged the reputation of the Dutch government in international politics. As a result, a round of political and social reform took place and the Trinta di mei has become a central event in the collective memory of Curaçaoans.

it. The foundation of TBA is in fact made to coincide with ‘a new wave of emancipation and resistance’ as visitors can read in one of the dialog boxes:

After the violent arrest of Quinsy Gario and Jerry Afriyie during the Sinterklaas entry in Dordrecht in 2011, a new movement arose against *Zwarte Piet* and racism. With the emergence of The Black Archives in 2016, V.O.S. led by Vincent Soekra, Delano Veira and Ninan Esajas became once again, one of the central places where critical debates are organized on current, social and political issues (The Black Archives 2019)

This link points to how TBA also functions as a bridge connecting the older generation of Surinamese-Dutch organizers with the current Afro-Dutch one, whose emergence is framed as concurring with the *Zwarte Piet is racism* campaign by Curaçao-born artist Quinsy Gario and Dutch-Ghanaian poet Jeffry Afriyie (also known as Kno’ledge Cesare). Their arrest, and the way it was widely circulated and commented on through social media and by international news, did signal the emergence of a new phase in how anti-racism activism is organized and communicated from Amsterdam and other major centers to the rest of the country. The campaign consolidated through talks, conferences, and the formation of the action group Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP) as a coalition between different groups and organizations like Nederland Wordt Beter, Zwarte Piet Niet, Zwarte Piet is Racisme, and Stop Blackface.

The protests against *Zwarte Piet* have become a pivotal moment in the historicization of the new wave of anti-racism activism in the Netherlands, but also in how TBA is situating itself within it. The success that TBA has enjoyed and the number of high-profile collaborations with institutions run parallel with a varying perception on whether or not the Archives do activist work or are run by activists. Activism in the sense of direct political action is not the core of TBA’s work, which instead is focused on archiving and exhibiting – and thus heritagizing – the past and present anti-racism movements. In doing so, and it is arguable whether this move is more or less deliberate, TBA reinforces the public perception of being seen as activists. What does this multiple positioning achieve? The success that TBA has enjoyed and the number of high-profile collaborations with institutions run parallel with a varying perception on whether or not the Archives do activist work or are run by activists. Activism in the sense of direct political action is not the core of TBA’s work, which instead is focused on archiving and exhibiting – and thus heritagizing – the past and present anti-racism movements. In doing so, and it is arguable whether this move is more or less deliberate, TBA reinforces the public perception of being seen as activists. On their part, de Abreu and

Esajas have been vocal about their support of KOZP although they stress how their participation happens in a personal capacity. It appears that the type of anti-racism activism that is being historicized through the work of the Archives needs to move in parallel with an explicitly cultural program. For instance, putting the Vereniging Ons Suriname back on the map as a center for arts, culture, and heritage, potentially the location of a museum, and home of a young and successful organization like The Black Archives becomes part of a successful strategy and long-term vision. Highlighting the importance of TBA's role in representing multiple diasporic communities and their heritage allows for gaining the type of recognition that ensures longevity, funding, and high-profile institutional collaborations; at the same time, by defining their role within the cultural field and through cultural activities TBA remains within the boundaries established by the Dutch discursive space on identity and heritage, in which belonging is first withheld and then made to slow-drip through gestures of recognition; this way, as a 'meeting place for activists' but not as an 'activist archive' TBA can garner enough legitimacy to appear as an interlocutor solid enough to participate in the 'approved space of politics' (Gilroy 1993, 114). The next section will follow these lines of thought through the example of The Black Archives Bijlmer: a temporary project in a historically black neighborhood in Amsterdam Southeast, which aims to provide a space for intergenerational dialogue between yesterday's and today's activists.

'We don't talk about inclusion and diversity we breath it'

In August 2020, The Black Archives Bijlmer (TBA/B) opened as a temporary space in the Amsterdam Southeast district, in an area at the border with the neighborhood commonly known as De Bijlmer. The main focus of this new venture was, according to architect and researcher Wouter Pocornie, to provide a meeting point for locals but especially young people and older age groups, who would not normally visit the main venue in Amsterdam East – whose public he believes is made largely of 'academics and artists' (Pocornie 2020). I visited the location in September 2020, less than a month from its official opening and not too long after the demonstrations that took place earlier that summer. Pocornie welcomed me and guided me through the bookshelves, each section dedicated to a different topic: 'slavery', 'gender studies', 'sexuality', 'feminism', 'sociology', and 'race studies'. This collection was assembled through donations from prominent Dutch intellectuals like Philomena Essed and writer Adriaan van Dis and sociologist Frits Corsten. A smaller cabinet

