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## Museum Kura Hulanda: Representations of Transatlantic Slavery and African and Dutch Heritage in Post-Colonial Curaçao

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Museum Kura Hulanda: Representations of Transatlantic Slavery and  
African and Dutch Heritage in Post-Colonial Curaçao

by

April Min

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology  
with a concentration in Heritage Studies  
Department of Anthropology  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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## **Abstract**

Presenting a history of slavery that resonates with multiple audiences and serves necessary educational goals, while still creating sufficient appeal to attract visitors and remain sustainable is an enormous task faced by museums in post-colonial spaces across the world. The Museum Kura Hulanda in Curaçao finds itself in an unenviable position of maintaining a vast collection compiled by its founder, navigating the complexities of the 400-year legacy of Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, and sustaining its position within the local business and tourist economy of Curaçao.

Focusing on the exhibitions at the Museum Kura Hulanda as a site of analysis, this research explores how African and Dutch heritage are presented in a specific museum in the Dutch Caribbean; in particular, how these heritages intersect – or not - in the Museum’s presentation and interpretation of the transatlantic slave trade. Viewing the Museum’s exhibits through the lens of the authorized heritage discourse and conceptualizations of erasure and silences, and using Cubitt’s (2011) discussion of “atrocious materials” as a tool of analysis, this exploratory and interpretive qualitative case study critically assesses the modes of presentation in the Museum; the impact and potential impact of the Museum’s displays on its visitors in view of historical and contemporary issues of race and racism in the Kingdom of the Netherlands; and the absence of local stories in favor of a more global approach to the Museum’s displays. The analysis concludes with a recommendation for further research into the utilization of community engagement as a strategy for rethinking exhibit space, displays, and narratives to potentially provide a space for local people to engage with and relate the stories of Afro-Curaçaoans.

## Chapter One: Overview

### Introduction

By many accounts, the Museum Kura Hulanda serves a vital role in opening the eyes of many White Dutch and other tourists to the atrocities and ravages of transatlantic slavery, providing for many their first in-depth exposure to the historical role of the Netherlands in the transatlantic slave trade. Any visitor to the Museum is hard-pressed to emerge unmoved by the myriad of torture devices, tools of bondage, and images of brutality on display.

The Museum's mission is concurrently simplistic and complex - to acquire and exhibit collections related to the cultural identity of the people of Curaçao, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic Rim (Museum Kura Hulanda n.d.). Within moments of meeting the local, non-White people who staff the Museum, it is clear they are both invested in and proud of the Museum's intention to educate its visitors about a largely ignored and erased aspect of Dutch history.

But a critical analysis of race relations in the European and Caribbean Netherlands, the lasting impacts of the transatlantic slave trade on Dutch culture (for both White and Black Dutch people), and of the positioning of the Netherlands in the transatlantic slave trade provokes inquiries into the larger position of the Museum in Curaçaoan and Dutch culture. Specifically, what role does this Museum play, or could it play, in broader discussions of Dutch racism, museum interpretation practices (especially in the presentation of African and Dutch heritage), and engagement of the local Curaçaoan community with this history?

To explore these issues more critically, I set out to understand the genesis of the Museum Kura Hulanda, how it came to fruition, who constructed the Museum and its displays and exhibits,

where and how artifacts were obtained, and how the narratives surrounding the artifacts were created. Focusing on the exhibitions at the Museum as a site of analysis, this thesis explores how African and Dutch heritage are presented in a specific museum in the Dutch Caribbean; in particular, how these heritages intersect - or not - in the Museum's presentation and interpretation of the transatlantic slave trade. I further assess the global perspective of the Museum's displays and the absence of a thorough presentation of local stories. As a result, I suggest that the Museum should incorporate community engagement as a strategy for rethinking exhibit space, displays, and narratives to potentially provide a space for local people to engage with and relate the stories of Afro-Curaçaoans.

During four weeks in Curaçao conducting field work in 2018, I was immersed in a dynamic culture predominated by African and Dutch descendant communities, while also observing a disconnect between the Museum, the local Afro-Curaçaoan community, and historic and contemporary narratives of national identity. Consultation with African and Dutch descendant communities may provide opportunities to reconstruct power dynamics in the production of narratives concerning African and Afro-Curaçaoan heritage and to identify narratives that are relevant and meaningful to communities previously silenced or overlooked.

One of the many legacies of the transatlantic slave trade has been a lack of critical interpretation of the exploitation of enslaved Africans by European colonial powers, particularly in the Netherlands where its role in the transatlantic slave trade has been largely overlooked until recently (Wekker 2016). Instead, the era of slavery is often viewed in the context of White European prosperity and opulence, ignoring European histories of subjugating African knowledges and the resourcefulness, intelligence, and capacity for resistance and survival exhibited by enslaved Africans (Jackson 2012; Smith, et al. 2011).

Nowhere is this legacy of European participation in the slave trade more true than in the Netherlands, which found its greatest era of prosperity concurrent with this period. Known as the Golden Age and spanning most of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this era saw the Dutch excel in naval power, seafaring and trade, become a haven of intellectual gathering and advancement, lead the art world in the development of landscape, portrait, and still life painting, and produce numerous groundbreaking scientific and intellectual advancements (see generally Cook 2007).<sup>1</sup> Yet, for nearly 400 years, few scholarly or mainstream popular works discussed the direct correlation between this epic Dutch prosperity and the contemporaneous entry of the Dutch into the slave trade. And while interpretations of transatlantic slavery have been studied in the United States and in the French and British Caribbean (e.g., Jackson 2012; Shackel 2009; Dann and Seaton 2001), fewer studies have been undertaken in the Dutch Caribbean. As the foremost Dutch slave-trading terminal in the Americas and long-time Dutch territory, Curaçao was a significant point of entry for enslaved Africans into the New World and an important point of Dutch and African contact, particularly in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. My research presents a case study assessing how these tensions have been or are being presented at one museum site in Curaçao.

## **Research Setting**

### Curaçao

Curaçao is one of six islands that make up what is commonly known as the Dutch Caribbean or Caribbean Netherlands. Three islands - Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao - are referred to as the “ABC” islands and are located fifteen to fifty miles off the coast of Venezuela in the Southern Caribbean (Figure 1.1). Distinct from the more well-known non-Dutch Northern Caribbean islands, the ABC islands are primarily volcanic rock and limestone coral and are part of a larger group of islands located south of the hurricane belt in the semidesert Southern

Caribbean. The region is characterized by year-round tradewinds, sparse rainfall, little fresh water, large growth of desert plants like cactus, and limited terrestrial fauna (Rupert 2012). Three other Dutch Caribbean islands, St. Maarten, Saba, and St. Eustatius (the “SSS” islands), are located further north, just east of Puerto Rico.

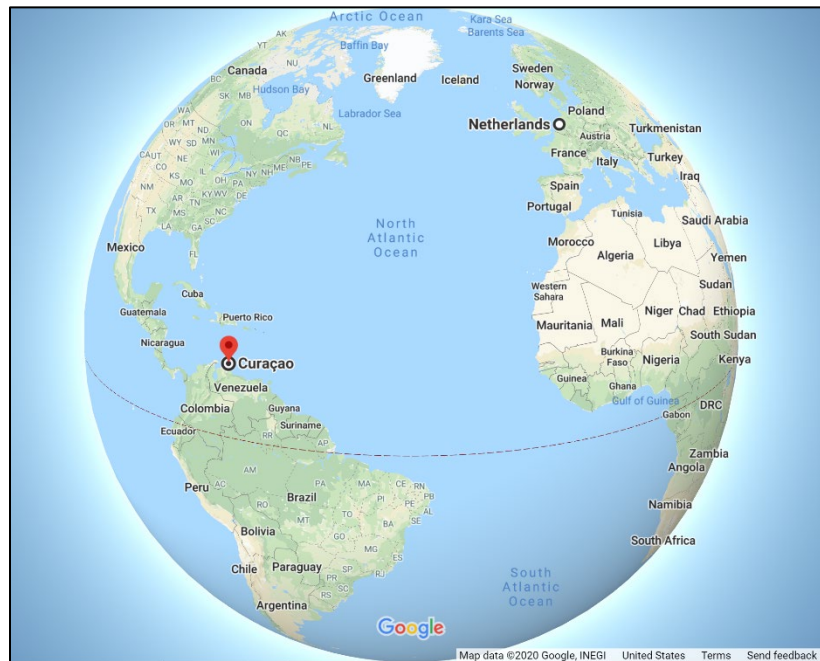


Figure 1.1. Global map identifying relative positions of Curaçao and the Netherlands. Image courtesy Google Maps (2020).

All six islands are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a European parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy comprised of four autonomous constituent countries: the Netherlands, Aruba, Curacao, and St. Maarten. Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius are special municipalities of the constituent country of the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> As of 2010, Curaçao and the other constituent countries are responsible for their own national governments and legislation. Only the Kingdom has international standing, however, and it also continues to provide military, judicial, and financial support to the all of the islands (Government of the Netherlands n.d.b).

### Museum Kura Hulanda

The Museum Kura Hulanda is located in Willemstad, the capital city of Curaçao (Figure

1.2). It opened in 1999, the conception of Jacob Gelt Dekker (1948-2019), a wealthy, and at times controversial, Dutch entrepreneur and philanthropist largely responsible for funding much of the restoration of the Otrobanda section of Willemstad. The restored section of Otrobanda now comprises a large portion of the UNESCO World Heritage site in Curaçao. Designated in 1997, the Historic Area of Willemstad is described by UNESCO as an example of a colonial trading and administrative settlement and is comprised of four urban districts within the city: Punda, Pietermaai, Otrobanda, and Scharloo. Although UNESCO’s inscription of Willemstad relied heavily on the widespread European architectural influence, UNESCO also notes that “the social and cultural differences from Afro-American, Iberian and Caribbean inhabitants have contributed to enriching the building traditions as well as the city’s cultural life. The result is a European architectural style with regional adaptations in a rich array of Caribbean colours” (UNESCO WHC 2020).

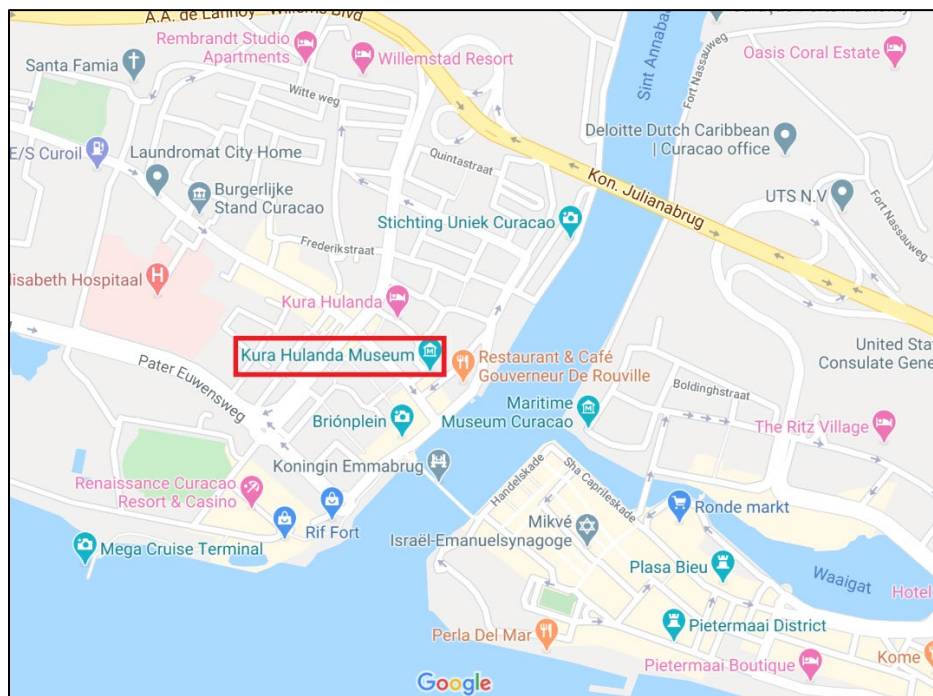


Figure 1.2. Map of downtown Willemstad, Curaçao showing location of the Museum Kura Hulanda and other notable landmarks. Image courtesy Google Maps (2020).

