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# Commemorative Processes and Slavery Memorials in the Netherlands

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## Abstract

Although extensive research exists on public displays of Dutch colonial history and the Netherlands' involvement in the global slave trade, there is currently a gap when it comes to investigating slavery memorials as a larger, Dutch racial redress trend. This research uses James E. Young's criteria for successful memorial processes to argue that the slavery memorials in the Netherlands constitute a successful racial redress trend, as they join civil society agents, impacted communities and municipalities/the Dutch state in conversations about how to challenge a hegemonic narrative of Dutch slavery history. The discussions of existing and planned slavery memorials in this thesis base themselves on elaborate research of primary source materials from the online archives of municipalities, newspapers and civil society organizations enriched by the conduction of qualitative dialogic interviews with stakeholders involved in ongoing memorial processes. This research shows that the emplacement of slavery memorials into visual spaces in the Netherlands counters hegemonic narratives of Dutch slavery. Furthermore, it concludes that the memorial processes result in the creation of specific sites for Keti Koti commemoration and celebration, which makes the functionality of the physical memorials significant for fostering discussions of Dutch slavery history even after the monument inaugurations.

Keywords and phrases: *Racial redress, hegemony, slavery, memorial, memorial process, James E. Young, Netherlands*

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## 1 Introduction

In 1993, which marked the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the official abolition of slavery in the Netherlands and the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the actual end of the Dutch slave trade (Cain 228), the *Nationaal 30 juni/1 juli Comité* was established by Amsterdam citizens of African and Surinamese descent (Kardux 171). This marked the beginning of a wave of racial redress activities in the Netherlands, and around 60 racial redress initiatives have followed since then in an attempt to solidify Dutch slavery past as an integrated aspect of Dutch national history (NIOD data). These activities often constitute examples of combined efforts between civil society organizations and politicians, municipalities and/or the Dutch state. Especially after the 2002 erection of *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* in Amsterdam, anniversaries and decennials of the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands, known as *Keti Koti*, are celebrated annually on 1 July and have become more prominent, first in Amsterdam and later in other major Dutch cities such as The Hague, Utrecht and Rotterdam (NIOD data). Following the inauguration of the monument in Amsterdam, Middelburg and Rotterdam erected memorials for commemoration of the Dutch slave trade in 2005 and 2013 respectively (Koops, BKOR “Slavernijmonument”). In connection to the upcoming 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Keti Koti* in 2023, The Hague, Groningen, and Utrecht have announced that they will all erect local slavery memorials, and Tilburg has already planned to erect one on *Keti Koti* 2022 (Rubio, Scheffer, NOS, Hest).

This research takes its starting point in historian James E. Young’s analysis of the inherent problems connected to situations in which nations attempt to display non-favorable aspects of their history through memorials (Young, “Counter-Monuments” 270) in order to examine Dutch slavery memorials. Young focuses immensely on the significance of the *process* when it comes to erecting memorials and emphasizes that

“dissent and debate [are] also part of the process and (...) any memorial worth realizing [has] to be capacious enough to contain and manage the needs of both its advocates and its detractors, both its local and its national constituency” (Young, “Stages of Memory” 189).

Young thus stresses that debate potentially preserves the memory, which a memorial attempts to eternalize, more successfully than the actual physical memorial. However, the connection between *Keti Koti* celebrations and the erection of Dutch slavery memorials highlight the importance of the physical monument, which tends to be neglected by Young. This research thus aims to approach the processes of erecting Dutch slavery memorials through Young’s methodology, but at the same time seeks to avoid disregarding the spatial importance of the memorials.

The case studies of the three already erected Dutch slavery monuments, that is: *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* in Amsterdam, *Het Zeeuws Slavernijmonument* in Middelburg and *Slavernijmonument Rotterdam*, build on multifaceted source material selected from online municipality archives, online newspaper archives and websites of civil society organizations involved in the memorial processes. Since this analysis aims to investigate the roles of various stakeholders, especially the Dutch state, municipalities, and civil society organizations, in the planning and inauguration of slavery memorials, the selected and applied sources rely on information from four angles. Websites and online archives of the following information categories provide these different perspectives: civil society organizations (petitions and websites), local news (focused on the municipality or even districts within municipalities) and national news (national Dutch newspapers), municipalities (websites, press releases and covenants) and academic (scholarly sources and research institutes). In addition to this, qualitative research in the form of interviews with key stakeholders of the processes in Tilburg, Utrecht, and the Hague constitutes primary source material for the discussion of not yet erected slavery memorials.

This research argues that the slavery memorials in the Netherlands constitute a successful racial redress trend, as they bring together civil society agents, impacted communities, and municipalities and/or the Dutch state in conversations about how to challenge a hegemonic narrative of Dutch slavery history. Furthermore, this analysis explores how the emplacement of slavery memorials into visual spaces counters this hegemonic narrative and establishes that the memorial processes result in the creation of specific sites for *Keti Koti* commemoration and celebration, which makes the functionality of the physical memorials significant. To commence, existing research on public displays of slavery history in the Netherlands will be explored. Then follows an analysis of the slavery memorials in Amsterdam, Middelburg, and Rotterdam as well as a contextualization of the monuments within the Dutch racial redress debate and the tendencies detected among redress activities. This paves the way for a discussion of how the already erected monuments function as counter-hegemonic visual source material when emplaced within hegemonic visual narratives in Dutch city spaces. Finally, this research examines the current wave of local monument erection processes through interviews with key stakeholders in order to discuss potential continuity between already erected and planned monuments for slavery commemoration in the Netherlands. It concludes with a reflection on the success of slavery memorials as a redress trend.

## 2 Visualizing Dutch Slavery History

The various processes for erecting national and local slavery memorials in the Netherlands are here described as an example of a Dutch trend for ‘racial redress’ activities. ‘Redress’ is interpreted in alignment with the International Commission of Jurists’ (ICJ) definition as explained in the guide *The Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Gross Human Rights Violations* from 2018 and the definition presented by the United Nations’ (UN) Committee against Torture (CAT) in *Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* from 2012. According to the UN CAT, ‘redress’ contains all forms of, “effective remedy and reparation [. . .] and refers to the full scope of measures required to redress violations” (UN CAT Article 14, point 2). In that sense, the term ‘redress’ acknowledges that a violation has happened without dictating the manner in which restoration should take place. Initiatives referred to as ‘racial redress activities’ can thus combine what the committee calls “reparative concepts” without restricting restoration to one specific concept, for example monetary compensation (ibid.). The ICJ’s definition adds that the terms ‘remedy’ and ‘reparation’ often limit action to a state level and a “notion of State responsibility” (ICJ 30). ‘Redress’, on the other hand, manages to encompass multiple and interlinked types of reparations while simultaneously not excluding non-state actors from the reparation process.

Another terminological decision relates closely to the case studies, as this research adopts Young’s idea of a ‘memorial’ as something dynamic and living that exists within a city space, whereas he defines a ‘monument’ as “authoritarian”, “fixed” and “static” (Young 4, 6). In order to emphasize how the Dutch projects for visualizing slavery in public spaces differ from more traditional monuments such as war commemoration monuments and statues depicting specific people, this research consequently refers to them as ‘slavery memorials’.