hosts the ‘Bijlmer dossier’ consisting of texts but also music and video materials from the borough that can help to gain a better understanding of its history and culture. In dedicated display cases are exhibited what Pocornie calls ‘conversation pieces’: two heavy volumes containing the register with the names of the enslaved people in Suriname and items representing racial caricatures. The long-term objective is to expand the collection to include themes and groups that represent current ‘blind spots’ – like the histories of the Ghanaian community in the Bijlmer (Pocornie 2020).³ Born and raised in Amsterdam Southeast, Pocornie talks passionately about the history of the borough in which he grew up. ‘We don’t talk about inclusion or diversity, we breathe it’ he says referring to young people between fifteen and thirty-five years old who also grew up in the area (Pocornie 2020). And yet he feels that for people belonging to these age groups the history of the Bijlmer and the well of memories that have uniquely shaped the diaspora experience in Amsterdam are not easily accessible. Therefore, he envisions the Southeast location of the Archives as primarily a place where to exchange knowledge: ‘something that is missing in academia’ he adds, broadly referring to the institution’s exclusionary methods but also to how the histories of the borough have been used to narrate it as a location alien to the rest of the city (Pocornie 2020).

Built between the 1960s and 1970s, the Bijlmermeer – locally called *de Bims/Bimre* – occupies a particular position within the history of postcolonial Amsterdam. Sharing a fate similar to other modernist estates in Europe, the Bijlmer also failed to attract the middle-class families it had been designed for (for a historical overview see Aalbers 2011; Helleman and Wassenberg 2004; Dekker 2016). Instead, after years of neglect and disrepair, the area became a destination for different waves of migrants: first from post-independence Suriname and then largely from West Africa. After being met with logistic chaos – and hosted in expensive and run-down boarding houses – the Surinamese Dutch citizens that had arrived in Amsterdam were sent to occupy the empty buildings in the Bijlmer or directly decided to squat them.⁴

3 Approximately forty per cent of residents are of Surinamese and/or Antillean descent and more than twenty per cent are of African descent – primarily from Ghana (Abdou 2017).

4 Due to the city’s chronic scarcity of accommodations the newly arrived were put in ‘guesthouses’: despite the unsanitary living conditions, the rental prices for rooms in these pensions were disproportionately high and usually paid through state subsidies. The activist group LOSON protested both the racist housing policies and the untenable situation in the guesthouses. Andre Reeder, a member of the group, documented the situation in the film *Onderneming Onderdak* – literally ‘the accommodation business’ (Kunstinstituut Melly 2017).

Balkenhol notes that, although not explicitly planned, overseas nationals from Suriname were relocated en masse ‘from the margins of Empire to the margins of the metropole’ (2014, 65) – in a place that would further their marginalization for decades to come. This is indicative of the role that race plays in ‘Dutch notions of self and modes of world making’ (2014, 65): at the conjunction between danger and exoticism the Bijlmer becomes ‘a place in the Netherlands that is not the Netherlands’ (Balkenhol 2014, 67). A district that was, and in the perception of many still is, situated geographically and discursively at the periphery of the former colonial metropole. Through the mobilization of the imaginary of the ghetto ‘the racial geography of empire was shifted and reapplied within the national boundaries’ (2014, 67) whilst ‘the notions of whiteness and “home” are folded into one another’ (2014, 68). Long before deprived neighborhoods started to be framed in public discourse as ‘objects of dystopian imaginations of multiculturalism gone wrong’ (De Koning 2015, 1205), the Bijlmer had already become ‘iconic’ in a particular sense (Balkenhol 2014, 67). As the Dutch political climate shifted – and embraced neoliberalism – local authorities started to look for ways to redevelop the area. When in the fall of 1992, a cargo plane crashed into two of the original honeycomb high-rise blocks killing at least forty-three people and leaving the local community bereft and traumatized, plans for the renewal of the area became more and more urgent.⁵ In 1995 the first demolitions started: since then, several waves of urban regeneration became the tool through which facilitate the spreading of owner-occupied households by ‘diversifying’ low-income neighborhoods through state-led gentrification (on the rationalities behind this move see among others Aalbers 2011; Abdou 2017; De Koning 2015; De Koning, Jaffe, and Koster 2015).⁶ This strategy

5 Remembered as the Bijlmercrash (Bijlmer disaster), on the evening October 4, 1992 a Boeing 747 cargo plane of the Israeli airline El Al crashed into the Groeneveen and Klein-Kruitberg flats in Amsterdam’s Bijlmermeer. The disaster killed at least 43 people. Early reports estimated at least 200 victims considering how densely inhabited the buildings were, but numbers were not reliable because many residents could have been undocumented at the time. Amy Abdou notes that in the hectic weeks following the event ‘[i]nstead of a show of support... the press quickly focused on the status of the illegals, as the Dutch government offered an amnesty package to the survivors’ (Abdou 2017, 194). This change of attitudes mirrored a broader shift in public discourse around migrants: if in the 1960s the Dutch government had portrayed undocumented immigrants as ‘spontaneous guestworkers’ who were regularised as soon as they found a job (Rath and Schuster 1995), from the 1990s on they were painted as “profiteers” who should be expelled instantly’ (Kloosterman, van der Leun, and Rath 1998, 252). Distinguishing between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ victims after the crash led to a broader discussion on the issue of illegal immigration as a threat to security that, according to van der Leun and Kloosterman, resulted ‘after years of benign neglect’ in an ‘explicit policy of discouraging undocumented immigration’ (2006, 60).