The Museum is the culmination of Dekker's efforts to collect artifacts representing African history, an effort he undertook after purchasing the abandoned and dilapidated buildings in Otrobanda which he later restored (Pier n.d.). The Museum comprises 15 buildings and spans more than 16,000 square feet. It contains three primary exhibitions: *Lands of Abraham*, the *Slave Trade*, and *West African Kingdoms*, totaling twenty-six distinct segments and thousands of artifacts. According to Dekker, his aim was to provide educational materials to the local population who he perceived as being uninformed about their own historic background (Pier n.d.). Despite Dekker's intention that the Museum serve the local population, its primary visitors are cruise ship and other tourists, many of whom are White Europeans and African Americans. Very few locals frequent the Museum, with the exception of increasing numbers of local school groups (Interview of Participant No. 1, July 18, 2018; Interview of Participant No. 3, July 18, 2018; Interview of Participant No. 4, July 20, 2018).<sup>3</sup>

To obtain the artifacts for the Museum, Dekker spent eight to ten months traveling throughout Africa and elsewhere, purchasing or receiving as gifts items from locations along the Niger River Delta basin, including the cities of Timbuktu, Djenne, and Moti; other African nations including Sudan, Tanzania, Benin, Kenya, and Cape Verde; Syria, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Yemen; Cuba and Haiti; and Suriname (Pier n.d.; Interview of Participant No. 2, July 19, 2018). The Museum also houses items in the *Lands of Abraham* exhibit on loan from the University of Leiden (Interview of Participant No. 2, July 19, 2018); art pieces on loan from two local Curaçaoan collectors; and a variety of other Curaçaoan, Caribbean, and South American artifacts.

While the Museum did not share its budget with me, I understood that the Museum is not generously funded and operates primarily on revenue from entrance fees. The Museum is privately owned and operated through the Stichting (Foundation) Museum Kura Hulanda and does not



receive any funding or support from the Curaçaoan or Kingdom governments. The Museum is currently self-sustaining, with primary expenditures for salary and maintenance. The Museum does little marketing unless it can be done for free, relying on word-of-mouth, online reviews, and local connections with the tourism board and other hotels to generate visitor traffic.

### Jacob Gelt Dekker

Jacob Dekker was born in Oterleek, the Netherlands, in 1948. A dentist by training, Dekker, who reportedly added “Gelt” (a slang term of Yiddish origin referring to money) to his birthname sometime later in life (Broere 2019), found financial success through a number of ventures including the Dutch Budget Rent-a-Car franchise and a one-hour photo service ultimately bought out by Kodak (Pier n.d.; Arends 2006).

Diagnosed with cancer in his twenties, Dekker traveled the world and eventually made his way to Curaçao in 1996, when he first encountered the neighborhoods of Otrobanda that he would eventually purchase, restore, and transform into the Kura Hulanda Village and Spa (Pier n.d). Despite his philanthropy, Dekker was often a controversial figure on Curaçao, which many might claim was of his own making. He wrote extensively in the local media, often asserting polarizing views on race, politics, and local conditions. In a 2006 column, Dekker accused the Curaçaoan government of corruption, claimed the local population was poorly educated, and that “for many, work ethics go no further than laziness, stupidity and theft of everything that is loose...” (Arends 2006). The Curaçaoan government then unsuccessfully attempted to declare Dekker *persona non grata* on the island, but a boycott of Dekker’s two hotels did gain traction (Arends 2006).

Dekker was involved in many charitable endeavors throughout his life, including serving as honorary chairman of ChildRight, an organization that fights child abuse and exploitation (Arends 2006). He characterized his efforts in Curaçao as a “restoration of the people,” not just

buildings, and he viewed his work as helping to instill a new self-respect in the people who lived in the area (Pier n.d.; Arends 2006).

His desire to fight poverty, educate the local populace, and to develop Curaçao (Ramdharie 2003), however, was often overshadowed by his controversial views on race and politics. In 2017, he wrote an especially polarizing piece in the local media about the concept of Negritude on the island, concluding that “[b]ombastic, political rhetoric often calls for independence, sovereignty, and autonomy, but when push comes to shove nobody wants to give up their EU- or USA-passport in exchange for a Caribbean micro-state ID-card, let alone a West African passport. Truly, Negritude is dead. [Edward Wilmot] Blyden was wrong, and so were, [Marcus] Garvey, [Frantz] Fanon and the Rastafarians: Blacks want to be White” (Dekker 2017).

At least one local activist has labeled Dekker as racist (Ostiana 2013), and local views about Dekker and his projects are mixed. Despite Dekker’s stated motives to support the local community, many do not agree. Regarding the Kura Hulanda complex, one local said “This is not intended for us. Do you know how much a cup of coffee costs in the restaurants?” (Ramdharie 2003). A local merchant commented, “Otrobanda has improved a lot, but the common man is not coming, not even in the museum. After all, it remains something for outsiders, for tourists” (Ramdharie 2003). And a local taxi driver interviewed for a profile about Dekker put it succinctly: “Jacob is a difficult man. He has done good things for Curaçao, but it is a shame that he has such a big mouth” (Arends 2006).

Dekker succumbed to cancer in late 2019, leaving behind a legacy that will likely continue to be debated. Curaçao’s Prime Minister, Eugene Rhuggenaath, has said that the Museum Kura Hulanda is “the most beautiful gift to Curaçao” that Dekker has left behind (Broere 2019). His book, *The Caribbean* (2018), was his last major work before his death.

## Museum Construction and Design

With regard to the construction of the Museum, restoration of the museum buildings occurred in conjunction with the restoration of eight city blocks of the Otrobanda section of Willemstad that were developed into the Kura Hulanda Village Hotel and Spa (see e.g., Figures 1.3 and 1.4). The primary architect and designer of both the hotel and museum was Leo Helms, a Dutch architect with degrees in psychology and in architecture and graphic design (Interview of Participant No. 2, July 19, 2018; Hotel Kura Hulanda, “Leo Helms: Designer of Project Kura Hulanda/Director of Museum Kura Hulanda,” news release, undated, provided by Museum Kura Hulanda). Prior to his work on Kura Hulanda, Helms was the project manager and interior designer for various museums and exhibitions in Europe, and subsequent to Kura Hulanda he worked on the design of the Historical Museum in Aruba and other Curaçaoan museum projects. He served as the first director of the Museum Kura Hulanda and was subsequently Director of the Curaçao Maritime Museum from 2011-16 (Helms news release, undated; Helms n.d.). It is believed that Helms and Dekker coordinated in constructing the narratives and descriptions found in the Museum, though this has not been verified and current Museum personnel could not offer additional information (Interview of Participant No. 2, July 19, 2018). It does not appear that Dekker and Helms engaged any history, anthropology, or heritage professionals in the initial construction of the Museum, though Jay Havisser (Ph.D. Archaeology, University of Leiden; M.A. Anthropology, Florida State University), was a subsequent director of the Museum.

Many reports state that Dekker was motivated to build the museum after discovering that one of the buildings he purchased, a run-down mansion, was located on the former site of a slave yard used during the Dutch slave trade in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (see e.g., Ritter 2006; Kura Hulanda Museum n.d.). I was not able to independently verify the veracity of this claim. That said,

the discovery apparently motivated Dekker’s desire to honor the history and memory of those who



Figure 1.3. Museum Kura Hulanda reception building, entryway, and adjoining structures prior to restoration. Photo courtesy Museum Kura Hulanda.



Figure 1.4. Museum Kura Hulanda reception building, entryway, and adjoining structure, July 2018, post-restoration. Photo by author.

had been enslaved in Curacao, in turn leading to the creation of the Museum (Ritter 2006). According to Helms, Dekker did not simply want to collect artifacts of the slave trade and slavery, but sought to “show the greatness of the African culture from which the slaves came” by offering the Museum as a “gift” to the Curaçaoan descendants of enslaved Africans where they could “see

that their ancestors in Africa had a great history” (Ritter 2006).

Rather than first identifying stories and narratives that he wished to illustrate in the Museum, Dekker’s approach was to collect items first, then design how they might be displayed. “... [I]t was literally dictated by my personal experience, where I’d gone, what I had researched, the stuff I had obtained. It was not the other way around. It was not first a script and then a travel. It was first a travel and experience, and then a script” (Pier n.d.).

The Museum describes itself as “an anthropological museum that focuses on the predominant cultures of Curaçao . . . offer[ing] a world-class chronicle of the Origin of Man, the African slave trade, West African Empires, Pre-Colombian gold, Mesopotamian relics and Antillean art” (Kura Hulanda Museum n.d.). Its stated mission is “to acquire and exhibit collections related to the cultural identity of the people of Curacao, the Caribbean and the Atlantic Rim” (Kura Hulanda Museum n.d.).

As noted previously, Curaçao’s position as the foremost Dutch slave-trading terminal in the Americas situates it as a significant point of Dutch and African contact in the Western hemisphere during the transatlantic slave trade. The Museum’s location in Curaçao and its specific focus on the slave trade were driving factors in my choice of the site to inquire into the cross-section of African and Dutch heritage and the slave trade in the Dutch Caribbean.

## **Historical Background**

### The Netherlands

The history of the modern Netherlands may be most easily demarcated by the beginning of the Eighty Years War in 1572, when a group of northern European provinces rebelled against the rule of the Spanish Hapsburg dynasty (‘t Hart 2014). Led by William of Orange, the ancestral founder of the Dutch monarchy (Rowan 1988), the Provincial States of Holland would

commercialize warfare and begin to take form as a nation centered on industry and trade ('t Hart 2014: 2). In 1579, the seven northernmost provinces banded together under the Union of Utrecht, forming what would ultimately become today's Netherlands (18). In 1648, the war would finally conclude with the United Provinces of the Netherlands emerging as an independent sovereign state (28).

Occurring contemporaneously with its mercantile exploits and new-found independence, what would become known as the "Dutch Golden Age" marked a significant era of Dutch prosperity and success that would span most of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Dutch achievement crossed disciplines and industries, most notably in its rise as a naval power, in seafaring and trade, in scientific and intellectual advancement, and perhaps most famously in art (Cook 2007; Oostindie 2005; Klooster 2019).

One of the Netherlands' most glorified naval successes, which still resonates with the Dutch today, was Admiral Piet Hein's 1628 capture of the Spanish treasure fleet in the Caribbean. This was the only time the Spanish fleet was ever captured, reaping over 11 million guilders to the benefit of the Dutch republic (Oostindie 2005; Klooster 2019). The Dutch also pioneered global trade in this era, forming the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1602. The VOC would become the first multinational corporation in the world, financed by stock traded on the first-ever stock exchange (Klooster 2019). The VOC's less successful sister company, the Dutch West India Company (WIC), was formed in 1621 and would become the principal colonizing agent of Curaçao (Rupert 2012; Klooster 2019).

The University of Leiden had already been established in 1575 but saw an influx of intellectuals in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Noted philosophers René Descartes and John Locke spent considerable time in the Netherlands during this time, and significant scientific innovations took

place during the era to include Antoni Leeuwenhoek's development of the microscope and Christiaan Huygens' invention of the pendulum clock (Cook 2007). Finally, Dutch art was among the most acclaimed of the era, featuring such Dutch "masters" as Rembrandt de Rijn, Johannes Vermeer, Frans Hals, and Jan Steen (Muizelaar and Phillips 2003).

#### Colonization and Establishment of Curaçao; the Dutch West India Company; Dutch Entry into the Slave Trade

Curaçao was first populated by the Caquetios, a subgroup of Arawak Indians who likely migrated to the island from the Maracaibo Basin of the South American mainland around 600 CE.<sup>4</sup> While Curaçao became known as a critical trade port during Dutch occupation, the Caquetios actually pioneered transcolonial trading through their ongoing contact with mainland South America, both before and after Western European contact was established (Rupert 2012).