### 2.1 Hegemony and the Hegemonic Visual Narrative

This research frequently employs the term ‘hegemony’, which makes it important to stress which definition, or perhaps rather, understanding, of the term applies here. Arguing for a hegemonic Dutch narrative of slavery in the Netherlands may seem potentially problematic due to the difficulty of determining exactly *what* this supposed narrative entails. According to the prominent scholars of the Dutch slavery past and its commemoration, Paul Bijl and Artwell Cain, a narrative which downplays the violence of the Dutch slave trade constitutes a possible working definition of the term ‘hegemonic’ (Bijl 458, Cain 229-230). Bijl sees the creation of a hegemonic Dutch narrative of slav-

ery not as a master-narrative attempting to delete minority experiences from Dutch history, but rather as a dominant narrative which does not view victims of Dutch colonialism as “memorable within a national context” (Bijl 458). Similarly, Cain argues that this hegemonic narrative cannot contain the Dutch participation in slavery and that two main arguments characterize this hegemonic narrative as well as the academics, journalists, and politicians who defend it: firstly, diminishing the Dutch slave trade’s scope and distancing the economic success of the Netherlands during the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries from profit derived from the slave trade and, secondly, refusing to acknowledge the negative experiences of contemporary descendants of enslaved people and members of minorities from former Dutch colonies which connect to slavery history and the commemoration thereof (Cain 229-230).

Young and the cultural historians Andreas Huyssen and Jennifer Tosch all provide a more multifaceted interpretation of ‘hegemony’ than Bijl and Cain, as they view visual hegemony as a question of what one focuses on rather than as a master-narrative, which needs a competing narrative in order to be altered. Huyssen opposes the very idea that a certain unchanging hegemony can persist or has historically existed without changing over time and according to “spatial practices” – the manner in which architecture, culture, and also monuments change spaces (Huyssen, *Other Cities* 3). An example of this could be the placement of a slavery memorial within a space which connects to the Dutch colonial era, e.g. a harbor area or a warehouse, since these spaces were used in the triangular trade. Similarly, Tosch argues that one does not have to “change history” or provide an “alternative history” in order to incorporate minority experiences into a hegemonic visual narrative, since a city like Amsterdam carries traces of minorities everywhere (Tosch 11). Young goes so far as to argue for the impossibility of determining national hegemonic narratives and claims that memorial artworks in public spaces create fixed points of communion for communities that are increasingly characterized by a lack of unity:

“[In] sharing common spaces in which we collect our disparate and competing memories, we find common (perhaps even a national) understanding of widely disparate experiences and our very reasons for recalling them” (Young “The Stages of Memory” 15).

According to Young, contemporary visual memory work in cities thus undermines attempts to maintain visual hegemonies if the memory work manages to strive for inclusivity and ambiguity rather than a singular, hegemonic narrative of its own (Young “The Stages of Memory” 14-15).

Huyssen, Tosch and Young do not argue against the existence of hegemonic narratives, but they all object to the legitimacy of this hegemony, as they show that counter-hegemonic narratives already exist within hege-

monic narratives, waiting to be recognized and made visible. Huyssen writes that,

“The same space cannot possibly have two different contents. But an urban imaginary in its temporal reach may well put different things in one place: memories of what there was before, imagined alternatives to what there is” (Huyssen, *Palimpsests* 7).

Huyssen thus employs the metaphor of a palimpsest to describe city spaces – just like a surface inscribed with various texts on top of each other, the hegemony of the city (interpretable as the most visible piece of writing on the palimpsest) may obscure the layers below the most visible top layer, but this does not remove the other layers from the narrative. Additionally, providing the counter-hegemonic visual narrative does not, according to Huyssen, imply that a space can be both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic at the same time, but rather that the narrative derived from visual sources of a space changes according to which aspects of the space one focuses on.

So, when this research refers to something as a ‘hegemonic’ narrative of Dutch slavery, it aims to associate ‘hegemony’ with the notion that the violence of slave history remains in the past and with the refusal to recognize that unflattering aspects of the Dutch history of slavery have been made less visible in the hegemonic visual narrative of the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands. The term ‘counter-hegemony’ will thus refer to initiatives striving to broaden the debate about Dutch slavery history and its commemoration, especially in relation to how visual sources in public spaces affect public discourse. This research interprets ‘counter-hegemonic’ as increasing the visibility or adding visual representations of narratives, which already exist in the visual source material of a city but remain overlooked in the hegemonic narrative of the city.

## 2.2 The Academic Debate on the Visibility of Dutch Slavery History

In the article “The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today” Young describes the difficulties connected to inaugurating national monuments which commemorate atrocities committed by a nation in its past (Young, “Counter-Monuments” 268). Young writes that:

“After all, while the victors of history have long erected monuments to remember their triumphs, and victims have long erected monuments to recall their martyrdom, only rarely does a nation call on itself to remember the victims of crimes it has perpetrated. Where are the national monuments (...) to the millions of Africans enslaved and murdered?” (Young, “Counter-Monuments” 270).

Although Young’s case studies focus on counter-monuments in Germany and despite there being a lack of counter-monuments in Dutch commemoration activities, Young’s analysis of the challenges of national monuments seems to resonate with a central question in the academic debate concerning the commemoration of Dutch slavery, namely: How can slavery memorials contribute to altering hegemonic narratives of Dutch national history, and what are the challenges of getting states or municipalities to support public acknowledgements of slavery commemoration?

First of all, an ongoing academic dispute concerns itself with the question of whether one can refer to the Dutch slavery past as ‘forgotten’ or ‘hidden’. Markus Balkenhol argues for a more complex interpretation of how the Netherlands has historically commemorated slavery as he aims to illustrate how even violent aspects of the Dutch slavery past are sometimes voluntarily displayed (Balkenhol, “Politics of Compassion” 278). While not following Balkenhol’s claim that Dutch colonial violence has, historically, been deliberately made visible, Bijl does refute the notion that the Dutch hegemonic narrative of slavery is the product of a deliberate attempt at removing problematic aspects of Dutch national history (Bijl 441).

Cultural historian Johanna Kardux emphasizes the connection between citizenship and commemoration of slavery. She argues that what the French memory scholar Pierre Nora deemed an “exaggerated focus on memory” and sites of commemoration actually constitutes a way in which the hegemonic narrative, which does not emphasize the crimes committed by the Netherlands during slavery, becomes renegotiable (Kardux 166). So, by adding slavery memorials to public spaces, the persistence of the hegemonic narrative becomes an impossibility, because minority memories and alternative interpretations of Dutch history openly challenge this narrative. In another article, Balkenhol refers to this idea of piercing the hegemonic narrative with sites of commemoration as “emplacing slavery” (Balkenhol, “Emplacing Slavery” 135). Emplacing commonly refers to structures on or in which something heavy is placed and thus the introduction of slavery commemoration (for example, the erection of slavery monuments) becomes a means through which minorities within Dutch society can strategically implement more nuanced interpretations into the hegemonic narrative of colonialism and slavery (Balkenhol, “Emplacing Slavery” 141).

Jeroen Dewulf, a Belgian scholar specialized in Dutch language, slavery, and culture studies, views the incorporation of minorities into a hegemonic narrative through monuments as an approach very central to Amsterdam (Dewulf 245). He views this approach as an attempt to work through public trauma and to “preserve public harmony” and he goes even further to propose that diversifying sites of public commemoration could change the idea that Dutch identity separates itself from

the identities of minorities and could replace it with an identity focused on “interaction-in-diversity” (Dewulf 251).

Several other scholars focus on how the constant presence of monuments favoring certain colonialist narratives affect a city space and, more importantly, public discourse. The Dutch professor of modern European history, Michael Wintle’s analysis of the “visual history” of Amsterdam provides an excellent example of this, as it focuses on representations of other countries and cultures in Amsterdam through monuments and decorations in the city space. He argues that this representation presents Amsterdam as superior to these foreign countries and cultures (Wintle 81). This, Wintle states, connects to Michael Billig’s concept of ‘banal nationalism’ – the automatic reinforcement of a hegemonic national narrative through the constant ‘flagging’ of nationalism in the background (Wintle 80, Billig 39). Consequently, according to Wintle and Billig, this presence of small and often not actively recognized remnants of colonialism and colonial narratives of Dutch superiority affect public discourse, since they create a public space which tells a ‘visual history’ of a hegemonic narrative of Dutch colonialism. In that sense, Dewulf seems to build from where Wintle’s analysis ends – namely by arguing that adaptations to public space in Amsterdam, which aim to foster inclusivity and diversity, contribute to challenging the hegemonic visual history created through the presence of banal visual nationalism.