6 Today only six of the original honeycomb-shaped high rise blocks have been preserved: since

has been successful and the Bijlmer started to appear again as an attractive destination: for both prospective residents and the many working in the Amstel III Business Park – an area that is being redeveloped as mixed residential and where TBA/B found its temporary home.

Pocornie is very familiar with the overlapping geographies that constitute the Bijlmer: old and new residents, the remaining high-rise blocks and the new semi-terraced houses, the celebration of diversity, and the permanence of inequality. He relates how on numerous occasions he has been approached by the ‘borough’s gentrifiers’ and various stakeholders who ‘don’t have a plan but still present their projects’ (Pocornie 2020). He sees these ventures as playing on surface-level identity politics without any real understanding of what the Bijlmer actually needs (2020). Further, he points out how thirty years after the first wave of demolitions and redevelopment, the district’s still stagnant employment rates are in stark contrast with the booming business park across the railway tracks (Pocornie 2020).⁷ For policymakers and government officials that seek to improve its image, the Bijlmer becomes a zone of extraction: the same cultural expressions that could have made it into an unredeemable, ungovernable place are mobilized to construct a story of success despite adversities, in which difference is reworked into exotic appeal and blackness into commodifiable urban culture. As we have seen in Chapter 2 with the Indische Buurt, again narratives that emphasize diversity as an asset aim to replace those about failed multiculturalism. But, if we look at them from up close, they rely on figures of speech that are also dangerously close to colonial tropes: exoticism is painted over danger, adventure over fear. Diversity then is a charged notion in the borough: the lived multiculturalism that Pocornie describes throughout our conversation is the target of attempts to both commodify and criminalize it.⁸ And belonging is produced and articulated

2019, are officially designated as protected cityscape (*beschermd stadsgezicht*) by the municipality of Amsterdam.

7 In Balkenhol: ‘Over het spoor (beyond the tracks) is considered the rich part, whereas ‘this’ side of the train line is struggling with unemployment and all sorts of socio-economic problems’ (Balkenhol 2014, 73).

8 In his analysis of practices of containment and displacement through policing in large Dutch cities, Sinan Çankaya notes that increased securitisation measures are largely directed at young men that either constitute ‘matter out of place’ in more affluent areas or are framed as ‘target groups’ to be stopped and searched ‘in the areas where they presumably belong’ (Çankaya 2020, 717). In this context ‘self-governance’ implies ‘internalising these moralised geographies, conceding to state-imposed definitions of alterity, of not belonging, of not being from a particular urban soil’ (Çankaya 2020, 718).

by different groups of stakeholders and according to different strategies.⁹ A varying notion of blackness returns in its multiplicity of meanings to be employed in different ways by residents, local organizers, and political actors. For instance, Balkenhol examines how blackness and Africanness are juxtaposed in the discourses of Bijlmer inhabitants of Surinamese descent against their neighbors coming from West African regions – and vice-versa. Racial stereotypes inherited from the colonial archive are employed by Surinamese Dutch to equate being African with backwardness; whilst West Africans that, as a result of contracting migration policies, have continued to struggle to gain ‘papers’ mobilize colonial history to describe Surinamese-Dutch as lazy and relying on welfare provisions they have access to through their citizenship status (Balkenhol 2014, 85–88). Priya Swamy’s research among the Indo-Surinamese – a minority in the Bijlmer – reveals that this community has contrasting views on the matter: respondents in her study ‘scoff at the idea of the Bijlmer as a multicultural paradise’ and instead point at ‘the reality of living in a “black neighborhood”’ as a result of ‘the everyday experience of seeing black cultural and religious spaces and performances take place in the neighborhood’ (Swamy 2016, 70).