The Spanish arrived on the ABC islands in 1499 via Amerigo Vespucci's second expedition. Because the Spanish found the islands of little use, they made no effort to establish colonies there; they did, however, engage in colonizing enslavement of some native Caquetios to undertake farm work on Curaçao, as well as deporting much of the native population to provide labor at gold mines and sugar plantations in Hispaniola (Carroll 2010; Rupert 2012). For the indigenous population that remained on Curaçao, and for those who came – or were brought back – to Curaçao later, the Spanish instilled religious control over the native island population, deeming Curaçao part of the Catholic Diocese of Coro in 1561. The ecclesiastical affiliation was justified by the Spanish on the basis that the Caquetios shared the same "language and nation" as the natives of Coro on the South American mainland. This connection to Spanish Catholicism would remain in place long after the Dutch takeover of the island and would have a lasting impact on the enslaved Africans who would be brought to the island by the Dutch (Rupert 2012).<sup>5</sup>

As noted, the Dutch, in the meantime, were engaged in a long battle against the rule of the

Spanish Hapsburg dynasty. When the Eighty Years' War ended in 1648, the newly-independent United Provinces of the Netherlands became the only republic among the otherwise monarchy-dominated Atlantic powers (Klooster 2016). Before this independence, however, the Dutch had already begun their forays into the Caribbean, establishing contact with numerous islands and the South American coast in what is now Brazil. The Dutch also began trading along the coast of Africa, establishing their first outpost there in 1612, Fort Nassau, on the Gold Coast in what is now Ghana. In 1621, the Dutch chartered the Dutch West India Company (WIC), a joint-stock company of Dutch merchants and foreign investors, with both military and trade missions and a charter that granted a complete monopoly on Dutch shipping and trade across the Atlantic. As a result of its dual missions, the WIC engaged in privateering from the outset, critical to eventual Dutch entry into the slave trade (Rupert 2012).

In 1624, the WIC founded a colony in North America, New Netherland, and in 1630, the Dutch captured Pernambuco in the then-existent Spanish South American coastal province of Tierra Firme (encompassing modern-day Brazil), which they held for a short but pivotal time until 1654. Around the same time, the Dutch settlement on St. Martin (now St. Maarten) came under control of the WIC, but was lost temporarily in 1633 along with its critical salt pans. As a result, and facilitated by WIC control in Tierra Firme, the WIC set out to capture Curaçao, an island that was strategically close to Tierra Firme, held many deepwater harbors, and featured much-needed salt pans (Rupert 2012).

When the Dutch arrived in Curaçao in 1634, they took the island (along with Aruba and Bonaire) with little resistance. Estimates indicate that the island was sparsely populated by this time, with less than three dozen Spaniards on the island and about 500 Caquetios. The Dutch quickly deported most of the island's inhabitants to Coro, leaving only about 75 indigenous people



(Rupert 2012: 36). The islands were administered by the WIC under the authority of the Dutch crown until 1792 when the islands were turned over to the Dutch government (Fouse 2002).

Curaçao quickly became a vital port for the WIC, developing into its foremost slave-trading terminal in the Americas (Jacobs 2012). The first settlements on Curaçao consisted of Dutch merchants, enslaved Africans forcefully brought to Curaçao, a small residual population of Indians, and a community of Sephardic Jews (Carroll 2010). The Sephardic Jews, who originated in Portugal, would come to play an important role in the development of Curaçao. Having been expelled from Spain as a result of the Spanish Inquisition in 1494, and later also from Portugal, the Sephardic Jews made their way to religiously-tolerant Amsterdam around the 1590s. From there, many of them relocated to the newly-settled Dutch colony in Northeastern Brazil forming the first Jewish community in the Americas. After the Dutch withdrawal from Brazil, the Sephardic immigrants returned first to Amsterdam, then joined the new colony established by the WIC in Curaçao. In 1651, approximately 100 Sephardim established the first Jewish community and synagogue on Curaçao, still the oldest Sephardic congregation in the Western hemisphere (Joubert and Perl 2007; Hillinger 1995).

At the same time Sephardic Jews were settling in Amsterdam, two communities of Portuguese Jews were flourishing in Senegal, where they could live openly as Jewish and where Sephardic merchants were commercially active in the same villages where WIC trading ports were located (Jacobs 2012: 297, 303). The Sephardim were significant allies to Dutch merchants challenging Portuguese dominance in Africa. They were engaged in the transatlantic slave trade first from their positions as merchants in Africa, and later, with the migration of the community to Curaçao, both as slave holders and as merchants in Curaçao and throughout the Americas (Rupert 2012).

Dutch involvement in the slave trade began as early as the late 1500s. Arising largely out of the continued conflict with Spain, Dutch vessels routinely battled Portuguese ships,<sup>6</sup> often resulting in the capture of enslaved Africans the Portuguese were transporting. The earliest recorded Dutch transport of enslaved Africans was in 1596, when a ship from Rotterdam delivered 130 captives to the Dutch port of Middleburg.<sup>7</sup> In 1606, the first slaving voyage originating from the Dutch republic transported 470 enslaved Angolans to a Spanish colony in Trinidad. However, it was the routine illicit trade efforts of Dutch privateers who attacked Portuguese vessels, seized their cargo, and sold the African captives in the Americas that formed the basis for a permanent Dutch presence in the Americas. After the Dutch conquest of northern Brazil, the WIC took three major Portuguese forts in Western Africa: Mouree (Ghana), São Jorge de Elmina (Elmina Castle, Ghana), and Axim (Ghana). These interests in Africa and South America facilitated Dutch engagement in the slave trade (Rupert 2012).

The Dutch involvement of Curaçao in the slave trade appears to have first occurred in 1639, again the result of the sale of enslaved Africans taken from a captured Portuguese vessel. The “Slave Voyages” database notes the first transatlantic slave voyage to Curaçao occurring in 1657,<sup>8</sup> though records of the WIC clearly identify the presence of enslaved, and also possibly free, Africans in Curaçao before that, notably Africans owned by the company itself (Rupert 2012; Gehring 2011). The *Curaçao Papers*, a collection of business records maintained by Peter Stuyvesant, director of the ABC islands and later, in 1645, Director-General (Governor) of the New Netherland colony, address the presence of both enslaved Africans and native Caquetios as early as 1638. For example, instructions from the WIC to the then-Director of the ABC islands, Jacob Pietersz Tolck, in 1638 directed that:

He [Tolck] shall vigorously enforce and observe the ordinances previously proclaimed which state that no one shall cause any violence or fraud on the natives

of the country or others with respect to their persons, women or possessions; and no one shall treat the Black and Indian women dishonestly, much less associate with them lasciviously, whether voluntarily or by force, on pain of forfeiting all their monthly wages and other [ ], and banishment from the place as a liability.

Black men and women belonging to the Company who run away, shall both do double labor and be fed bread and water, and the punishment increased or mitigated according to the circumstances of the offence. Furthermore, he shall not permit any of our Christians to marry Indian or Black women before and until they have been baptized, following sufficient instruction, and incorporated into the community of Christ; just as Black servants, who are without the same preparation, may not marry one another, neither one nor the other, unless the proponent or comforter of the sick has the authority and charge to do so by the church council. He shall place the Black servants under the supervision of someone appointed thereto or to be appointed, without [ ] or unchristian treatment, inducing them to such work from which the Company shall derive the maximum use and profit especially in cultivation and agriculture, both for provisions, [as with] fishing and otherwise, as well as for shipment to us.

(Instructions from the West India Company Amsterdam to Jacob Pietersz Tolck, 1638, *Curaçao Papers* 2011: 4-5).

Other references in the *Papers* include, in 1643, the dispatch of the “Company’s Negroes” to the salt pans in Bonaire, and a related expedition by soldiers to nearby islands to catch turtles to feed them in light of waning food supplies on the island (23); the decision in 1644 to trade “3 or 4 Negros and Mulattos” for supplies because it was more profitable to the Company than killing them (41); and also in 1644, dispatching of enslaved Africans to the Bonaire salt pans “because for the present nothing more profitable and beneficial can be performed by them” (44).

As the Dutch entered full bore into the slave trade, Curaçao would become the central Caribbean distribution point in the trade, particularly after the Dutch lost their footholds in Brazil and New Netherland. From 1650-75, Dutch participation would constitute 20 percent of all enslaved Africans forcibly shipped to the Western Hemisphere. And from 1674-89, 59 percent of all Dutch slave exports from Africa went to Curaçao (about 50,000 enslaved people), though most were reexported to Tierra Firme soon thereafter (Rupert 2012). Much of this time correlated with

the WIC association with the Spanish *asiento*, the contract awarded by the Spanish Crown for supply of enslaved labor to its colonies. Though never holding the *asiento* itself, the WIC served essentially as a subcontractor to those who did, beginning in 1662 and ending around 1690. After losing its *asiento* subcontracts, most WIC ships began bypassing Curaçao to deliver enslaved Africans to the Spanish colonies directly; this change coincided with a sharp decline in the Dutch involvement in the slave trade (Rupert 2012).

The late 17<sup>th</sup> century engagement with *asiento* holders was critical, however, in shaping the infrastructure and society of Curaçao. The WIC built large warehouses in the Schottegat harbor to house the captives as they recovered from the arduous Middle Passage before shipping them to other destinations in the Spanish Americas. Significant construction took place along the St. Anna Bay to accommodate merchants engaged in both the slave trade and the corresponding trade in non-human commodities. And beyond the walled town center established in conjunction with the naval fort at the mouth of the bay, Curaçao's Black majority established small settlements, most notably in the area across the bay that is now known as Otrobanda.

This growth was both spurred by, and a result of, the WIC's declaration of Curaçao as a free trade port in 1675, marking Curaçao as the only open trade center in the Americas (Rupert 2012; Klooster 2016). This designation, which allowed for the import and export of goods through Curaçao without the imposition trade duties or taxes, was vital to Curaçao's survival. With little agricultural potential and few commodities available on the island, facilitating trade was critical to sustaining Curaçao's growing population (Rupert 2012). As a free trade port, Curaçao became a prime destination for vessels of all nations, supplying the WIC with goods and commodities essential to the island's survival while facilitating the WIC's trade of enslaved Africans in exchange for these goods (Rupert 2012).

Though estimates vary, most scholars agree that the Dutch shipped over 500,000 enslaved Africans from West Africa to the Americas. While the Dutch were responsible for only 6.6 percent of the total transatlantic slave trade in the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, their involvement in the 17<sup>th</sup> century alone was 11.7 percent; of the total number, a full 20 percent (101,000 of 500,000) were transported during the peak period of Dutch involvement from 1651-75 (Rupert 2012). These figures are impactful, particularly in light of the fact that for most Dutch people, the history of slavery is intangible and characterized as occurring long ago in collusion with many others (Nimako, et al. 2014). Further, the predominant narrative in the Netherlands has focused on the Dutch as traders, not enslavers, engaged in “legitimate business” exploits rather than barbaric enslavement of other human beings (34-35). Yet, the gravity of the Dutch engagement in the slave trade becomes very real when quantified. That the height of Dutch involvement in the slave trade occurred from 1651-75 also reinforces the importance of Curaçao in facilitating the Dutch participation in the slave trade.

#### Growth of Curaçao; Decline of Dutch Engagement in the Slave Trade; Tula and the Revolution

As Curaçao’s role in regional and transatlantic commerce grew, so did its population. Though less than 500 people were on Curaçao in 1635 after the Dutch takeover (Rupert 2012), by 1720 the population had grown to around 4,000, more than half of whom were enslaved Africans (van Welie 2008). Around this time, expansion of Willemstad from the fort side of St. Anna Bay to “the other side” had begun, becoming home to an increasing free Black and mulatto population, as well as small groups of urban enslaved people who lived away from their masters part of the time (Rupert 2012). Originally named *Oversijde* (Other Side) by the Dutch, the area would eventually become known by its Papiamentu name, Otrobanda (Rupert 2012: 128).