Tosch, who founded the Black Heritage Tours in Amsterdam in 2013, disagrees with Wintle’s conclusion that background displays of colonialism re-iterate a hegemonic narrative by bringing attention to exactly these displays of banal nationalism in order to illustrate how people of colour have an inherent claim to be seen as fully fledged citizens of the Netherlands, since the visual history of Amsterdam documents their historical presence in the country (Wintle 81, Tosch vi). Tosch also counters the arguments proposed by Bijl and Cain, since she uses the visual history of a hegemonic nationalist narrative as proof of how Dutch identity cannot be defined as fundamentally one thing, since it intersects with all the other cultures that were present during Dutch colonialism.

Evidently, the vivid academic debate about displays of Dutch colonialism and proposed means for countering a hegemonic narrative of Dutch national history mainly focuses on Amsterdam and not on the broader tendencies of slavery memorials which have been erected in the Netherlands since 2002. With a new wave of slavery monument erections approaching in 2022 and 2023, this research seeks to fill a gap in the academic debate by arguing that the existing and planned Dutch slavery memorials function as local expressions of a larger dynamic of civil society and municipality-led interferences with a hegemonic Dutch narrative of slavery. This is especially prominent when the processes leading to their inaugurations accommodate both civil society

agents such as descendant organizations and political actors such as municipalities. This research furthermore aims to locate the slavery monuments within the ongoing Dutch redress debate since 1993 in order to discuss whether the monuments and changes fit into this debate.

### 3 Slavery Memorials in Amsterdam, Middelburg and Rotterdam

Although Young in his 1992 essay “The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today” had trouble imagining that nations would finance erections of slavery memorials, his approach to analyze visual memorial work, as presented in his 2018 essay collection *The Stages of Memory*, provides the fundamental method for the following analysis of the processes leading to the unveilings of the three already erected Dutch slavery memorials. *The Stages of Memory* argues that successful visual memorial work functions as processes full of unresolved conflicts and debates, which continue after the erection of a memorial, rather than culminate with the unveiling of a memorial (Young “The Stages of Memory” 7). In order to solidify this argument, Young writes, “Better a thousand years of Holocaust memorial competitions in Germany than a final solution to your Holocaust memorial question,” referring to the 1995 competition to find a design for the memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe (Young “The Stages of Memory” 7). Thereby, Young argues that a design competition for a significant memorial should not strive for a perfect solution that everyone agrees on. Instead, it should focus on understanding the importance of a continuing debate surrounding the memory represented or visualized by the memorial even after its physical completion.

In order to follow Young’s argument, this analysis of the three existing slavery memorials will not go into details about the artists behind the memorials or their visual designs. Instead, this analysis focuses on the memorial processes themselves in order to evaluate these according to Young’s success criteria and eventually place the memorials within a broader context of Dutch racial redress.

Young determines the success of a memorial process based on the following main criteria: the process must accommodate disagreement between stakeholders, the final memorial should reflect the existence of disagreements rather than attempt to depict a unified or hegemonic narrative of what it represents, and that the memorial, “might also be regarded as a never-to-be-completed process, animated (not disabled) by the forces of history bringing it into being” (Young “The Stages of Memory” 16). Young divides the memorial process into several stages, but since the discussion phase



is the prime focus of this research, only what Young terms “The Jury Stage” will be elaborated on here. He argues that The Jury Stage should focus on composing a jury consisting of both academics, politicians, civil society organizations, local residents, and people with practical knowledge about the erection of monuments, for example artists and architects (Young “The Stages of Memory” 37). With his criteria, Young underlines the significance of the democratic qualities of a memorial process, that is: working towards a multifaceted product and viewing debate and disagreement as an integral aspect of the process. Furthermore, Young insists on the fundamental importance of including *all* stakeholders at an early stage in the memorial process and continuing this collaboration and discussion throughout the rest of the process.

### 3.1 The Process in Amsterdam: *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden*

Although the inauguration of *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* took place on 1 July 2002, the process behind its erection began almost a decade earlier with the foundation of the Nationaal 30 Juni/1 Juli Comité in 1993 (Kardux 171). This committee, consisting of descendants of enslaved people and people otherwise affected by Dutch colonialism, wished to increase knowledge about and visibility of *Keti Koti* in the Netherlands (Kardux 171). On 22 September 1998, the female descendant organization *Stichting Sophiedela* sent a petition to the Dutch ministry of internal affairs urging the Dutch government to get involved in official initiatives to commemorate the Dutch slavery past (Biekman). The petition, signed by *Stichting Sophiedela*'s chair Barryl A. Biekman, did not specifically mention a slavery memorial or that the commemoration initiative should take place in Amsterdam, but it did start a debate about how to respond to the demands for commemoration put forward by descendant organizations (Biekman, Kardux 172). As a result, *Het Comité van Aanbeveling Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden*<sup>1</sup> came into existence in 1999 and on 9 June 2000, the Dutch government and the Municipality of Amsterdam signed the *Convenant Inzake De Totstandkoming Van Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden Tussen De Staat Der Nederlanden En De Gemeente Amsterdam*<sup>2</sup>, hereon referred to as ‘the covenant’ (Boxtel). Thus, what started out as a descendant organizations-led project to foster recognition of the Dutch slavery past within the Netherlands eventually resulted in the erection of the first Dutch slavery memorial – a joint initiative between the Dutch state, the municipality of Amsterdam, Landelijk Platform Slav-

ernijverleden<sup>3</sup> (LPS), and *Het Comité van Aanbeveling Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* (Boxtel).

The covenant of 2000 determined all major aspects of the to-be-erected *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden*, and particularly its 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> article show the main purpose of the memorial: to provide an easily accessible location for annual celebrations of *Keti Koti*, which appeals not only to descendants of enslaved people in the Netherlands, but to the Dutch society as a whole (Boxtel Artikel 6 and 7). The covenant further states that the decided-upon memorial must satisfy all involved parties – the state, the municipality, *Het Comité van Aanbeveling Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden*, and LPS, an organization chaired by Biekman who represents the original civil society agents working on increasing focus on the Dutch slavery past and its implications in the present (Boxtel Artikel 7). An open call was made for design proposals for the memorial (Art at Site), and all parties eventually agreed on the design proposed by the Surinamese artist Erwin de Vries, which was then erected in Amsterdam's Oosterpark on 1 July 2002 (figure 1).

However, the actual realization of *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* proved far less collaboration-oriented than what the covenant seemed to aim towards. According to Kardux, the government involvement in the decision-making process exceeded the covenant's initial consensus, since the Dutch state ended up dictating Oosterpark as the location of the memorial in spite of this being a far more peripheral part of Amsterdam than, for example, Dam Square, which some descendant organizations advocated for (Kardux 174). Kardux also argues that the Dutch state's intervention in the process caused the project to turn into a commemorative artwork for all Dutch minorities at the risk of removing focus from the intended purpose, namely to commemorate Dutch participation in slavery and counter a hegemonic Dutch narrative of slavery (Kardux 174). In addition to this, the circumstances of the official unveiling of the memorial brought discontent, as fences separated the memorial from the public in order to make it safe for the Dutch queen to attend the inauguration (Trouw “Protest”). This sparked protests from the citizens wishing to attend the inauguration, as they had to settle for watching it on screens (ibid.).