At the same time, in recent years, the neighborhood has witnessed the establishment of cultural and heritage projects that make use of the ancestral lineage with Africa or of the history of the Bijlmer as an identity-building tool. For instance, CBK – Centrum Beeldende Kunst Zuidoost (center for visual arts Southeast) was founded in the 1990s to provide access to contemporary arts while also dedicating part of its programming to the district’s Afro-Caribbean identity; Stitching Untold (Untold foundation) develops programs in the field of education, dance and theatre to connect

9 Pinkster et al. note that or the ‘old Bijlmer’ memory plays an important role in creating distance with the borough’s fame as dangerous ghetto. Locals share ‘elaborate personal memories to emphasize how the neighborhood has improved, thereby projecting stigma onto the past’ (Pinkster, Ferier, and Hoekstra 2020, 537). This study focuses on how the three main categories of residents deal with territorial stigma: white, middle-class respondents call the district South East instead of Bijlmer and justify their choice to live there by underlining the positives: “‘mixed”, “multicultural” and “colourful” ... a “window into the world”” (Pinkster, Ferier, and Hoekstra 2020, 533). Black middle-class respondents must deal instead with the fact that they ‘embody the racial dimension of stigma’ and so they emphasize the adjacency of white residents to ‘underscore the middle-class status of the area’ while also projecting negative stereotypes on the ‘old sections of the Bijlmer’: meaning the high-rises where people are renters and not home-owners – “‘bad” spots’ in contrast to Surinamese’s propriety (2020, 535). It is then by far on this last group, black residents in the high rises, that ‘the burden of reworking stigma’ falls: their strategy for attempting to reposition themselves as ‘good’ is to shift negative behaviours and characteristics on ‘bad’ residents – identified through the same raced, classed and gendered categories against which they are also judged (2020, 539).

young people of African descent to their identity, for example through events like the African Diaspora Performing Arts festival. The biggest event held in the borough is the Kwaku Summer Festival (previously known as Kwakoe Zomerfestival) which attracts around three hundred thousand visitors over four weekends. The festival started as a soccer tournament in 1975 and developed throughout the decades into a ‘major focal point for celebrating “black culture” in the Netherlands’ (Aalbers 2011, 1709) but it also ‘marks a moment wherein diasporic space is intimately tied to nostalgias that celebrate home, comfort and belonging through a wide range of multi-sensorial practices that are associated with blackness’ (Swamy 2016, 64). One organization that is directly engaged with heritage production is Imagine IC (Imagine Identity Culture), which was established in 1999 and shares its location at the center of the Bijlmer with one of the branches of the Amsterdam Public Library. Through a range of programming that focuses on participatory events, Imagine IC has been exploring the ‘emotion networks’ around heritage sites and objects related to, for example, the commemoration of slavery and the Zwarte Piet debate.¹⁰ TBA/B has therefore entered a space already filled with projects and initiatives attempting to provide a portrayal of the identity of the neighborhood. A more recent development of this process is the attempt of recuperating a notion of blackness that is more directly associated with the Bijlmer’s lineage of resistance and protest. So for instance in 2018, on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the borough, Imagine IC co-organized with the Research Center for Material Culture an event titled *Stadsgevoel #4: verzet in de 50-jarige Bijlmer* (City feeling #4: resistance in the 50 years old Bijlmer). The event focused on the legacy of Zwart Beraad (the black council) an action group that lobbied for the Afro-Surinamese community during the first urban renewal plan in the mid-1990s. The group referenced the colonial past to describe the situation in the Bijlmer where few, white Dutch policymakers were deliberating on resources destined for the district.¹¹

10 Imagine IC has been developing these insights into a methodology called ‘emotion networking’ that takes into account how heritage objects do not necessarily elicit the same emotions of positive attachment and recognition among all that have with ties to them: ‘[r]ather than only involving like-minded members of communities, heritage workers must consider everyone with an emotion about a heritage item to be(come) part of an irregular network of emotions – including ourselves as heritage workers’ (Rana, Willemsen, and Dibbits 2017, 977).

11 At the time, what ‘[f]rom inside the political discourse in De Bijlmer’ was understood as ‘a trajectory of emancipation’, was framed through media and scholarly analysis as ‘the forced introduction of an issue that most believed strongly to be obsolete and non-existent in the Netherlands: race’ (Balkenhol 2014,76). As Abdou points out the antagonism against this particular moment in the history of the district, and its protagonist, is echoed in academic discourse as well: Dukes also frames this political intervention as divisive, ultimately motivated by self-serving agendas, and heavily