By 1789, Curaçao’s population had virtually exploded, with more than 21,000 living on

the island (See Table 1.1). Just over 11,000 lived in Willemstad, over 8,000 of whom were people of color, both enslaved and free (Rupert 2012; van Welie 2008). Of the 9,500 people living outside the city, almost 7,500 were enslaved people (van Welie 2008).

Table 1.1. Population of Curaçao, Representative Years

Year	Pop.	Year	Pop.
1634	<550	1925	37,055
1635	<500	1955	118,858
1720	4006	1967	143, 778
1789	20,988	1986	153,736
1863	19,000	2019	158,665

Sources: Oostindie 2011; Rupert 2012; van Welie 2008; Central Bureau of Statistics Curaçao 2020a.

Curaçao’s position as a center of trade, along with the maritime-centered role of the Dutch in the transatlantic slave trade and larger global commerce was also reflected in the nature of enslavement on Curaçao. Though many estates were built outside of Willemstad, owned first by the WIC and later by private merchants and others, these “plantations” were largely utilized as vacation-type homes, signifying the wealth and prosperity of their owners (Rupert 2012: 135). Due in large part to the arid nature of the island, along with deforestation by the Spanish and the Dutch, the island was unsuitable for large-scale farming. Thus, these plantations could only operate as small farms, producing limited quantities of maize and green vegetables and sustaining small numbers of livestock (Oostindie 2005). The numbers of enslaved people on these plantations was similarly small, typically a few dozen, as compared to sugar plantations in other Caribbean regions where hundreds of enslaved people toiled (Oostindie 2005).

On the other hand, enslaved labor was critical to Curaçao's function as a maritime trade port. Enslaved and free Black men worked on the docks, in shipyards and as shipbuilders, and as boatmen providing ferry service across St. Anna Bay. They also comprised the majority of the labor force on regional sailing vessels; by the mid-1700s, two-thirds of Curaçao's sailors were Black (Rupert 2012).

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, over half of the enslaved people on Curaçao lived within the walls of Willemstad. Many were skilled workers who worked for wages or were rented out by their owners (Rupert 2012). Some enslaved laborers also worked in the salt pans on both Curaçao and Bonaire, particularly grueling work that was often meted out as punishment (Rupert 2012; Oostindie 2005).

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Curaçao's population was a diverse collection of White Dutch and other Europeans, Sephardic Jews, and enslaved and free Blacks. The majority of the population could be divided into three distinct groups of descending power: a small Dutch Protestant elite, Sephardic Jewish merchants, and a largely Catholic population of African descent, both enslaved and free, Black and mulatto (Rupert 2012). A small group of poor and lower class Whites also lived on Curaçao, including sailors, soldiers, servants, and various non-Dutch Europeans. While not part of the Dutch or Sephardic economic elites, these Whites held a degree of status within the ranks of the elite based solely on race (Rupert 2012).

Though slavery was already on decline in Curaçao by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a critical moment in this ongoing decline occurred in 1795, when an enslaved man named Tula led a revolt that began on the Plantation de Knip and proceeded down the west coast of Curaçao to Willemstad, some 45 kilometers away, taking on additional enslaved Africans along the way. At its height, the revolt involved upwards of 2,000 enslaved Africans, and was reportedly spurred by an

infringement on daily routines that propelled the enslaved workers to strike and march off the plantation. Tula's action was apparently inspired by the prior successful revolution in Haiti that began in 1791; statements from a Catholic priest who had been asked to negotiate with the revolutionaries reported Tula's explanation of the enslaved Africans' perspective: "We have been badly treated for too long, we do not want to do anybody harm, but we seek our freedom, the French [Caribbean] blacks have been given their freedom, Holland has been taken over by the French, hence we too must be free" (Oostindie 2011: 9).<sup>9</sup>

The revolt was violently suppressed, resulting in the brutal execution of about thirty of the enslaved leaders, and an additional 100 enslaved people being killed during the warfare. This was not the end of turbulence in Curaçao, however, where political upheaval in the Dutch Republic fostered ongoing tensions, resulting in a coup d'état in 1796 and continued revolts in the period of 1796-1800. These resistance efforts were not entirely ineffective; shortly after the 1795 revolution, new laws were enacted in Curaçao requiring "reasonable" treatment of the enslaved. And subsequent to the tumultuous period that concluded in 1800, there were reportedly no harsh retributions against the enslaved. Oostindie (2011: 17) has suggested that these changes in the otherwise brutal climate of slavery in the Dutch Caribbean may have attributed to the absence of any further revolts after 1800.

In any event, once the Dutch regained control of the island, the enslaved population shrank dramatically with over 4,000 enslaved people sold off of Curaçao in the following decades (17). Lesser numbers and little resistance after 1800 likely also allowed the European Dutch mainland to continue to ignore the atrocity of slavery in its colonies and preempted any urgency to abolish slavery. It would take until 1863 for the Dutch to finally abolish slavery, one of the last European nations to do so (17).<sup>10</sup> It is against this historical backdrop that Curaçao would develop both



economically and socially as it entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century, creating the foundational basis for the production of local history and heritage in Curaçao (see generally Smeulders 2009).

### Post-Slavery Era and Contemporary Curaçao

Racial tensions and the marginalization of Afro-Curaçaoans would not end with the eventual abolishment of slavery, however. After a period of economic downturn associated with the end of the slave trade, Curaçao saw a new era of economic growth spurred by the arrival of the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company (Shell) in 1918. The opening of a Dutch oil refinery on Curacao and an American oil refinery on Aruba resulted in significant immigration to the islands, and with it, a reform of the education system by the Dutch government to mandate all instruction occur solely in Dutch (Goede 2008; Jacobs 2013). After having been long-neglected by the European Netherlands, by the 1930s Curaçao (and Aruba) once again became important to the mainland because of the financial success of the refineries (Sharpe 2014). This era was also significant in the overall growth of Curaçao. The population of Curaçao had remained relatively stagnant between the abolition of slavery in 1863 (pop. 19,000 (Oostindie 2011)) and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with population growth of only about 15,000 over half a century. However, from 1925 to 1955, the island's population tripled from 37,055 to 118,858, with a peak growth of 35,000 people in the decade between 1940 and 1950. (Allen 2018).

With the influx of White Dutch managerial staff from the European Netherlands, labor from other Dutch Caribbean islands, and English-speaking Black West Indian workers from former British colonies, race and ethnicity became focal points of division and belonging (Sharpe 2014). On Curaçao, “pigmentocracies” would develop where gradations of skin color dictated levels of power and status (121). These racialized divisions would become part of a national identity on Curaçao, reinforced by Shell's race-based hierarchy inside its corporate structure,

including the separation of White and non-White workers in housing, commerce, and schools (Sharpe 2014: 122; Allen 2018).

Skin color was not the only division, however. A three-tiered social structure that was firmly developed on Curaçao during slavery persisted; the intersection of race/ethnicity/color and class hierarchies dictated position in Curaçaoan society as based primarily on occupation, ethnic heritage, and skin color (Allen 2010: 119). Racial strains were exacerbated by economic divisions, with non-Whites underrepresented in skilled trades and professions; in a political structure dominated by minority Whites; and by social divisions within races, exemplified by the differing status between Black laborers and those who had returned to the island after attending universities in the Netherlands (Allen 2010; Anderson and Dynes 1973). Similarly, while Curaçaoan society was transitioning from one organized strictly along racial lines to a more class-based society, a new middle class of Black residents was also emerging (Allen 2018).

While Black Curaçaoans continued to experience segregation, lower income levels, and White governmental domination, a national identity on Curaçao was forming characterized by the still-present concept of *Yu di Kòrsou*, Papiamentu for “Child of Curaçao” (117), in which Afro-Curaçaoans are considered the only “real” Curaçaoans (119). Some scholars have noted this notion excludes many other ethnic groups who have long been on the island and have played a significant role in the development of Curaçaoan culture: Dutch and Sephardic Jews, immigrants from South Asia, China, Portugal, Suriname, the Middle East, and the English-speaking Caribbean, along with White Dutch who came to Curaçao in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of the opening of the Shell refinery and more recent immigrants from Venezuela, Haiti, and Columbia (Allen 2010: 119-120, citing Oostindie 1996).

In 1954, the *Statuut* or Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was put into effect, combining Curaçao and the other five Dutch Caribbean islands into the Netherlands Antilles, with Curaçao as the seat of federal government (Allen 2010: 117). While some Curaçaoans praised the move, others viewed it as a continuation of their earlier colonial status by which the European Dutch remained in political control and Curaçaoan cultural identity was subjugated (Anderson and Dynes 1973).

The events of the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century would mark the beginnings of a strong wave of anti-Dutch sentiment, as Dutch became the only acceptable language on the ABC islands and Papiamentu was forced out of schools and governmental business. Together with an economic downturn beginning in the 1950s and ongoing racial difficulties, the climate of unemployment, Dutch domination, and discontent would culminate in an uprising on May 30, 1969, known as “Trinta de Mei” (or the May Movement). Characterized by growing unemployment primarily among the Black population, exclusion of the Black population from local politics, and resentment that public education was provided in Dutch rather than the native Papiamentu language, a work stoppage grew into riots on Curacao and Aruba (Anderson and Dynes 1973). While the Movement would result in numerous casualties and property damage, it mobilized the working class and is widely regarded as central to a transition on Curaçao from a mostly White ruling elite to a majority Black and sometimes anti-Dutch populist political environment (Sharpe 2014).

In the 1980s, the closing of the oil refineries led to mass migration of Afro-Curaçaoans to the European Netherlands, which, coupled with a prior migration of Surinamese people after Suriname declared its independence in 1975, defined a new era in the European Netherlands where for the first time large numbers of non-White people were present. At the same time, tourism to Curaçao increased, largely comprised of White European Dutch tourists, continuing to be one of

the main income sources on the island.

Today, tourism is the key industry. Curaçao is a prime “sun, sand, and sea” destination for Dutch, North and South American, and other global tourists (see generally Semrad and Rivera 2015), although it has recently experienced a new economic downturn due to the unrest in nearby Venezuela, an important source of imported goods. The 2018 opening of the Mega Pier cruise terminal has facilitated an even greater influx of cruise tourism and revenue, but the lasting effects of the boom remain to be seen. The current focus on tourism caps a centuries-long progression of industrial change in Curaçao which began with the slave trade, shifted to oil and petroleum, and now rests with tourism.

As noted by Smeulders, “[i]n historiography, commemoration politics and museological representations, factors like economic developments, constitutional and ethno-political power relations are defining. They shape local heritage collections and displays” (Smeulders 2009: 101). The history of Curaçao through its industrial evolutions, immigration and forced migration, racial, political, and economic divisions, and changing national identity creates the foundation upon which the heritage of its people is viewed and displayed. Through my research, I seek to explore whether these factors reveal themselves in the displays at the Museum Kura Hulanda, whether local heritage finds a place in the Museum, and if not, how local communities can impact the presentation of African and Dutch heritage at the Museum.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This era will be discussed further in Chapter One, “Historical Background.”

<sup>2</sup> Aruba obtained *Status Aparte* in 1986 at which time it gained independent governing autonomy (Carroll 2010). From 1954 until 2010, all six of the Dutch Caribbean islands were part of the Netherlands Antilles, then a constituent country of the Kingdom (minus Aruba beginning in 1986). In 2010, a new constitutional order dissolved the Netherlands Antilles and put into place the current governmental structure (Government of the Netherlands n.d.a). Confusion often arises regarding the distinction between “the Netherlands” and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Netherlands is one of the aforementioned four independent countries that together comprise the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In many contexts outside the Kingdom, “Netherlands” is used both in reference to the constituent country as well as a shorter reference to the Kingdom - typically the cause of the confusion. Here, “European Netherlands” will be used when specific reference to the singular constituent country is intended.