Although Young argues for the significance of disagreement and debate in the memorial process, he also writes that a modern memorial should “mesh memory with life, embed memory in life, and balance our need for memory with the present needs of the living” (Young “The Stages of Memory” 12). The Dutch state's interference with *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden*, both with regards to its placement and the significant broadening of who it should commemorate, thus appears at odds with the “needs of the living” (Young

<sup>1</sup>(In English) The Committee of Recommendation for National Monument for Slavery Past

<sup>2</sup>(In English) Covenant on the Establishment of the National Monument for Slavery Past between the State of the Netherlands and the Municipality of Amsterdam

<sup>3</sup>(In English) National Platform for Slavery Past



Figure 1: Photo of the Erwin de Vries' memorial inaugurated in Amsterdam in 2002 (Martin Alberts. *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden*. Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 9 October 2007, <https://archieff.amsterdam/beeldbank/detail/29fbdad7-ecfa-1ca1-7808-a8e013cb762e>, accessed 1 June 2022).

“The Stages of Memory” 12), which one could in this case interpret as the descendant organizations who initiated the process. So, at the beginning of the memorial process, *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* followed Young’s success criteria, as it focused on including all stakeholders in the decision-making process, but the project eventually departed from Young’s idea of a democratic and open memorial process because the Dutch state acted as an executive power by diminishing the wishes of other stakeholders, thus undermining the initially democratic nature of the memorial process. However, the functionality of the memorial as a site of commemoration and celebration of *Keti Koti* does restate its original purpose as a counter-hegemonic visual source specifically connecting to the memory of slavery in the Netherlands, and the fact that it remains the main site for Amsterdam’s *Keti Koti* celebrations twenty years later (*Keti Koti* Festival) also shows that the redress purpose of the memorial succeeded in spite of state interference.

### 3.2 The Process in Middelburg: *Het Zeeuws Slavernijmonument*

According to the speeches given by GroenLinks municipal council member Jaap Goetheer and chair of the project group *Zeeuws Slavernijverleden* Roelof Koops at the official unveiling of *Het Zeeuws Slavernijmonument* in Middelburg, the process of erecting a slavery memorial in Middelburg began with the late 1990s discussions about where to place a national slavery memorial (Goetheer, Koops). Middelburg played a prominent historical role in the Dutch slave trade due to the slave trading activities of the *Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie* (MCC) and *West Indische Compagnie* (WIC), which both had warehouses and other facilities in Middelburg in the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Campbell, Gelder).

When the 2000 covenant finalized the decision to make Amsterdam the location of the national slavery memorial, it sparked local initiatives in Zeeland, and also specifically in Middelburg, to erect a local memorial for the commemoration of Zeeland’s involvement in the Dutch slave trade (Goetheer, Koops). On 31 July 2001, Ferdinand Ralf, the founder and chair of *Stichting Monu-*



Figure 2: Photo of the Middelburg memorial, designed by Hedi Bogaers (KITLV. Het Zeeuws Slavernijmonument. Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kitlvcollections/5612388631>, accessed 1 June 2022).

ment Middelburg, proposed the idea to erect a local slavery memorial to the Municipality of Middelburg (Omroep “Middelburger Wil Slavernijmonument”). However, the municipality did not accept the proposal until Goetheer and GroenLinks Middelburg stated their support for the project on 9 March 2002 – a mere four months before the unveiling of *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* in Amsterdam – and this time, the municipality approved the project (Omroep “GL Middelburg”). In 2003, Stichting Beeldende Kunst, in collaboration with the civil society organization Stichting Monument Middelburg and the Municipality of Middelburg, announced an open call for memorial designs and the three stakeholders agreed on the project submitted by the local artist Hedi Bogaers (Omroep “Kunstenaars Gezocht”, Zierikzee).

As becomes evident from figures 1 and 2, the final design of *Het Zeeuws Slavernijmonument* differs quite remarkably from that of *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden*, since the Middelburg memorial is a stringent geometrical combination of three types of granite, whereas the Amsterdam one shows an evolution of human-resembling figures from slavery to freedom. However, the processes that led to the erections of the two memorials appear strikingly similar, especially

when it comes to their inherent focus on collaboration between civil society and municipalities as well as the practical purpose of the memorials. For example, both erection processes aimed towards satisfying all parties involved with the realization of the memorials when it came to crucial decisions such as placement (Boxtel Artikel 6, Omroep “Locatie”). As explained previously, the final location of the Amsterdam memorial caused significant tensions between civil society organizations and the state/municipality. The placement of *Het Zeeuws Slavernijmonument*, on the other hand, seemed to satisfy all involved parties, since its erection in front of the MCC warehouse is in line with the history of this Middelburg building (Campbell, Gelder). *Het Zeeuws Slavernijmonument* was inaugurated on 2 July 2005, in order to not distort attention from the national Ketji Koti celebration at *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* on 1 July (Koops). But during his unveiling ceremony speech, Koops made it clear that in the future, he aspired to have the Middelburg memorial as the center of a more local Ketji Koti celebration in Zeeland (Koops).

In contrast to *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden*, *Het Zeeuws Slavernijmonument* seems to have succeeded in continuing an open memorial pro-

cess, thus following Young's success criteria. Ferdinand Ralf, the initiator of the memorial process, initially faced a lack of support for his idea to erect a slavery memorial in Middelburg, but discussions between civil society and the Municipality of Middelburg eventually resulted in official support and funding for the monument. The design and placement of the monument constituted the result of the jury stage which included all stakeholders, and thus reflected Young's criteria for a successful, democratic memorial process more than the process in Amsterdam.

### 3.3 The Process in Rotterdam: *Slavernijmonument Rotterdam*

In 2009, a descendant group spearheaded by Rotterdam PvdA politician Peggy Wijntuin started collecting signatures from Rotterdam citizens in favour of erecting a local memorial to commemorate Rotterdam's crucial role in the Dutch triangular slave trade of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (BKOR "Slavernijmonument", Waterkant). Although *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* already existed at that point, Wijntuin argued that a local memorial would make the inherent connection between contemporary Rotterdammers, the slaves, and the slave traders of the past more visible (Rijnmond). Wijntuin adds that the question of visibility makes it difficult for Rotterdammers to connect their city's history of slavery, because the triangular trading system meant that companies involved in the slave trade had warehouses and factories in Rotterdam. These produced the goods that the companies would sell in West Africa in exchange for enslaved people who would then get shipped off to the Dutch colonies (Rijnmond). According to Wijntuin, however, the historical lack of physical presence of enslaved people in Rotterdam, does not diminish the current issues faced by the city whose inhabitants do not connect Rotterdam's trade history and historical prosperity to the slave trade (Rijnmond).

As a result of the collection of 3,000 signatures through Wijntuin's campaign, the city's alderman Rik Grashoff from GroenLinks made an official promise on 23 November 2009 to erect a memorial (Waterkant). It would take four more years until the official inauguration, as involved parties wished to time the unveiling with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands so that the memorial could exercise its function as a site for *Keti Koti* celebrations for the first time during this major anniversary (CBK). Since the erection of the Rotterdam memorial, the narrative of *Keti Koti* anniversaries in the Netherlands has changed, because of a more widespread acceptance of the fact that it took ten years from the official abolition of slavery in 1863 until enslaved people actually gained freedom in 1873, which results in Dutch cities such as Groningen currently planning to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Keti Koti* again in 2023 (Scheffer). However, in 2013 the

memorial in Rotterdam still represented the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Wijntuin collaborated with Het Centrum Beeldende Kunst Rotterdam (CBK), a public benefit organization funded by the Dutch state, in order to realize the slavery memorial. Together, they organized a design competition in 2012 where artists could submit ideas which representatives of Surinamese, Antillean, and Cape Verdean communities in Rotterdam would then vote on (BKOR "In Memoriam"). All stakeholders voted unanimously for the design proposed by Cape Verdean artist and Rotterdam resident Alex da Silva, whose *Slavernijmonument Rotterdam* according to the artist himself consists of an abstract interpretation of a slave trade ship made in bronze on top of which four metal figures dance their way from enslavement to freedom (BKOR "In Memoriam", CBK). However, the number of designs in the competition as well as further details about how exactly the vote was conducted is not known. According to BKOR, the competition was tough, but the article fails to mention exactly how many proposed designs this competition consisted of (BKOR). Da Silva, Wijntuin and CBK decided to place the memorial at the Lloydpier in Rotterdam, a location with significant importance to the Triangular trade since the ships set for West Africa would dock there (BKOR "Slavernijmonument").