On their part, the Archives emphasize creating a space for intergenerational conversations: where old and young people, today's activists, and their counterparts from previous eras, can come together and share knowledge. For instance, on the day of TBA/B's opening, young people that had participated in the summer 2020 demonstrations were invited to share the stage with former members of the activist organization LOSON Ernestine Comvalius and Roy Wijks, who were invited to share their experiences in the 1970s and 1980s. To further these conversations TBA/B also features the brightly painted 'red room': a space in which local people from different generations will come together to record their stories. This, according to Pocornie, will serve as the basis for more research on oral transmissions of memories of the neighborhood. The opening of TBA/B coincided with a moment of elation, in which the massive participation in the demonstrations in solidarity with Black Lives Matter had imbued anti-racism activists with new hope. The numbers of participants in June 2020 were unprecedented: approximately fourteen thousand in Dam square and ten thousand in the Bijlmer's Nelson Mandela Park. At the time of my visit, the corridor connecting the two rooms which TBA/B comprises was filled with cardboard signs from the demonstrations. Pocornie tells me that TBA's staff has been collecting the signs after each demonstration in Amsterdam but also in Rotterdam, Almere, The Hague, and Utrecht and that they plan to digitize and perhaps display them in future exhibitions. 'We need to tell our story rapidly' he says, meaning that he is aware that the narrative around this moment in the history of Dutch anti-racism activism could be appropriated (Pocornie 2020). The last section of the chapter examines TBA's ongoing attempt to meta-historicize not only the recent past of activism and resistance but also its present.

reliant on categories imported from the Black Power movement – thus ignoring the different contexts in which the term 'black' has been used by post-colonial citizens to campaign for their rights. This and other similar analysis depict the low participation of residents to the urban renewal process as a consequence not of structural and political barriers to it, but rather as resulting from a general absence of interest in civic matters compounded by contrasts along ethnic lines, which were made worse by the involvement of groups like Zwart Beraad (Abdou 2017)



Fig. 9 Vrouwen van VOS, artwork by Patricia Kaersenhout portraying Jessica de Abreu a Polly Leven. Photographer: Vittoria Caradonna. Courtesy of The Black Archives



Fig. 10 'Racism is also a Pandemic'. Protest sign from Black Lives Matter 2020 demonstrations archived digitally by The Black Archives. Courtesy of The Black Archives.

Heritagizing activism (as it happens)

It is not casual that many of the cultural organizations that engage with the Bijlmer's layered heritage have been founded in the same years during which urban renewal plans were deployed, and have continued to operate in conjunction with neoliberal policies that aim to exalt the cultural diversity of the borough along with producing active and responsible citizens. As it is often the case, the dynamics at play in this particular neighborhood are not reducible to grassroots action versus state policies: as De Cesari and Herzfeld point out such 'reductionist dichotomies between bad heritage (by state and capital) and good heritage (by civic committees and protest movements)' do not work because the emphasis on participatory practices and local talents has become a 'shared language' across neoliberal policymaking and community activists (De Cesari and Herzfeld 2015, 172). The organizations I cited above and newer initiatives like TBA/B are all funded through a mix of public and private subsidies; and, similarly to what Mitchell Esajas remarked in relation to their collaborations with the Tropenmuseum, institutions and grassroots initiatives mutually feed on each other to legitimize their presence and their work within local cultural ecosystems. Beyond the instrumentalization of cultural and heritage projects to service state-led gentrification (on the topic see for instance De Cesari and Dimova 2019), different memories of dwelling in the Bijlmer are used by a variety of actors to produce narratives – sometimes contrasting – about the kind of belonging available to residents both new and old. The heritagization of certain elements of the borough's history has been and still is an integral part of the urban management strategies targeting the Bijlmer. But it needs to be framed against a specific sociopolitical backdrop in which the memory of the colonial past and the figure of the descendant of the enslaved have been mobilized to ground the identity of the borough's inhabitants: not migrants, but full citizens. This strategic use of memory has been instrumental in opposing the culturalist discourses framing Surinamese and Antillean-Dutch as bodies out of place – and reclaiming the right to belong.

During the several lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, both venues of the Archives had to be closed to the public for long periods. In the end, TBA/B shifted its programming online and closed the location in the Bijlmer. But during the forced closures between 2020 and 2021, TBA managed to digitize a large portion of its collection: books and other written material have been cataloged in a new online archive, which also consists of other two sections that feature instead visual material. The first one is titled *Kick Out Zwarte Piet* and presents some items already in possession of the Archives:

for example, photographs chronicling the emergence of the movement born out of the *Zwarte Piet is racism* campaign in 2011, and a 1990s antecedent when activists reunited around the slogan *Zwarte Piet=Zwart Verdriet* (black Pete = black grief). Another section of the online archive is titled Black Lives Matter 2020 and contains photographs and pictures of the protest signs from the demonstrations. In addition, in the fall of 2020, the Archives curated a two-month exhibition *Zwarte Beweging #BlackLivesMatterNL* (black movement #BlackLivesMatterNL) in the central branch of the city's public library featuring photographic portraits of people that, in one capacity or another, are part of this multigenerational black movement: from Surinamese Dutch politician Sylvana Simons to artists Iris Kensmil and Patricia Kaersenhout, to rapper Akwasi, to TBA's de Abreu, Esajas and Camille Parker.