<sup>3</sup> In accordance with the research protocol established for this study and approved by the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board, the interviews were conducted confidentially and the names of the participants withheld.

<sup>4</sup> Though the genesis of the name “Curaçao” has been debated, most scholars now agree that the word *Curaçao* or *Curacao* is of Caquetio origin (van Buurt 2015:44; see also Nationaal Archief 2020).

<sup>5</sup> A 2011 census reported 72.8% of the population of Curaçao is Roman Catholic (Curaçao Central Bureau of Statistics 2020b).

<sup>6</sup> The Portuguese and Spanish crowns were united in 1580, rendering Portuguese vessels equally at risk in the ongoing Dutch fight to gain independence from Spain.

<sup>7</sup> Reportedly, upon discovering that the captive Africans were Christianized, the Dutch released them (Rupert 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Slave Voyages database, Voyage ID No. 11362; Vessel name: Bontekoe, originating from an unspecified port in the Netherlands; principal place of purchase occurring at an unspecified port in Africa; arriving in Curaçao in 1657. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>.

<sup>9</sup> The Republic of the United Provinces was taken over by France in 1795, leading to the creation of the short-lived Batavian Republic. In 1800, the British captured the Republic and would hold it until 1816, when Dutch rule was reinstalled under the monarchy of Willem I and the newly-established Kingdom of the Netherlands (Oostindie and Roitman 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Prior to Dutch action to end slavery in 1863, the slave trade in the Dutch colonies had been abolished by virtue of Britain’s occupation during the Napoleonic Wars from 1804 to 1816. Britain’s abolition of the slave trade in 1807 applied to the occupied territories and was never challenged by the Dutch, who sanctioned abolition in 1814 and again in 1818 (Oostindie 2005).

## Chapter Two: Relevant Literature and Theoretical Framework

### Heritage

Laurajane Smith notes that heritage is a process that occurs when we “reshape and recreate . . . memories and knowledge” to help make sense of who we are and also who we want to be (Smith 2006: 2). Another heritage scholar, David Lowenthal, describes heritage as a communion, where “legends of origins and endurance, of victory and calamity” project the present into the past and the past forward (Lowenthal 1996: xi). He contrasts this with history, which he describes as something that explores and explains an increasingly opaque past. He proposes that heritage’s essential role is to husband community, identity, continuity, and even history itself; and that heritage “clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes” (xi). Jackson further illuminates the distinction by defining history as “a story about the past” where the power resides in the “production and reproduction of the story in the present” and its relevance to those affected (Jackson 2012: 23). She compares this to heritage, which she defines as “anything a community, a nation, a stakeholder, or a family wants to save, make active, and continue in the present”; like history, heritage is one way of engaging in the past, but heritage operates as “our living connection to history in the *present* moment” (23) (emphasis added).

Thus, while history and heritage are linked, it is the presentation of a group’s *heritage*, rather than just its history, that is critical in defining the group’s identity, both past and present. While my research necessarily explores the past, including Dutch, Curaçaoan, and African history, these histories serve primarily as a foundation for understanding the present purposes of Dutch and African heritage and the consequent production and presentation of this heritage in Curaçao.

Framing the examination of heritage is recognition of a pervasive “authorized heritage discourse” (AHD): that there is a dominant Western discourse about heritage through which “social meanings, forms of knowledge and expertise, power relations and ideologies are embedded and reproduced via language” (Smith 2006: 4). The AHD privileges the power/knowledge claims of experts and institutions and endows them with an “authority” to determine what constitutes heritage and who may “legitimately” speak about the past (11, 29). AHD further constrains and limits the historic, social, and cultural experiences and contributions of a range of non-dominant groups (30).

A useful countermeasure to the AHD is critical discourse analysis (15). In particular, critical race theory evaluates “how the history and political economy of a nation, state or other system exerts direct or indirect domination over the political, economic, social, and cultural expressions of citizens or residents, including” marginalized groups (LeCompte and Schensul 2010: 59). Critical theorists believe that reality can be accurately discerned in the specific historic and geographical contexts being studied; but it is also assumed that “interpretation of the cultural products (words and text, norms, behaviors, symbols, physical objects, etc.)” being examined “is influenced by the context in which they are produced and reproduced” (60). Ultimately, the task in critical race theory is to uncover and describe “relationships of power so as to change the inequities” in them and to engage in activities or actions that will bring about change (59-61).

Also significant is an analysis of silences in the production of history and heritage through constructivist theory as applied by Trouillot. Constructivism proposes that history is just one narrative among many; the only difference being that history rests on a pretense of “truth” (Trouillot 1995:6). Through this lens, Trouillot asserts that any historical narrative is a “bundle of silences,” that these silences are not equal, and that each enters the process of historical production

uniquely (27). Trouillot posits that silences enter the process of historical production at four important moments: fact creation (the making of sources), fact assembly (the making of archives), fact retrieval (the making of narratives), and at the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in “the final instance”) (26). Throughout the production of a historical narrative, “[p]ower is constitutive of the story,” entering the story at different times and from different angles (28-9). According to Trouillot, “[i]n history, power begins at the source” (29).

These concepts are necessarily implicated in an analysis of how heritage is presented in museums. In museums, the cultural assumptions of those who create museum exhibitions affect how they decide what elements to emphasize and what truths to tell or to ignore. Moreover, how cultures are represented in museums reflect deeper issues of power and authority (Lavine and Karp 1991).

Trouillot also notes that presences and absences in sources and archives are neither neutral nor natural, but rather are created. Though silences are necessary in any historical account, it is the selection of what matters, and what does not, that is dictated by external forces associated with power and authority (50-51). Uneven historical power plays a role from the moment of fact-creation (sources), during fact-assembly (archives), and throughout the creation of historical narratives. In short, choices and selections are made at each stage of the production of heritage and history, choices that are typically dictated by power and which have resulted in the exclusion of “some producers, some evidence, some themes, [and] some procedures” (53). Accordingly, an evaluation of history and heritage necessarily require an assessment of the balance of power and authority, and by whom it has been exercised, throughout the production process. One must also evaluate how the unequal exercise of power and authority have impacted the subsequent production and presentation of a community’s heritage.



Finally, returning to the application of critical theory, Potter (1994) notes that critical theory requires self-reflection by those who use it. He suggests that if circumstances surrounding the collection of data influence the data collected, then the researcher's individual situation must be considered as part of the circumstances. Addressing the researcher's situation, or position, at the outset assists in identifying the context of the research, particularly when the researcher is studying the local history and ancestors of a group to which the researcher does not belong (3-4).

Thus, as I endeavor to apply a critical perspective to an evaluation of the Museum Kura Hulanda, I must consider my status – and how my positionality as either an insider or outsider may bear on my analysis. My interest in Curaçao and the Dutch involvement in transatlantic slavery arises out of my focus on my own ancestry, which through my own and other family members' genealogical research has been established as wholly European Dutch at least as far back as the early 1600s. I certainly feel a connection to this history of the Dutch slave trade, as its effect on the prosperity and positioning of the Netherlands in the global landscape certainly would have had an effect on my Dutch ancestors, and consequently, on my own way of life as the child of Dutch immigrant parents who came to the United States from Amsterdam in the 1960s. But despite a shared influence of Dutch culture, the connection cannot realistically place me as an insider to Curaçaoan heritage and even less so to the Afro-Curaçaoan experience and heritage. And so, while I may find my positionality more connected to Curaçao than that of other Americans, I am no doubt an outsider, and thus, must acknowledge and consider the perspectives and choices of the local Curaçaoan community, especially the Afro-Curaçaoan community, as I assess the data I have collected and my experiences in collecting the data. Accordingly, a critical analysis of Afro-Curaçaoan heritage and history as presented at Kura Hulanda must assess whether, and to what extent, the local communities desire to explore their own heritage, as well as the benefit which

may or may not inure to those communities in doing so.

## **Race and Racism**

Critical to any analysis of the presentation of African and Dutch heritage in Curaçao is an understanding of the positioning of race in Dutch culture and society, both historically and contemporarily. Despite the historical use of “race” as a way to distinguish people through physical characteristics, “race is an idea, not a fact” (Painter 2010). While scientists today do not support the idea that race exists as a physical distinction among people, “race science” has been used for centuries to justify distinctions among people based on physical characteristics. French physician François Bernier was the first to popularly divide people according to phenotypic characteristics in 1684, while also proposing what would become a popular trope – the relation of a superior physical prowess in Africans to that of animals, which was often utilized as a rationale to support slavery (Kendi 2016). Generally, race is now viewed primarily as a social construction, though still recognized through physical appearance. Weiner points out that “race” is a system of power relations and structural meanings through which groups are identified as superior or inferior based on perceived biological and/or cultural differences (Weiner 2014a). “Racism” notes racial (phenotypic) differences and ranks them into inferior or superior types (Fluehr-Lobban 2018). And Kendi explains that a “racist idea” is “any concept that regards one racial group as inferior or superior to another racial group in any way” (Kendi 2016: 5).

In his discussion of racist ideas in the United States, Kendi notes that hate and ignorance have not driven racist ideas, but rather, racist policies have driven racist ideas. Further, racially discriminatory policies have usually arisen from economic, political, and cultural self-interests. In sum, “the beneficiaries of slavery, segregation, and mass incarceration have produced racist ideas of Black people being best suited for or deserving of the confines of slavery, segregation, or the

jail cell” (10). As will be seen in the discussion of Dutch racism that follows, these same fundamental notions of racism being driven by economics and cultural self-interests go to the heart of the Dutch role in the transatlantic slave trade historically and the perpetuation of racist ideas in Dutch society in the present.

### **Dutch Racism**

The lens of Dutch racism is critical to evaluating Kura Hulanda, the site of my research. The widespread perception of the Netherlands, both internally and around the world, is that it is a bastion of tolerance, freedom, and progressiveness, with a predominant “live and let live” milieu. The Netherlands was the first nation to legalize same-sex marriage, is known for its long-standing acceptance and legalization of marijuana and prostitution, and has historically provided safe haven to the religiously-persecuted. But I would suggest that “tolerance” in the Netherlands does not equate to *acceptance* of difference; rather, it more typically takes the form of “putting up” with others’ differences, so long as those differences are not discussed and are not “flaunted.” In other words, in a majority White nation, you may be tolerated if you are non-White, but only to the extent you are not perceived to infringe upon the White status quo.

And so, while the notion of Dutch tolerance is often thought to include race, there exists a persistent racism in the Netherlands that is unacknowledged and when suggested, usually draws strong protestations to the contrary. Many scholars agree that not only does racism exist in the Netherlands, its roots and continued perpetration derive from ideologies developed during the Dutch history of colonialism and involvement in transatlantic slavery (see e.g., Weiner 2014a and 2014b, Wekker 2016, Nimako, et al. 2014, among others). Weiner explains this connection by pointing out that contemporary racism is inextricably linked to capitalism and a neoliberal denial of any connection between private control of resources and the propagation and maintenance of

racial inequality (2014b: 330). This racial neoliberalism further ignores centuries of colonialism, exploitation, and racist policies, and to the extent racial inequities are addressed at all, situates blame on non-White minorities themselves for purportedly failing to socioeconomically assimilate (330).

Dutch racism is complex and there is no shared discourse through which to address it. Thus, “one needs a plurality of registers to study the phenomenon” (Essed and Hoving 2014: 9). These registers (e.g., anthropology, history, literary analysis, art history, and psychoanalysis) all have relevance in understanding the multitude of factors at play in Dutch racism. While the present analysis does not endeavor to assess all of these registers, a critical race perspective is vital to challenging mainstream perspectives that often go unchallenged (Essed and Nimako 2006: 282). “Among other things, Race Critical Theory exposes how taken for granted claims of race neutrality, colorblindness and the discourse of tolerance often hide from view the ‘hidden, invisible, forms of racist expressions and well-established patterns of racist exclusion that remain, unaddressed and uncompensated, structurally marking opportunities and access, patterns of income and wealth, privilege and relative power’” (282, citing Goldberg and Essed 2002: 4).