Although some details regarding the memorial process in Rotterdam remain unclear, it still seems like a successful democratic process, especially since its Jury Stage included both civil society stakeholders, politicians, citizens, and an expert advisory group in the shape of CBK. Furthermore, this process made an attempt to further democratization of what Young calls The Judging Stage (Young "The Stages of Memory" 46), as it allowed minority communities in Rotterdam with a historical connection to Dutch slavery and colonialism to vote on a selection of designs chosen by the jury.

## 4 Contextualizing the Memorials within the Dutch Redress Debate

The process of erecting the Rotterdam memorial does in many ways reflect the processes in Amsterdam and Middelburg. *Slavernijmonument Rotterdam*, like *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* and *Het Zeeuws Slavernijmonument*, originated as a civil society-led initiative seeking collaboration with a municipality in order to execute the slavery memorial. As with the two previous memorials, the Rotterdam process strove towards accommodating various opinions and the perspectives of minority groups within Rotterdam. Fundamental similarities between the three memorials also appear when looking at the intended function of *Slavernijmonument Rotterdam*, since the creation of a site for *Keti Koti* commemoration and celebration constitutes



Figure 3: Photo of the Rotterdam memorial, designed by Alex da Silva (NRC. Slavernijmonument Rotterdam. Nrc.nl, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/10/05/monument-tegen-de-onwetendheid-a2139262>, accessed 1 June 2022).

the main functional purpose of all three memorials.

In the autumn semester of 2021, I mapped racial redress activities in the Netherlands for the NIOD Institute of War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies' Transitional Justice Programme, and our research resulted in 59 mappings of apologies, statue removals, memorial erections, and other redress activities (NIOD data). This research illustrated three main tendencies within Dutch redress activities which will help place the erected and planned slavery memorials within a broader narrative of Dutch racial redress activities. The three trends are: first, clusters of commemoration around Keti Koti anniversaries and decennials, second, an internal process of change in-between Keti Koti anniversaries that highlights the effect of civil society organizations' pursuits of changing the hegemonic Dutch narrative of slavery and 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch history, and third, activities sparked by world-wide Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. Of course, some redress activities overlap, but this does not defy the purpose of the categories, as this

categorization illustrates general trends rather than mutually exclusive ones.

Firstly, 22% of the mapped redress activities either took their starting point on Keti Koti or function as preparation for bigger Keti Koti decennials – in particular those of 2013 and 2023 – which results in significant clusters of commemorative activities around Keti Koti (NIOD data). Therefore, the inauguration of the national memorial in Amsterdam on Keti Koti 2002, the deliberate one-day delay of the unveiling of the Middelburg memorial on 2 July 2005 to accommodate for the Keti Koti celebration in Amsterdam on 1 July, and the erection of the Rotterdam memorial for the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Keti Koti in 2013 all correspond to the broader trend for racial redress activities in the Netherlands connecting to Keti Koti. Furthermore, the Tilburg memorial inauguration will take place on 1 July 2022 and the three slavery memorials planned for erection in Utrecht, The Hague, and Groningen will be erected in 2023 to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery

in the Netherlands (Rubio, Scheffer, NOS, Hest). Both erected and planned slavery memorials thus follow the tendency for Dutch racial redress events to connect to Ketu Ketu anniversaries and even intensify this tendency by creating spaces for local Ketu Ketu celebrations, thus broadening the tradition for celebrating Ketu Ketu which previously mainly existed in Amsterdam (Ariese 125).

Although this research calls the second trend in Dutch redress activities ‘an internal process of change’, this process does of course still connect to global trends and changes in awareness of how to present unflattering elements of the national history of a country. However, the formulation of this second trend refers to the fact that during the late 2010s several museums and municipalities in the Netherlands initiated redress projects without being under a major pressure to do so. Some prime examples of this trend include the 2018 city council-initiated investigation of Rotterdam’s slavery past and the formal apology from the Rotterdam major for the city’s participation in the slave trade, the Mauritshuis Museum’s decision in 2018 to remove a bust of Count Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen from its lobby due to his involvement in the Dutch slave trade, and the Amsterdam Museum’s 2019 decision to cease to use the term ‘Golden Age’ in relation to Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century history (NIOD data). All these decisions show a potential shift within local municipalities’ and museum’s approaches to commemorating Dutch slavery history, since the city council of Rotterdam, the Mauritshuis Museum, and Amsterdam Museum all decided to engage in internal change without pressure from the public and protesters. These internal decisions to broaden or change the hegemonic narrative of Dutch slavery history potentially constitute long-term effects of the racial redress debate initiated by descendant-led civil society organizations in the 1990s and continued through racial redress activities and collaborations between civil society groups and municipalities during the 2000s and 2010s.

The three already erected slavery memorials and the ones planned in Tilburg and the Hague all follow the trend of internal change. As mentioned before, all erected memorials connect inherently to Ketu Ketu anniversaries, but at the same time they also include long processes during which a single member or a group from a minority community manages to establish the existence of public support or desire for a public site for slavery commemoration, thereby getting the state or local municipalities to engage in the process and fund the erection of memorials. Even though it may seem like the new wave of slavery memorials in 2022-2023 constitutes an example of attempts to diversify public spaces after the Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations of 2020, two of the planned memorials actually follow the first trend rather than the post-BLM trend, as the official processes of erecting slavery memorials in Tilburg and the Hague began in 2018 and 2019, respectively (figure 4).

A staggering 47% of the mapped Dutch redress activities began after the BLM protests, which took its Dutch starting point on Dam Square in Amsterdam on 1 June 2020, and thus fall under the third trend detected in the redress data (NIOD data). This tendency corresponds with two of the memorials for slavery commemoration planned for erection in 2023, since the official support for these projects only arrived after the BLM protests of 2020, even though civil society agents and some politicians had lobbied for the memorials prior to the protests (figure 4; Lucas). The official municipal announcement of plans for erecting a slavery memorial in Utrecht happened on 9 July 2020 – a month after BLM protests began in Utrecht on 5 June 2020 (DUIC “Jaarbeursplein”). The BLM protests in Utrecht appear very fundamental to initiating the memorial process in Utrecht because the announcement came so swiftly after the protests began, and news articles reaffirmed this connection between BLM and the Utrecht memorial project by accompanying articles on the announcement of the memorial with pictures from a BLM-protest on Het Jaarbeursplein in Utrecht (NOS, DUIC “Slavernijmonument”). Groningen also experienced BLM protests in June 2020, which could explain why the official decision to erect a memorial came after 2020, even though the memorial process began before 2020 (Trouw “Demonstranten”). However, a connection between the memorial in Groningen and BLM appears less clear than the connection between official support for the Utrecht memorial and BLM protests in Utrecht.

In closing, although the BLM-protests had a major impact on Dutch racial redress activities it would be anachronistic to view the entirety of the new memorials planned for 2022-2023 as a consequence of BLM, since only two official announcements about memorial erections happened right after the beginning of BLM protest in the Netherlands. The new memorial processes and the three already erected memorials all follow the Dutch redress activity trend of connecting to Ketu Ketu, as the (scheduled) inauguration dates all systematically connect to Ketu Ketu anniversaries and decennials. Additionally, the erections of slavery memorials correspond to the trend of internal change detected within the racial redress mappings, since the majority of the erection processes try to place slavery within hegemonic narratives of Dutch history but do so through a process that includes both municipalities, civil society actors and local communities, thus contributing to a broader change in the Dutch narrative of colonialism and slavery history through the elaborate process required in order to erect slavery memorials.