These two examples – Kick Out Zwarte Piet from 2011 and Black Lives Matter in 2020 – are put in dialogue with each other and memorialized as part of the ongoing history of anti-racism in the Netherlands. For TBA the need to collect and archive tangible traces of the demonstrations while also historicizing this movement is a vital part of their objectives: inequality and discrimination need to be fought through education and through connecting contemporary struggles to the long durée of coloniality. Therefore, on one hand, memorializing the 2020 BLM movement in the Netherlands felt like an urgent task precisely because of being able to take ownership of the narrative of what contemporary anti-racism activism looks like and what it stands for. On the other, like on the occasion of the talk at De Nieuw Instituut de Abreu feels the need to clarify that TBA is not an 'activist archive'. This is to underline the fact that TBA should not be undermined by the label 'activist', which as we have seen, has been predominantly utilized to distinguish between legitimate knowledge production – located in academia and other institutions – and activist accounts that are untrustworthy because too emotional, radical, polarizing. TBA provides a space that, through archival work and public programming, connects today's generation of activists to previous ones to a larger, international tradition of black radical thought. At the same time, TBA's work in experimenting with the production of a black subjectivity capable of fully expressing the multiplicity of identities and experiences of the diaspora, cannot fully circumvent how the diaspora has been built, categorized, studied by and through dominant discourses. Since memory is a powerful tool for subjectification, it is always used in two ways: by minorities to become visible and assert their right to belong and from state and state-like formations to request proof of a cohesive identity capable of fitting the 'approved space of politics' (Gilroy 1993, 114).

In the book *Black Man in the Netherlands: an Afro-Antillean Anthropology*, Francio Guadeloupe makes a distinction between who he identifies as Dutch ‘urban popular artists’ and ‘black activist-intellectuals’: the first group does not share the goals and modes of communication of the second and instead structure their work around an idea of ‘conviviality that nurtures them and feeds their utopian dream of an antiracist tomorrow’ (2022, 83–84). Among those that Guadeloupe sees instead as ‘categorically defin[ing] themselves as black in the US sense of the term’ (2022, 123) he names Esajas, Quinsy Gario, and Jerry Afriyie. Resuming Paul Gilroy’s project against ethnic absolutism, Guadeloupe posits that these activists are engaging in a ‘politics of fulfillment’, meaning that they ‘demand that the Dutch political establishment fulfills, meaning fully lives up to, the idea enshrined in the law of the land that all citizens ought to receive equal treatment and enjoy a life free of racism and economic injustice’ (2022, 83). In Gilroy’s original formulation, the politics of fulfillment indicate ‘the notion that a future society will be able to realize the social and political promise that present society has left unaccomplished’ (Gilroy 1993, 37). They are juxtaposed to the ‘politics of transfiguration’ referring to the ‘emergence of qualitatively new desires, social relations, and modes of association within the racial community of interpretation and resistance *and* between that group and its erstwhile oppressors’ (1993, 37 emphasis in original). Whereas the first is a counter-discourse and as such still serviceable to modernity and its racializing projects, the second is a counter-culture whose ‘basic desire is to conjure up and enact the new modes of friendship, happiness, and solidarity’ that will follow ‘the overcoming of the racial oppression on which modernity and its antinomy of rational, western progress as excessive barbarity relied’ (1993, 38). These tactics can only happen at a ‘lower frequency’: ‘[c]reated under the very nose of the overseers, the utopian desires which fuel the complementary politics of transfiguration must be invoked by other, more deliberately opaque means’ (1993, 37). In Guadeloupe’s analysis, since the current generation of black activists limit their work to a ‘politics of fulfilment’ anchored in practical objectives and not utopian desires, the anti-racism they propose through their work is ‘dependent upon the Dutch government and NGOs, whose funding criteria demands that they present their case and themselves in the habitual ethnoracial categories of governance’ (2022, 83). He criticizes this as agreeing to a form of ‘essentialist identity politics’ which can end up producing ‘[r]eification and racialized camp thinking’ (2022, 83). My analysis partially departs from Guadeloupe’s since he seems to be emphasizing how this group of ‘black activist-intellectuals’ play into the ethno-racial categories

of governance of their own accord. I do not want to diminish the agency of individuals or groups and there is definitely an element of choice in how the new generation of activism chooses to portray itself. But this element of choice does not mean that the ‘black’ identity resulting from this process, is completely “‘self-achieved’” and fully ‘a reflection of ‘their own orientations, choices, and identifications, just as this was not in the case of the generation that arrived to the Netherlands in the years after political decolonization. (Jones 2014).