One explanation for the overall contested nature of race in the Netherlands is the proposition that White Europeans, including the Dutch, are anxious about societal changes that may result in a loss of security and privilege, which then becomes expressed as an “indictment of immigration and multiculturalism” (Essed and Hoving 2014: 15). This can be seen most markedly in Dutch society today where increased immigration of Moroccan and Turkish people has resulted in racism taking its most virulent form as anti-Muslim sentiment (17-18). It is impossible, however, to disassociate the current focus of Dutch racism from the longstanding racism directed at other minorities, especially Blacks.

This explanation only touches on one basis for Dutch racism, however, and can be seen in many countries, including the United States, today. Identifying a root cause of Dutch racism, if possible, requires a more intensive exploration. Both Wekker and Essed, among others, have identified the notion of “White Dutch innocence” as a foundation for Dutch racism. In *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (2016), Wekker describes this White innocence as the dominant Dutch self-image – as a small, but just, ethical and tolerant nation, recent innocent victim of German occupation in World War II, one that is colorblind and thus free of racism (a problem seen as existing in the United States and South Africa, but not in the Netherlands), and being inherently on the moral high ground. She attributes this notion of innocence to an “unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and feelings based on 400 years of imperial rule [that] have played a vital but unacknowledged part in the dominant meaning-making processes taking place in Dutch society,” including the making of the self (2-3).

All of this is assessed through the framework of the cultural archive. Wekker builds upon Said’s conception of the cultural archive as a “storehouse” of knowledge and “structures of attitude and reference” (Said 1994); a “repository of memory” that installed in nineteenth-century European imperial populations a deep structure of racial inequality and an entitlement of a dominant race to rule subject races (Wekker 2016: 2). Wekker suggests that it is from this cultural archive in the Netherlands that the sense of self has been “formed and fabricated” (2).

Essed, and later Wekker, merge the idea of innocence with “smug innocence” – not only claiming not to be racist, but the aggressive rejection of the possibility of knowing that something is racist (Essed and Hoving 2014: 24). This is further complicated by an increasing “entitlement racism,” where people champion freedom of expression as a justification to say anything they want about anyone or anything (Essed and Muhr 2018).

Two additional concepts inform the analysis of Dutch racism: postcolonial melancholy and cultural aphasia. Described by Gilroy in regard to British society, postcolonial melancholy also finds relevant footing in Dutch society and suggests that these societies have not been able to fully address or work through their traumatic colonial pasts (Essed and Hoving 2014: 21, citing Gilroy 2005). Because the guilt and shame associated with this colonial past have never been reconciled, it is a painful presence at the heart of Dutch identity; the “ultimately futile guilt” manifests itself in resentment directed at Black and migrant people, who are seen as both “tokens of a violent past, and as silent accusers” (21).

Cultural aphasia is similarly associated with the Dutch denial of racism and the claim of innocence. First identified by American historian Ann Laura Stoler, cultural aphasia is described as “a cultural disability, grounded in power relations” by which knowledge of a Western colonial past is blocked; the related inability to recognize a phenomena and talk about it result in a silencing of voices deemed as “disqualified” (minority voices), and in a responsive production of “endless replacements of categories with incomprehensible associations that collapse incommensurability” (Helsloot 2012: 1-2, citing Stoler 2011; see also Weiner 2014a: 737).

Wekker posits that Dutch society has convinced itself that 400 years of colonialism left no traces of racism; yet, it is a society constructed on a long-held disavowal and failure to acknowledge historic violence against Blacks, and on a historic conception that Blacks are “happy” and have limited capacity for suffering, rendering them suited and resigned to their historic enslaved status and present unempowered status (Wekker 2016: 166). These pervasive failures to recognize the role and impact of transatlantic slavery on the prosperity of the Netherlands, colonialist doctrines, and racially subordinating policies have been furthered by the almost complete absence of education in Dutch schools about the slave trade, especially the role of the

Netherlands in enslaving Africans. Thus, generations of Dutch people in both the European Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands have had little exposure to these realities, further perpetuating the racializing of Afro-Dutch people and a Dutch social forgetting of slavery and colonialism (Weiner 2014b).<sup>1</sup>

Dutch racism informs this analysis at Kura Hulanda and is significant because this perspective is often ignored, as will be discussed in more depth below. As a museum constructed around the history of the transatlantic slave trade and the West African kingdoms ravaged by it, and which is frequented heavily by White European tourists, assessing the nature of the Museum's exhibits, their inclusion or exclusion of African and Afro-Curaçaoan voices, and the impacts made by the Museum's presentations on its visitors and the local community must be viewed in the context of the historical and contemporary existence and effects of race relations and racism in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> For a full analysis of how Dutch primary school textbooks have obscured and distorted the Netherlands' role in enslaving Africans and contributed to a social forgetting of slavery, see Weiner 2014b.

## **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology**

### **Overview**

Viewing the Museum's exhibits through the lens of Smith's (2006) authorized heritage discourse and Trouillot's (1995) conceptualizations of erasure and silences, and using Cubitt's (2011) discussion of "atrocious materials" as a tool of analysis, I have conducted an exploratory and interpretive qualitative case study (Stake 1995; Merriam 1998; Yin 2017) of the Museum Kura Hulanda, aimed at understanding and interpreting this Museum and its unique characteristics (Stake 1995: 8-9). I conclude with a hypothesis for potential future research regarding community engagement at the Museum (Merriam 1998; Mills, et al. 2010).

As an exploratory and interpretive case study, my analysis focuses on the specifics of this museum, though the study may be useful for comparison to other case studies. Moreover, only portions of the observations identified as most worthwhile have been chosen for particularized interpretation and reporting (Merriam 1998: 78). Utilizing primarily a case study method, I conducted observation, interviews, and archival research. This has facilitated my quest to examine how African and Dutch heritage is represented in the Museum, why those representations were designed and constructed in the chosen manner, whether representations may be problematic – either theoretically or practically - and if so, how and why.

I am further guided in my analysis by Jackson's critical assessments of the impact of social policies and practices of exclusion as a means by which to construct more comprehensive representations of community history and heritage (Jackson 2012: 31; Jackson 2009; Jackson 2011; Jackson 2019). Most recently, Jackson's work on the construction of memory at public sites



of history and heritage where people go for leisure and learning informs my evaluation (Jackson 2019). As a museum in the busy cruise port of Willemstad, Kura Hulanda caters to the traveling public, especially White European travelers, and thus, is similarly situated to the kinds of sites Jackson's work assesses. Her work makes clear the need for critical assessment of "the realities and politics of exclusion based on race" to identify lingering exclusionary ideologies based on race and silenced or erased narratives of non-dominant groups. My research explores a similar critical assessment of these issues in the context of a former colonial space in which the majority community is of non-White descent, but where racialized separation and exclusion continues in the larger national context and is difficult to disrupt.

Prior to field work, I conducted a thorough literature review of methodological scholarship, as well as historical research on Curaçao and the transatlantic slave trade. Subsequent to field work, as detailed in Chapter Five, I also conducted a literature review of community engagement strategies, applications, and benefits.

### **Field Work**

I conducted field work in Curaçao from June 27 through July 25, 2018, where my aim was to uncover the "what, where, when, how, and why" of the design, content, and construction of the Museum's exhibits. I approached field work at the Museum experientially and analytically, visiting the Museum for the first time as a tourist, in the same manner that I would typically visit any museum. Aside from pleasantries and coordinating my continued presence in the Museum with the operations manager, I did not converse at length with any of the staff during my initial visit. I walked through the Museum's rooms and exhibits, stopping to focus on whatever caught my eye or interest, taking a few pictures of those items of visual or educational interest, and meandering through the displays in whatever manner my instincts directed. After I completed this

first visit, I left for the day and used the initial visit to plan my subsequent in-depth observation and data collection.

I subsequently visited the Museum daily for an additional thirteen days where my data collection consisted primarily of observation, photographs, field notes, and making maps of the museum layout. I used photography in a number of ways. First, as a means of orienting myself to the site and to record information and compile a thorough record accurately and in a short amount of time. I evaluated a significant number of exhibits, the details of which could not be sufficiently described through written field notes, making photography a vital aspect of my data collection. Through photography, I was also able to capture and memorialize detail in the exhibits that I may not have seen on initial viewing. The photos were used to further analyze the information once I left the field site (Collier and Collier 1986; Hockings 2003).

I documented the entirety of the Museum using photography and video, taking more than 3,100 photos capturing every exhibit, display, artifact, and written description, as well as the grounds of the Museum and the surrounding neighborhood. In addition, I diagramed and mapped every room in the Museum; these maps will be provided to the Museum for its use in cataloguing its exhibits and fashioning updated visitor materials. In rooms that were particularly large, but with obvious section breaks, I divided the rooms into subparts with discrete maps for each. In the maps, I noted the placement of every display, and within each display, labeled and placed every artifact, placard, and descriptive writing. I also completed a video walk-through of the Museum and observed ongoing tours provided to visitors, as well as experiencing a full two-hour tour myself.

I made a return visit in December 2018 to take additional photos, review and photograph an exhibit that had been updated since my field work, and to engage the Museum's director on a few follow-up questions.

While in Curaçao, I also visited a number of other museums for comparative purposes. Those museums included: Savonet Museum Curaçao; the Curaçao Museum; Kas di Pal'i Maishi; Curaçao Maritime Museum; Mikve Israel-Emanuel Synagogue and Jewish Museum; Museo Tula; Landhuis Chobolobo; Landhuis Dokterstuin; Landhuis Knip (Kenepa); Landhuis Bloemhof; and Desenkadená; Unchained (Tula Monument). I also traveled to the neighboring island of Bonaire where I visited the Terramar Museum and two sites of “slave huts” used to house enslaved Africans who worked the salt pans in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In all, I captured another 850 photos and video of these sites, along with collecting a variety of informational and tourist literature from each.

In addition, I engaged in informal and exploratory discussions with Museum personnel and conducted five semi-structured interviews of the director of the Museum, the operations manager, a tour guide, and two other museum personnel. Using the IRB-approved question set I prepared for this project, I primarily explored the informants’ knowledge of the design and curation of the Museum, visitor demographics and perceptions, local community reception and visitation, and the informants’ perceptions of the Museum, what it presents, and its impact on visitors.

Archival and historical research was also important to an understanding of the subject matter on display in the Museum so that it could be critically analyzed (Hill 1993), as well as to understand and assess other narratives that may be appropriate for inclusion in the Museum. I conducted research at the Museum itself, at the National Archives in Curaçao, and in multiple online document repositories. I requested interpretive planning documents, research plans, and other foundational documents from the Museum, but none were extant. The Museum did provide a draft tour script, as well as some internal memoranda concerning the restoration of the buildings, the Museum’s first director, Leo Helms, and some additional background materials.

In addition, I reviewed local newspapers and other local media reports in Curaçao and online to obtain additional context for both the types of representations of African and Dutch heritage that are taking place in heritage spaces in Curaçao, as well as of local perceptions of the Museum. I reviewed promotional materials and social media related to the Museum, online reviews of the Museum posted to the TripAdvisor platform, and numerous travel guides, both in print and online, for these same purposes.

Prior to field work, I developed the following research questions:

- 1) How is the history and heritage of African descendant communities represented in the Museum's displays? Likewise, how is the history and heritage of Dutch descendant communities represented? What are the differences and similarities, if any?
- 2) How are African and Dutch social-cultural and economic relations portrayed in the Museum?
- 3) How does the Museum market itself? In what ways and to whom?
- 4) Are the observed representations consistent with archival records and historical and anthropological scholarship on the specified subject matter? Recognizing that all stories cannot be told in one museum, are there narratives or stories that might be expected to be present in the subject Museum but are not?
- 5) How were exhibits in the Museum chosen and designed?
- 6) How were the artifacts chosen and obtained?
- 7) What were the intentions of the curators and other personnel when constructing the presentations?
- 8) What effect, if any, did external forces (such as the community or government influences) have on the decision-making processes?