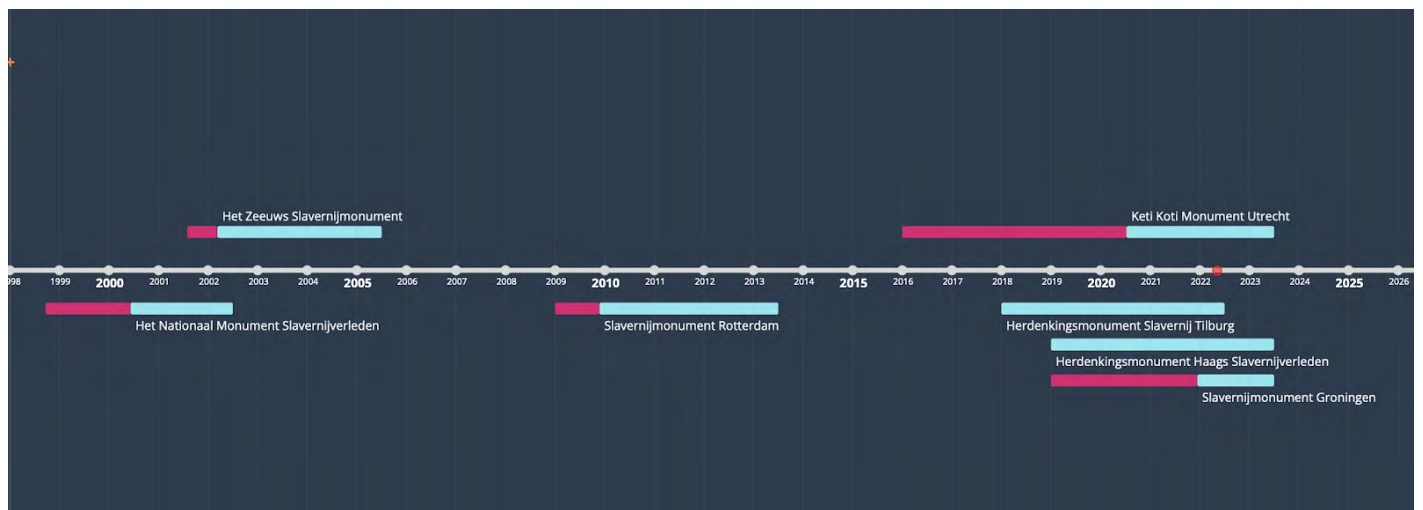


Figure 4: Timeline showing the processes of erecting slavery memorials in the Netherlands. The axis shows the years and the blue lines mark the timespan from an official municipal or state declaration about plans for erecting a memorial to the inauguration of the memorial. The red lines illustrate the amount of time that civil society organizations, often in collaboration with some city council members, lobbied for the erection of a memorial before it became an official municipal or state project. Sources used to create the timeline (from left to right): Boxtel, Kardux, Biekman; Goetheer, Koops; BKOR “Slavernijmonument, Waterkant, Rijnmond, Veenstra, Scheffer, Rozema.

#### 4.1 Emplacing Erected Slavery Memorials Within Hegemonic Visual Narratives

The slavery memorials of Amsterdam, Middelburg, and Rotterdam all have quite distinct features in common with regards to the manner in which they occupy space: none of them have replaced existing monuments and all the erection processes did at least aim towards making the process of developing the memorials inclusive and democratic to accommodate for the people who would eventually use the memorials as places of commemoration and celebration. Thus, the three erected slavery memorials constitute examples of counter-hegemonic initiatives to visually commemorate slavery in the Netherlands that all revolve around the idea of placing something, which inherently connects to Dutch history, in the visual spaces which have thus far failed to provide public displays of commemoration of this element of Dutch history. Balkenhol’s interpretation of “memory politics as processes of emplacement that intervene in a politics of belonging and provide a sense of political subjectivity” (Balkenhol 137) and Huyssen’s argument that “histories of destruction, crime, and conflicts of all kinds” (Huyssen “Other Cities” 3) necessarily exist within visual spaces of cities provide the foundation of the following analysis and discussion of the three erected slavery memorials as counter-hegemonic visual sources emplaced in city spaces.

The connection between hegemonic visual spaces and emplacement becomes evident when examining the processes of determining where to place the three slavery memorials. The placements of the Rotterdam

and Middelburg memorials signify attempts at emplacing slavery within city spaces that already fundamentally connect to aspects of the Dutch history and the slave trade, yet fail to represent this history through visual sources. Neither process had much difficulty arguing for the particular placement of a slavery memorial, since descendant organizations collaborated with the municipality of Middelburg in order to decide to locate the *Het Zeeuws Slavernijmonument* at the MCC warehouse (Omroep “Locatie”) Also, Alex da Silva, the artist behind *Slavernijmonument Rotterdam*, wanted the memorial to abstractly represent a ship used for Triangular trade and therefore wished to place it at the Lloydpier (BKOR “Slavernijmonument”). The two memorials thus constitute examples of emplacements of the Dutch involvement in the slave trade into the visual source material of spaces which, until the memorial erections, only displayed the profit and prosperity of these two Dutch cities which originated from the cities’ engagement in, for example, Triangular trading. Thus, the memorials occupy physical spaces, which already contain the aspect of Dutch slavery history that they represent without having visual source material to support this aspect of history, and emplace this aspect within the hegemonic visual narrative of the city space, thus providing a competing and broader visual narrative. The initiators of the memorials did not wish to remove the Lloydpier or the MCC warehouse, but instead aimed towards creating visual source material which supports a more nuanced hegemonic narrative of the Dutch slave trade.

*Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* in Amsterdam differs remarkably from the two other memori-

als, since its placement caused quite a dispute. Oosterpark, the location of the national slavery memorial, has no apparent connection to Dutch slave history and has only existed for around 100 years (Amsterdam Gemeente). According to Kardux, this location “was highly controversial in the Afro-Dutch community” due to its peripherality and lack of historical connection to the communities it supposedly represented (Kardux 174). To reiterate, the guidelines for the placement as described in the covenant stated that the location should be “accessible” and “representative”, but did not further specify the criteria for a representative location (Boxtel Artikel 6). According to Kardux, when Boxtel and the Dutch state together with the municipality of Amsterdam became involved in the memorial process, the focus shifted from the original idea of commemorating the violence and consequences of the Dutch slave trade to the unity of all minorities within the Netherlands (Kardux 173). This shift in the focus of the memorial during the process of shaping and erecting could constitute a primary reason for its non-slavery-connected placement.

The process of erecting and placing *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* distinguishes itself further from the erection processes for the memorials in Middelburg and Rotterdam by not being a project of emplacement. Because Oosterpark does not connect to the Dutch slavery past, placing the memorial there makes it impossible to constitute an example of emplacement of Dutch slavery history within a visual hegemony, since the memorial ended up merely being *placed* within a space it did not necessarily connect to instead of being *emplaced* within a space where a visual source of Dutch slavery history was missing. The municipality of Amsterdam’s official website entry on Oosterpark further contributes to the notion that the location of the memorial focused more on broadening its meaning and making it less visible than on placing it in a historically/culturally significant space. The entry describes Oosterpark as a site for “fun festivals” and “a large paddling pool” but mentions neither *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* nor the yearly Ketu Koti commemoration/festival held at the memorial (Gemeente Amsterdam). The non-central location together with the apparent lack of connection between the memorial and its surroundings thus seem to strip it of the impact which slavery memorials can have on hegemonic spaces, as proved by the cases of Middelburg and Rotterdam. So, even though the Amsterdam memorial succeeds in providing a place for Ketu Koti celebration and commemoration, it fails at intervening with hegemonic spaces.