The cohesiveness of this identity does play into the ‘habitual ethnoracial categories of governance’ – because this is the ask behind the promise of inclusion, of safety-through-belonging. In the early 2000s utilizing memory as property and resource would take the more straightforward and top-down shape of the National Monument of Slavery and the National Institute for Dutch Slavery and its Legacy. In the 2010s, institutional – at the city/state/EU level – projects need to also make space for more grassroots initiatives. In particular, in the last half of the 2010s, there has been a development in this discursive space: actors that have reached a degree of authority and respectability in the eye of institutions are designated as valid interlocutors. And thereby are now allowed to intervene in these debates while also drawing the link between ongoing disparities stemming from the legacies of colonialism. But the terrain in which these claims are produced and circulated remains cultural just as the question of redress continues to be shifted onto symbolic investments anchored in representation. The fact that these interventions are not openly shunned is an ongoing development, not completely stabilized or accepted at all levels of society. Although concerning the memory of slavery this expansion of the conversation can be seen as progress, it also inevitably plays into creating ulterior distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ activists and grassroots movements: some are able to navigate the terms of the conversations while others are pushed to the margins, some learn how to become indispensable for the institution while their work becomes at risk of appropriation. Being an anti-racism activist through protesting Zwarte Piet has been the target of ridicule and dismissal by mainstream media and the target of aggression from right-wing groups. But, through a decade of effort, it has also evolved into a position that is not perceived as completely oppositional. The BLM 2020 demonstrations mark the moment in which this particular way of doing activism – which uses memory work to both criticize and be recognized by the state – has been legitimized as a valid interlocutor. Building on the momentum TBA, together with the organizations Nederlands Word Beter foundation, Zetje In, and Black Queer & Trans Resistance NL,

launched the *Zwart Manifest* (Black Manifesto) on March 25, 2021. This document features an action plan across twelve sectors such as education, the labor market, and arts and culture with the goal of combating anti-black racism. It is envisioned as a tool for politicians and policy-makers, providing them with concrete action points and recommendations on how to improve the ‘socio-cultural and economic level of Black people’ (“Zwart Manifest” 2021). On June 10, 2021, one year after the demonstration in the Bijlmer, the manifesto was handed over to the outgoing Ministers of Social Affairs and Employment and of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. After, in the fall of 2021, an exhibition titled *Zwart Manifest: op weg naar Zwarte emancipatie* (on the road towards black emancipation) opened at OSCAM, an arts organization also located in the Bijlmer.¹² The exhibit was a result of the collaboration between TBA, the other organizations behind the initiative, and the well-known cultural platform BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht.

This rapid succession of events – the demonstrations, the manifesto, the exhibitions – points to how TBA is continuously involved in a process of heritagizing a movement in the present. But at no point, this movement strays from a ‘politics of fulfilment’ that still maintains the State as the guarantor of rights and affordances and citizenship as the horizon on which to realize the promise of safety through belonging. This conviction is upheld even in the face of blatant neglect: like in the case of the so-called *Toeslaagenaffaire* (allowances scandal). In parallel with the demonstrations and the pandemic, another story emerged in the Dutch public sphere: a scandal that had been progressively uncovered by investigative journalists since the beginning of 2019, which revolved around fraud investigations into recipients of child benefit supplements. The tax office had been asking for the monetary allowances back retroactively as a result of inspections that targeted disproportionately families with a migration background. The investigations were initiated based on criteria such as dual nationality or foreign-sounding surnames (for example, all beneficiaries of Ghanaian origin were subjected to a check). The consequences on the lives of the impacted families have been enormous: amassing debt to the point of bankruptcy, losing homes or jobs, and a person taking their own life after being asked to pay back tens of thousands of euros (Levie 2021). And from 2015 to 2021, more than one thousand children of parents affected by the Affair were separated from

12 Standing for Open Space Contemporary Art Museum, OSCAM started in 2017 as a pop-up museum part of the programme to commemorate the Bijlmer’s 50th anniversary and has grown into a platform to stimulate and increase the interest in the arts for the residents of Amsterdam, specifically young people living in the Bijlmer

their families after the intervention of social workers. The scandal indeed resulted in the fall of Rutte's government but, only months after, the national elections reconfirmed him as Prime Minister. Since then, reports detail how the compensation schemes for affected families are lagging and, at the time of writing, the children separated from their parents have not returned home (Kleinnijenhuis 2020; NOS news 2022; Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2022). For all of these reasons, in June 2021, the organizations behind the Zwart Manifest discussed whether or not to hand over their action plan to two of the exponents of the government responsible for the scandal. Ultimately, however, the organizers decided to proceed since the recommendations in the manifesto 'should transcend party and politics in order to ensure the sustainability of tackling institutional racism' (@zwartmanifest 2021). But can sustainability grow from within systemic irresponsibility?