As I conducted field work, and during preliminary analysis subsequent to field work, I identified additional and different questions arising from the data I had obtained in the field. Based on the observed disengagement of the local Afro-Curaçaoan community, my new questions centered on identifying potential methods by which the Museum could engage the community for the mutual benefit of both. These include:

- 1) Can community engagement can create a platform for dialogue and participation in the production of heritage at the Museum?
- 2) What methods can achieve a redistribution of power in the production of heritage and create new dynamics for the provision of knowledge at the Museum (Smith, et al. 2011; Arnstein 1969; Wilcox 1994)?
- 3) What strategies can effectively facilitate community engagement with the Museum
- 4) How can the local community contribute to mitigating negative implications that may be associated with non-local researchers and heritage professionals driving research agendas and heritage production in Curaçao (Haviser 2001; Boehm 2015)?

These questions are not answered by my present research. As such, I detail in Chapter Five a proposed direction for future research that could explore these questions and the potential efficacy and benefits to both the Museum and the local community that could inure from their engagement.

### **Limitations**

My research design is limited in a few ways. First, I have not undertaken any direct visitor experience or community impact research. Whether there is community support for the Museum, as well as the community's perception of the Museum's representations of African and Dutch heritage, are both significant questions in the broader analysis of heritage and history in Curaçao.

Visitor response research has been done at the Museum Kura Hulanda by at least one researcher (Smeulders 2012), and I have utilized that research where pertinent to my analysis of visitor perceptions of the Museum. But I have not undertaken any visitor survey research in this study. That said, to the extent visitor reaction was observed, an effort was made to record the observations. I also collected anecdotal data concerning visitor perceptions from the Museum staff and assessed online reviews of the Museum.

Additionally, because I have specifically focused on African, African descendant, and Dutch heritage and history, I have not undertaken any in-depth research into indigenous presence or other heritages on Curaçao. It is important to note the lasting impact of indigenous Arawak and Caquetio peoples on the ABC islands and the necessity for recognizing these erased narratives in local museums. However, the specific scope of this thesis does not address these issues further. Similarly, while there is a growing worldwide recognition of the need to repatriate objects of cultural heritage to indigenous and source communities, the complexity of the various global conventions and legal provisions, and potential application to private collections, if any, again exceed the scope of this analysis.<sup>1</sup>

The study is also limited in that it is a single case study. The breadth of materials at this site, as well as time and resource constraints, necessitate focusing on a single case in this study. That said, this research may be expanded in the future at which time additional cases can be compared and questions relative to visitor and community perceptions, and the effect and usefulness of directed engagement with the local community, can be incorporated into a subsequent research design.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data I collected at the Museum, I utilized a grounded theory approach,

whereby I assumed an inductive stance and endeavored to derive meaning from the qualitative data I collected (Merriam 1998: 17). Consistent with a qualitative case study, my analysis occurred, in part, in tandem with my data collection, identifying insights and tentative hypotheses; additional and more exhaustive analysis occurred subsequent to data collection and my return from the field. I employed a constant comparative approach throughout, assessing the Museum's exhibits in comparison to exhibits at other museums in Curaçao, museums in the United States and the Netherlands, and examples from museums discussed in the literature (Merriam 1998).

Analysis of the data was also guided by an application of critical theory throughout the entirety of the study. This approach provided a framework within which to analyze and interpret the content and objects in the Museum. This framework also facilitated an understanding of the context in which the exhibits have been produced; the role of race, nationality, and culture in creating inequities in the presentation of African and Dutch heritage; and the dynamics of power and identity that have shaped Curaçaoan society generally, and the production and presentation of Afro-Curaçaoan heritage, specifically (LeCompte and Schensul 2010).

The primary data analysis tool employed was a database of the objects and displays in which I coded items according to type (Merriam 1998). Using a unique series for each room, a numbering scheme was utilized to progressively identify display cases, freestanding artifacts, and photos. A lettering scheme was employed to progressively identify writings, including museum panels, descriptive placards, posters, and other written information, as well as any paintings found in the Museum. Detailed maps were prepared reflecting the layout and location of objects in each room, using the coded designations to identify the position of every item. All of this information was entered into a database where the correlating photographs were also assigned to their respective objects and displays.

Finally, selected terms were analyzed using a simple word count strategy (Wutich, et al. 2015). Items were counted first to identify total numbers of descriptive writings in an exhibition, and then more specifically, word counts of chosen terms were completed from which conclusions might be drawn.

The database, photographs, and maps collectively allowed me to identify, review, and analyze each of the exhibits to understand the composition and content of the displays. Interviews and additional research were combined with this data to understand the genesis, construction, operation, and perceptions of the Museum in an effort to answer my research questions.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> For more on cultural repatriation, see e.g., Simpson 2009; Mickleburgh 2015. For representative agreements and legislation, see e.g., UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970); United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007); and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 25 U.S.C. §3001-3013 (1992).



## Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

### Evaluating the Museum Kura Hulanda

The Museum is located at Klipstraat 9, a block from the St. Anna Bay to the east and the city square at Brionplein to the south. A pleasant 10-minute walk from the newly-dedicated Mega Pier cruise ship terminal, it is easily accessible to cruise tourists looking for alternatives to beach or adventure activities. Arriving at the Museum, it is easy to miss at first as the primary entrance is gated and there is no large signage identifying the location.

Upon entering the ticket office and museum shop, guests are greeted by a pleasant, multilingual receptionist who accepts the \$10 US admission fee, provides a map of the grounds, and offers some general guidance to the visitors. The Museum is constructed in somewhat of a hub-and-spoke layout, with numerous buildings surrounding a central courtyard that features a grand bronze sculpture by Curaçaoan artist Nel Simon titled “Mama Africa.”<sup>1</sup> Entering the courtyard from the ticket office, the sculpture depicts the face of a woman, but as one moves around the figure, it transforms to reveal the continent of Africa (Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

Each of the Museum’s main exhibitions are housed in separate buildings and there is no directed path by which to view the Museum’s displays. Guests are, however, intuitively guided chronologically and thematically, beginning with the *Lands of Abraham* exhibit located immediately adjacent to the ticket office, and then following the path around the central courtyard in a clockwise direction. Following the *Lands of Abraham* is a discrete display on evolution, then two buildings housing the *Slave Trade* exhibition, and concluding with three large buildings containing the *West African Kingdoms* exhibit and a display of replica “Benin Bronzes.”



Figures 4.1 and 4.2. Front and side views of “Mama Africa” sculpture. Photos by author.

Guests are also offered the option of experiencing the Museum with a tour guide. In the early years of the Museum, audio tours were offered but are not currently provided. All of the guides are Curaçaoan and ask \$3 US from each guest on a tour. The guides are paid directly by the visitor and are not employed by the Museum; no portion of the guides’ fees are paid to the Museum. While tour scripts have been written and utilized in the past, none are currently used and each guide presents individualized tours, choosing what information to share with the guests and which aspects of the Museum to highlight.

Although my interactions with most of the guides was limited, I understood that at least some, if not all, guides take tour guiding and history courses with a teacher on the island. The guides who have been with the Museum for an extended time may have also been provided

historical information from prior directors, as well as having undertaken their own research at the Curaçao National Archives and at other local museums. At least one guide told me that regardless of the nature of the artifacts in the Museum, she focuses her tours on the prosperity that was achieved by the Dutch as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. As she told me, “When those Dutch came here . . . Curaçao is the place they have took, and they have their [slave] market. That’s why I’m telling them... we, the Blacks, have made the Dutch rich” (Interview of Participant No. 4, July 20, 2018). The guide also expressed the importance of sharing with visitors the importance of Curaçao to Dutch history and that the country should not be forgotten by its European counterparts: “[L]et us be aware that our country is very, very tremendous! Don’t push Curaçao aside. Lift Curaçao high. Because we are tremendous people also. That is what I’m telling them” (Interview of Participant No. 4, July 20, 2018).

Of the four or five guides who work with the Museum, only one is consistently on site and there are rarely more than two available at any one time. At times, no guide is available. The guides speak multiple languages, primarily Papiamentu (the local language of the ABC islands), Dutch, and English. Most also speak Spanish and some speak German, as well. While the guides make an effort to groups guests on tours by common language, very often the guides present the tour simultaneously in two or more languages.

Toward the conclusion of my field work, I took the opportunity to experience one of the tours. Though not everyone in the group was a native English speaker, everyone spoke English so the tour was conducted only in that language. Having already spent considerable time in the Museum, and thus having an intimate familiarity with the Museum, its displays, and the textual descriptions provided, I was better able to discern how the tour may affect one’s visit differently than when experienced self-guided.

Perhaps the most significant distinction was the nature of the narratives provided while on the tour, in contrast to the written descriptions accompanying the artifacts. The experience with the guide is entirely different than without. With the guide, you are told stories of slavery and what some of the artifacts of restraint were used for. For example, on my tour the guide explained how different restraint mechanisms were employed, and described certain artifacts that were not specifically identified by placards, such as iron clamps used to trap escaping Africans and long yokes displayed on a wall that were placed around the necks of captured Africans.

During the tour, the visitor does not have time to read any of the descriptions or to look closely at the artifacts; rather, the artifacts are background to the storytelling, used to supplement the story. While a self-guided visit allows the guest to look more closely at the artifacts and displays, much of the context is lost because the written descriptions are often lacking. I also noted, from observing various tours throughout my work in the Museum, that there was no standard format amongst the guides or even from tour to tour with the same guide.

The displays and exhibits were installed in 1999 and have seen little updating in the intervening years, with the exception of a small display on human trafficking which was renewed in December 2018. A number of displays, particularly paper placards, are fraying and discolored. Some of the displays appear to be missing items. While the majority of the Museum is air-conditioned - a welcome relief in the humid tropical climate - the unit in the building housing the United States display was not functioning during the month I was there. Based on online reviews, it appears the malfunction of air-conditioning units is an ongoing concern. Other portions of the Museum are suffering from noticeable disrepair such as peeling paint or disintegrating concrete. The *West African Kingdoms* exhibit, on the other hand, is in noticeably better condition than the other main exhibitions. A small staff and limited budget certainly contribute to the Museum's

capacity for maintenance and updating, though it was clear that the Museum's managerial personnel were interested and invested in improving the Museum.