## 4.2 The Current Wave of Local Slavery Memorials

The inaugurations of four new local slavery memorials will take place on Ketu Koti 2022 and 2023 (Rubio, Scheffer, NOS, Hest), thus cementing the erection of slavery memorials as an actual trend for slavery commemoration in the Netherlands. Since only the Tilburg memorial currently has an official design and placement, and due to the scarce source material on the memorials planned for erection in Utrecht, the Hague, and Groningen, this chapter aims to explore the processes of erecting new local memorials through qualitative interviews with politicians, representatives of civil society groups, artists, and advisory organizations in order to gain these four different perspectives on the memorial erection processes. However, none of the approached people engaged with the process of erecting the monument in Groningen replied to the interview requests and the only response from a participant of the process in the Hague came in the shape of a brief email rather than a live interview, which means that this interview did not provide an opportunity for follow-up questions. All other qualitative interviews with stakeholders took their starting point in similar sets of questions relating to the processes of erecting local slavery memorials, but turned more dialogical by asking follow-up questions.

This chapter thus relies on the written response from Peggy Wijntuin, former PvdA-politician in Rotterdam, and current project leader of the memorial erection process in the Hague, a live interview with Leroy Lucas, initiator of Ketu Koti Utrecht and the main civil society actor behind the memorial erection process in Utrecht, and live interviews with the artists behind the Tilburg memorial design, Albert Dedden and Paul Keizer, as well as Liesbeth Jans, process supervisor of the Tilburg memorial. Although the interviews do not provide a complete account of all groups involved, they constitute first-hand reports on the experiences of some of the agents behind the memorial erection processes, thereby making it possible to compare the processes to each other. This research fully acknowledges that other stakeholders involved in the process may have had different experiences of the processes, so all tentative conclusions made about the processes in Utrecht, The Hague, and Tilburg rely only on information presented by individual stakeholders, not the complete entity of stakeholders involved.

Wijntuin, a veteran when it comes to racial redress in the Netherlands, explains that the process of erecting a slavery memorial in the Hague differs from her previous experience with *Slavernijmonument Rotterdam*, since the city council initiated the memorial erection process in the Hague, whereas she initiated the process in Rotterdam herself as a citizen. Similarly, Jans states that the municipality of Tilburg contacted the advisory organization Kunstloc Brabant after the mayor



of Tilburg, Theo Weterings, promised the erection of a slavery memorial on Ketu Koti 2018, which led to Jans' official involvement in the process from 2020 onwards (Taylor). Jans explains that at the beginning of this process, "there were two years of discussions between the municipality of Tilburg, various foundations, and the communities who will be represented through the monument", thus emphasizing the importance assigned to collaboration and debate during the first phase of the erection process. The processes in Tilburg and the Hague thus seem quite driven by the cities' respective municipalities from the beginning of the erection processes, something that differs from the heavily civil society-led initial phases of the memorials in Amsterdam, Middelburg, and Rotterdam.

To some degree, the processes in Utrecht and Groningen resemble the initial phases of the three already erected memorials for slavery commemoration, as it took civil society organizations years to receive official approval for slavery memorials in these two cities, but in both cities the collaboration with a few select members of the respective city councils provided a crucial addition to civil society campaigns for erecting slavery memorials. Although the municipality of Utrecht made an official declaration of its plans for erecting a slavery memorial in 2020, Lucas explains that the actual process began several years before that, and that the eventual official support only arrived after years of lobbying for the idea both within the municipality and through the popularization of Ketu Koti in Utrecht:

"The process started 6-7 years ago. (...) Melody Deldjou Fard [member of the city council of Utrecht for GroenLinks] told me that some people in the municipality were already talking about the idea of a monument, which I did not know at that point, so I told her that I would start working on the Ketu Koti festival in Utrecht and she should start working on getting the monument approved by the Municipality – like a tandem project" (Lucas).

In Groningen, D66 politician Wieke Paulusma and the civil society organization Ketu Koti Groningen approached the municipality in 2019 to inquire about the possibility for erecting a slavery memorial in 2022, but on 3 November 2021, an article by Sebastian Scheffer published in the local newspaper *Oog* stated that the initiators behind the monument had not heard any news about it since they proposed the idea of a memorial in 2019 (Veenstra, Scheffer). As a result, the initiators presented a new proposal to the municipality of Groningen on 14 December 2021 for the erection of a memorial in 2023, which was approved (Rozema 3). Due to the lack of responses to interview requests for the people involved in the erection process in Groningen, it has not been possible to gather updates on the process, and the

rest of this chapter thus focuses on the memorial erection processes in the Hague, Tilburg, and Utrecht.

All interviewed parties state that the erection of local slavery memorials provides communities with a connection to Dutch slavery history and colonialism while at the same time focusing on unifying inhabitants of the Netherlands in the pursuit of a more equal future. Wijntuin mentions that the Dutch colonial past persists in present society through the 'Dutch cultural archive' – a term likely borrowed from the Afro-Surinamese Dutch social and cultural anthropologist Gloria Wekker's book *White Innocence* in which she uses Edward Said's term 'cultural archive' to show how a Dutch self-perception inherently connecting to the country's imperialist past remains strong among the white Dutch population today (Wekker 2). Wijntuin moves on to describe what she sees as the main purpose of erecting slavery memorials:

"Our conviction is that mutual knowledge and insights about our shared history and in particular the colonial and slavery past contributes in the long term to both the prevention of mutual alienation and to our common Dutch identity and future". (Wijntuin)

The erection of slavery memorials does thus, according to Wijntuin, simultaneously challenge a hegemonic, white Dutch identity built on colonialism while still ignorant of the consequences of colonialism *and* create a new "common Dutch identity", which broadens the hegemonic and exclusive Dutch cultural archive in order to make room for an inclusive, shared interpretation of Dutch slavery history.

Although the interviewed parties share a consensus concerning the idealistic purpose of erecting slavery memorials, some interviews revealed more practical explanations for the timings of municipalities' official declarations to erect slavery memorials. According to Lucas, the BLM protests in Utrecht in June 2020 sparked a broader political interest in the memorial erection project in Utrecht:

"Someone called up Melody Deldjou Fard after that [the BLM protests in Utrecht] and said that it might be time for that monument. I don't know who called her, but I think it was a white position. She knew she could pass a bill for a monument at that moment, because she had momentum. That's how it got done. But the bill had everything that I had been telling politicians for years in it, so I just saw my words, finally" (Lucas).

With the BLM protests, the municipality of Utrecht suddenly had a practical reason to support the erection of a local slavery memorial, even though Lucas, Fard, and others had tried to achieve this for years. The official collaboration between civil society and municipality thus began as a response to tumultuous protests rather

than as a result of dialogues between civil society, minority communities, and the municipality of Utrecht.

The Tilburg municipality is the second example of a municipality agreeing to erect a slavery memorial for practical as well as idealistic reasons. While explaining the reasons that the committee liked Dedden and Keizer's design, Jans revealed that its contrast to the existing and quite controversial Peerke Donders monument in Tilburg constituted an appealing factor:

“Especially people from the BLM movement want it [the Peerke Donders statue] removed because it is a very stereotypical depiction of a relation between a white and a black man. That is one of the reasons why the Afro-Caribbean community in Tilburg wanted a memorial as a counterpart of the Peerke Donders monument. There is definitely a connection between the Donders monument debate and the erection of this slavery monument”. (Jans)

According to Jans, the new memorial will help balance out the Peerke Donders monument and the hegemonic narrative of colonialism that it represents. This resonates with the Rotterdam and Middelburg memorials, as these also serve as examples of emplacing visual representations of counter-hegemonic narratives into hegemonic spaces previously dominated by visual sources that reinforce the hegemony.