TBA is producing an autonomous cultural archive capable of retrieving the black radical tradition and connecting it to the history of homegrown Afro-Dutch activism. But demands for more – more radical change, redistribution of resources – must be articulated within the horizon of citizenship rights through cultural recognition. In such a context it does not come as a surprise to note how TBA plays up or down its hybrid nature – activist/non-activist – while it navigates the demands and affordances of culturalized politics. Foregrounding the memory of colonialism and slavery means acknowledging its potential to act as a resource to advance a political agenda. The goals of this strategy move between short-term representational progress, e.g. a stop to the Zwarte Piet character; but also long-term radical change, e.g. eliminating social disparities based on race (and gender, class, and ability) through a pedagogical project aimed at revealing the colonial roots of current systems of differentiation and exploitation. However, together with responding to the need for a 'safe space' where 'to put ourselves central', the Archives are helping to memorialize a certain version of activism as it happens. This means that before the potential of this movement is realized – or even before it can be called a movement – a loosely connected group of people, ideals, and goals for the future exists as an exhibition – it has entered the archive. This exceeds documentation for internal purposes and goes instead in the direction of using these memories, still not fully sedimented, as a resource: a way of connecting the past and present of black Dutch activism to strengthen its identity. But once this identity is established and made cohesive through social media profiles and state-subsidized meeting places it also becomes property: something to curate and guard from appropriation.

Ultimately, the very thing that makes a group identifiable and thus legible by state and state-like formations, is also what prevents real intersectional alliances with all those that live on the other side of safety. At the beginning of his speech in Dam square, Esajas named all the possible black lives that should matter. His list, which included ‘females, queer, undocumented, Muslim’ black lives, represented a gesture of both refusing a mono-definition of blackness and recognizing the need to link the variety of struggles with which racism and inequality interlock. But identifying lives that count through hyphenating adjectives means also renouncing ‘opacity’. Édouard Glissant demanded ‘the right to opacity’ in opposition to a Western thought based on a concept of transparency through which apprehend the Other: ‘[i]n order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce’ (Glissant 1997, 190). This ask has evolved along with the economy of desires supporting capitalist modes of governance: in order to accept you, in a near future but not today, I need intimate knowledge of how does it feel to want certain things and being denied. And how does it feel to have a taste of it, a piece of the pie. While naming categories can be in the context of a demonstration a moment of communion or mutual recognition, outside of that moment and location it is also a plea: for the State to stop brutalizing and start protecting, to cease to discriminate and embrace all – because of their difference and not in spite of it. This plea comes with a tangle of wants and aspirations that make up the bargain of belonging: aspiring to normativity means aspiring to safety, which means having to perform one’s identity as readable as possible for the institutions regulating life. This trade-off, of which memory has come to represent a portion, is what prevents solidarity from turning into political action: not only because of the always lingering fear of repression. But because of just how effective the promise of the ‘good life’ – for at least some of us – continues to be. Even in the face of the continued, violent evidence that *our* safety is based on the precarity of someone else: the bad citizen, migrant, activist.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how through their work The Black Archives is working to surpass the nested categorization of black/descendant/victim. The first section describes the founding of TBA and examines the tensions within the notion of blackness deployed to articulate the type of diasporic subjectivity that is also at the center of TBA’s work. The second section has examined

the positioning of TBA in relation to institutional collaborations, a practice that is as common as it is layered, while also analyzing how TBA inserts itself in a lineage of resistance that connects different generations in the fight for anti-racism. Intergenerational exchange is also the purpose of having a location in Amsterdam Southeast, next to the historically black neighborhood of the Bijlmer – the focus of the third section. Until this temporary project finds a new, more permanent home TBA is continuing to provide a safe space where the histories of the Surinamese, Antillean and African diasporas can be told. However, despite its grassroots base, the Archives, as the fourth section concludes, plays into a type of contemporary ‘politics of fulfilment’ that entrusts change in the hands of the same actors that are responsible for its infinite delay. Heritagizing activism ‘as it happens’ is at risk of diminishing its political weight and potential for coalition building. Whereas today’s activists need to recuperate the memory of past emancipatory attempts, becoming legible as a valid interlocutor for the state means having to play into its normative project of belonging through citizenship.

Accepting to use memory as a resource means also for it to become a property: the bargaining chip to obtain visibility and recognition from the state and transnational governance actors. To refuse this means subjecting oneself to the continued threat of violence awaiting on the other side of safety: those that choose strategies of dis-identification – militant, non-normative, queer – with the promises of belonging are exposed to the brutality of the state. Conversely performing an identity that is not cohesive enough, and using memory only as a tool for private modes of commemoration, results in disinterest from the funding bodies that support the projects of activists-cum-cultural organizers. Finding a balance between these pushes and pulls is increasingly difficult since personal beliefs and political claims must fit into the mold of what counts as the proper tools and avenues in which to articulate dissent.