Only Tilburg has settled on where to place its slavery memorial so far – a decision that caused debate between the municipality and the advisory committee for the memorial. Dedden and Keizer were not involved in this decision, but the artists do believe that the very central location assigned to the memorial signifies the serious recognition of what it represents. Jans explains that the municipality of Tilburg had not prepared for a situation in which the advisory board did not accept the proposal to place the memorial in the Vrijheidspark next to memorials commemorating the Second World War and the Holocaust. It therefore took time to finally settle on placing the memorial next to the stairs of Plan-T, a central location next to the station constantly frequented by students, travelers, and people on their way to work. Although this place has no connection to slavery, Dedden, Keizer, and Jans believe that the visibility of the memorial makes its placement significant, and this, in relation to the already erected slavery memorials, untraditional placement emplaces slavery history within a busy, contemporary visual space in Tilburg, thus attempting to continue the debate about colonialism, slavery, and how to create a more inclusive society.

### 4.3 Reflections on the Success of the Slavery Memorial Trend

In summary, several characteristics of the already erected slavery memorials reappear in the four new erection processes, among these the clear connection to Ketikoti, attempts at emplacing the memorials within hegemonic visual spaces, and creating memorials which focus both on broadening the hegemonic historical narrative of the Dutch colonial past and on encouraging hope for a more equal future. However, two of the four new memorial erection processes also show the difficulties of gaining official municipal support for slavery memorials, even after the completion of the erection processes in Amsterdam, Middelburg and Rotterdam. Although this chapter only bases itself on four interviews, the exploration of how key agents in the memorial erection processes have experienced the development from the initial idea, to create a memorial, to official municipal support for the project and, in the case of Tilburg, discussions about, and eventually decisions on the design and placement of the memorial, has provided a unique insight into the intricate processes of erecting local slavery memorials in the Netherlands.

To return to the question posed in chapter 2, this research shows that the Dutch racial redress trend of erecting slavery memorials does challenge existing hegemonic narratives, as the erection of a memorial generates debate between stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, municipalities, advisory organizations, and citizens in general. The Dutch state participated directly only in one memorial process – the process of erecting *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* – and this example appears as the least successful memorial process according to Young's success criteria, since the state involvement led to the exclusion of other stakeholders initially integral part of the process and ended up dictating The Final Deliberation Stage, The Building Stage, and The Opening and Reception Stage. But even this least successful slavery memorial succeeded in creating a place in Amsterdam that still hosts annual Ketikoti celebrations twenty years after the inauguration of the memorial and constitutes the starting point of a successful wave of local racial redress initiatives working towards broadening the celebration, commemoration, and awareness of Ketikoti through the erections of local slavery memorials.

Although only three monuments have been erected and even though the first memorial erection happened quite recently in a historical perspective, the Dutch memorial processes seem highly successful as a means of racial redress and according to Young's success criteria. Particularly the process in Tilburg resonates with Young's perspective, as the memorial process according to Jans took longer than expected because civil society and advisory organizations did not accept the placement initially proposed by the municipality. This highlights that the stakeholders in the Tilburg memorial pro-

cess valued democratic decision making and debate over quickly finishing the project, which corresponds to Young's main argument, namely that one should view the memorial process as more important than the final memorial (Young 7).

However, the Dutch slavery memorials also differ from Young's main objective, since all the erected and planned monuments function as specific sites for Keti Koti celebration and commemoration. Covenants and other agreements about the main purposes of slavery memorials in addition to the interviews conducted with main stakeholders have all provided the same answer to questions regarding the reason for continuing to erect slavery memorials: the wish to create local sites for annual Keti Koti celebrations. All memorials besides the national one in Amsterdam constitute the products of *local* initiatives aiming to broaden the celebration and commemoration of Keti Koti by creating their own visual spaces. In that sense, in addition to the value assigned to the discussions and debates occurring during the memorial processes, the final, physical products of the memorial processes have a major significance too. Hence, because of local insistence on broadening and spreading Keti Koti beyond Amsterdam, the slavery memorials remain important even after their inaugurations due to their function as specific sites of commemoration and celebration every year on 1 July.

Even the most successful of the researched memorial processes face certain limitations and uncertainties. Young mentions community education as a vital step in the memorial process and a necessary addition to any project wishing to result in the erection of a physical memorial (Young 7). However, the local slavery memorial initiatives seem to focus far more on creating sites for Keti Koti commemoration than on combining the erection processes with educational projects. Jans even states that while the Municipality of Tilburg has supported the slavery memorial project, it does not wish to organize educational projects. This indicates a potential issue with erecting slavery memorials, as these memorials risk ending up as excuses for not engaging in additional memory work<sup>4</sup> on challenging hegemonic narratives of Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century history. The Dutch government and the Municipality of Amsterdam actually created Het Nationaal Instituut Nederlands Slavernijverleden en Erfenis<sup>5</sup> (NiNsee) in connection to the inauguration of *Het Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden*, thus ensuring the realization of a research institute in addition to the erection of a national slavery memorial (Kardux 174). However, Wekker argues that support for this educational project ceased after decreasing political support (Wekker 14), which again appears to support the suspicion that slavery memorials can constitute an excuse for the Dutch state and municipalities to not

support further racial redress events seeking to provide counter-hegemonic narratives of Dutch slavery history and its continuing presence within Dutch society.

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Dutch trend of erecting monuments for the commemoration of slavery provides a highly successful means of racial redress, as it manages to emplace counter-hegemonic visual source material into spaces previously mainly occupied by visual sources furthering the hegemonic narrative of the Dutch participation in the slave trade. Furthermore, the processes of erecting memorials for slavery commemoration have resulted in many years of disputes and debates between minority communities, citizens, municipalities, and civil society organizations, thus furthering a public focus on what the slavery memorials represent and why certain groups seek to counter a hegemonic Dutch narrative of slavery through the erection of memorials. This aspect of the conducted research resonates with Young's insistence on the fundamental importance of the *process* rather than the *product* when it comes to modern memorial processes.

However, based on the information gathered about the intended purposes of all the memorials as sites for yearly Keti Koti commemoration and celebration, a main purpose emphasized in the qualitative interviews conducted with key members of the erection processes, is that Young's disregard for the physical memorial itself must be challenged in the case of the Dutch memorials for slavery commemoration, as the spread of Keti Koti celebrations and commemorations to cities other than Amsterdam connects to the memorial processes. So, even though these processes have a great significance when it comes to challenging a hegemonic narrative of Dutch slavery through debates and disputes between civil society organizations, citizens and politicians, the possibility to have a physical, fixed, and shared site for commemorating the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands also contributes to the significance of the monuments.

The process for a national slavery memorial constitutes the least successful one so far, as it went against Young's criteria for successful memorial processes because the Dutch state ended up dictating key decisions instead of allowing these to happen based on democratic discussions between all involved stakeholders. The Tilburg process, on the other hand, seems highly successful because it illustrates how a memorial becomes more valuable to a local community when all stakeholders can openly voice their opinions and challenge decisions proposed by the municipality, even though this prolonged the erection process. Generally, the other memorial processes appear to have learned from the mistakes of the Amsterdam process, as they seek to keep all stakeholders engaged through-

<sup>4</sup>Memory work: The manner in which a person, researcher or institution engages with the past in a historical, artistic and/or political manner

<sup>5</sup>The National Institute of Dutch Slavery History and Heritage

out the middle and final stages of the memorial processes instead of abandoning this democratic approach to memorial projects midway.

Future research on this topic would benefit from including interviews with multiple stakeholders per memorial from both old and current memorial processes in order to compare and contrast various stakeholders' experiences of the processes. Another important question unanswered by this research is how citizens interact with the slavery memorials outside of Ketj Koti celebrations and whether the monuments manage to successfully counter a hegemonic narrative of Dutch slavery history then. Furthermore, although this research concludes that the slavery memorials pose a successful racial redress trend in the Netherlands, future research should look into whether politicians use the monuments as excuses for neglecting other redress projects, since this would provide an argument against uncritically continuing the trend of erecting local slavery memorials.

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