### **Arrangement and Composition**

For the most part, the exhibits center on the display of artifacts. Written descriptions of the artifacts are often provided, found on various placards which provide information in Dutch, English, or Papiamentu, or in some combination of the three (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). Informational panels providing background historical information appear in most sections of the Museum (Figures 4.5 and 4.6). The presentations do generally comport with the Museum's stated mission to exhibit collections but connecting the collections to the "cultural identity of the people of Curacao, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic Rim," is not made obvious. Unlike museums like the National Museum of African American Heritage and Culture (NMAAHC) in Washington, DC, which endeavors to "demonstrate the centrality and impact that the African American story had

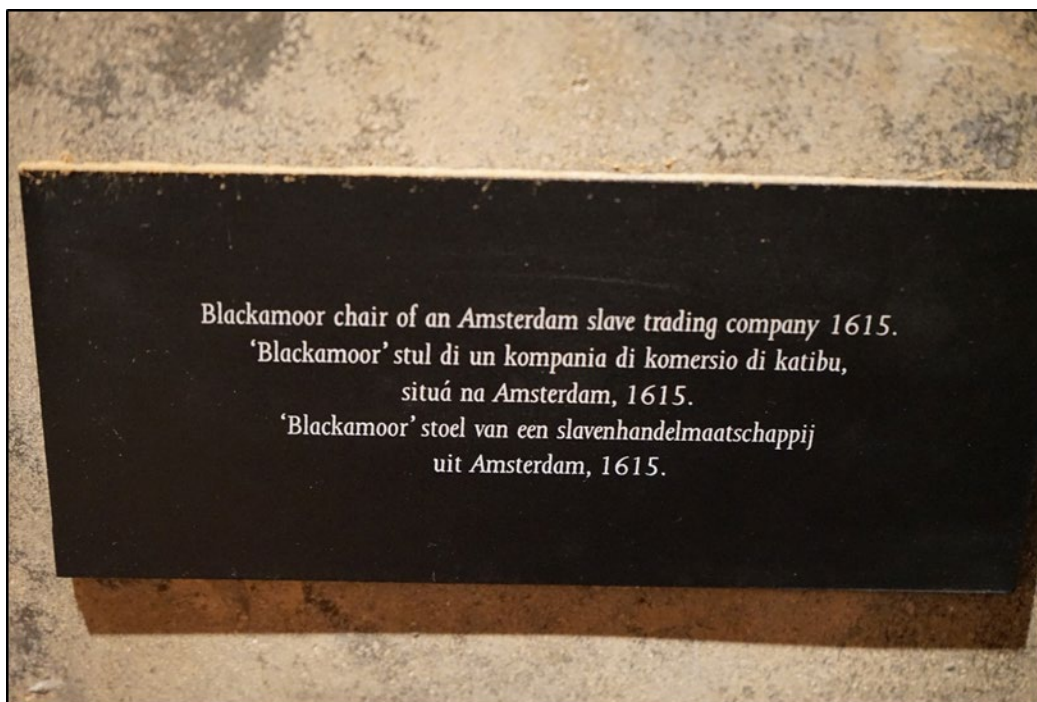


Figure 4.3. Example of placard providing description in English, Papiamentu, and Dutch. Photo by author.



upon America's history and culture" (Gardullo and Bunch 2017), the connection between the artifacts and the impact of enslaved Africans and their descendants on the culture of Curaçao and the broader Kingdom of the Netherlands is not explicitly presented.

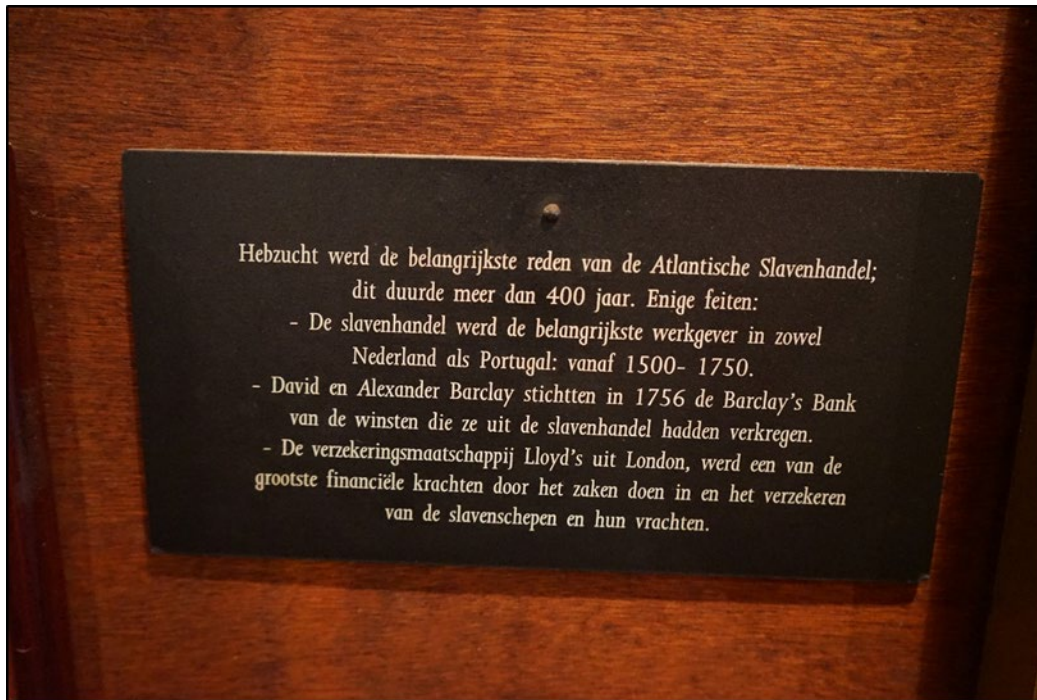
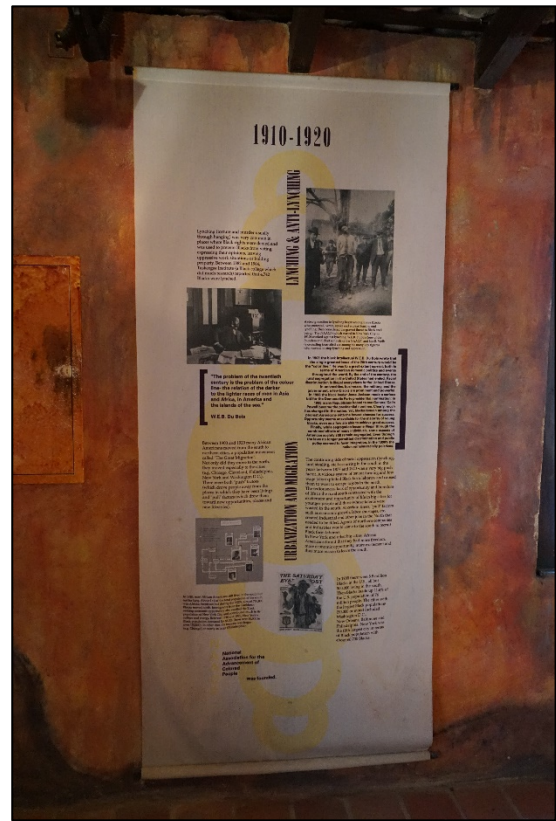


Figure 4.4. Example of placard providing description only in Dutch. Photo by author.

This is especially noticeable in the extent to which Curaçao is specifically featured in the Museum. One room within a larger exhibit displays some artifacts from Curaçao, including manumission documents and historical maps of the region (Figures 4.7 and 4.8), though most of the displays are old photographs and paintings. The area is small in comparison to the other exhibits and the history and culture of Curaçao and its people is not a theme or focus in the Museum. There are no identifiable artifacts from local people, and interestingly, all of the captions and narrative placards in this section are provided only in English. References to Curaçao in other areas of the Museum are negligible, if present at all. The small, non-localized Curaçao section of the Museum is indicative of the global, universal story of slavery that is told in the Museum, rather

than local Curaçaoan history and heritage (see generally Smuelders 2009).

As Smuelders notes, Curaçaoans also perceive the Museum’s presentations as too global, and she connects this image of “foreign-ness” to Dekker, whom she describes as one who “does not adjust to local habits” (119). Moreover, noting that Dekker was apt to “stomp[ ] on local sensitivities,” Smeulders asserts that the disinterest of local visitors may also be linked to the perception of Dekker, a White Dutch native, as “too colonial,” signified by his inclination to give his initiatives colonial names and his occasional appearances in public in Dutch colonial costume (111, 119).



Figures 4.5 and 4.6. Informational panels in *Slave Trade* exhibition. Photos by author.

As mentioned, Dekker himself has acknowledged that the Museum was built around the artifacts he was able to collect, rather than first envisioning narratives that would be illustrated or

supplemented by specifically sought-after items. The Museum's mode of display - one that groups items by region or time period, and which appear in many instances to be smatterings of items grouped together based more on the locations where they were found than on cohesive themes or ideas - appears much like the "cabinets of curiosities" prevalent in 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnographic museums. The mode of display also implies the positioning of the Museum as one primarily meant to display Dekker's collections.



Figure 4.7. Curaçao exhibit as seen from entryway. Photo by author.

The difficulty this presents is that the exhibitions are not oriented to any particular theme(s) or narratives, save for the generalized, global presentation of a chronology of slavery in various forms. Identifying a unifying theme – for example, the intelligence and capacity for resistance displayed by enslaved Africans throughout the era of transatlantic slavery and beyond – could open the Museum's options for displays that would not only present previously-silenced and overlooked



narratives of enslaved Africans and their descendants across the diaspora, but more importantly for this Museum, afford opportunities to present more relevant and engaging narratives about Africans and their descendants in Curaçao.



Figure 4.8. Display in the Curaçao exhibit of documents related to the abolition of slavery. Photo by author.

While in Curaçao I found that the Museum is commonly referred to as “the Slavery Museum,” despite its other extensive collections focused on West African culture. A simple Google search for “Curaçao slavery museum” returns pages of hits for Kura Hulanda and most tourism guide books on the region refer predominantly to the Museum’s slavery exhibits. I experienced this first-hand in a negative way while visiting the Curaçao Maritime Museum. I inquired as to the lack of information presented there about the Dutch as seafaring slave merchants. As the employee vaguely gestured in the direction of Kura Hulanda across the St. Anna Bay, she tersely directed that I should “go to the Slave Museum for that.”

## Visitor Demographics and Perceptions of the Museum

In order to better understand the populations that frequent the Museum, I endeavored to uncover information about the demographics of its guests. Museum personnel estimate that the Museum averages 1,500 – 2,000 visitors per month, but while the Museum maintains a guest comment book, it does not keep statistics on visitor demographics. In my informal observations, I noted a mix of visitors of most phenotypical racial presentations, though most of the visitors appeared White. I also observed visitors speaking English, Dutch, German, and Spanish, as well as a few other languages I could not immediately identify. For more clarity and an increased degree of relative reliability, I turned to the online TripAdvisor platform and its reviews posted about Kura Hulanda to gain some insight into the Museum’s visitors, both for demographic information and to better understand general public perceptions of the Museum.<sup>2</sup>

1,208 reviews of the Museum were posted to the platform from March 2004 (the first post) through July 11, 2019. TripAdvisor does not require that its users identify themselves, though many include their location. Users can also affix a photograph to their profiles, but these are not reliable indicators of identity. One informative indication of users’ origin was the language in which the review was written, recognizing that many non-native English speakers are fluent in English and chose to post in English rather than their native language. Nonetheless, based on language and stated location, some insights can be gleaned from the information available through TripAdvisor.

I reviewed the posts written in the six most used languages: English, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and German (1,173 posts)<sup>3</sup>. Of those posts, the four most identified locations across these languages were the United States (335), the Netherlands (296), Canada (104), and Brazil (74). A second tier of identified locations included Germany (37), Curaçao (37), Belgium (29), Argentina

(13), Venezuela (12), and Columbia (12). Of note, based on reports from Museum personnel that locals did not frequent the Museum, I was surprised by the relatively high number of reviews (in comparison to others) appearing from Curaçao. However, a review of the content of the posts that identified Curaçao as the posters' location indicated that many of them (more than half) were visitors to Curaçao at the time of posting, not residents.

TripAdvisor allows users to rate an attraction on a "5 star" basis, with 5 stars for "Excellent," four for "Very Good," three for "Average", two for "Poor," and one star for "Terrible." Of the 1,208 reviews, Kura Hulanda received 4 or 5 stars (Excellent or Very Good) from 85% of all reviewers. Less than 1% (11 reviews) rated the Museum "Terrible." Interestingly, of those 11 reviews, 4 were posted in English, 5 in Dutch, and 2 in German.

Parsing the reviews further, of the English language reviews, 89% rated the Museum Excellent or Very Good, while only 76% of the Dutch language reviews and 74% of German reviews rated it Excellent or Very Good. 86% and 82% of Portuguese and Spanish reviews, respectively, were Excellent or Very Good. Of those who rated the Museum "Terrible," four noted poor maintenance (which was echoed by many reviewers who rated the Museum higher), while at least four described the Museum as "confusing," without explanations, "incoherent," or "lack[ing] a clear focus." One Dutch reviewer complained that "the history [presented in the Museum] was very dependent on NL [Netherlands], while many more peoples participated in slavery." Many reviewers, both positive and negative, noted that they had hoped for or expected more information about Curaçao.

On the other hand, most reviews were extremely positive. Numerous comments described the Museum as a "must see," "impressive," "powerful," "worth visiting," "enlightening," and "educational." In addition, many reviewers from various locales commented that the Museum was

“eye opening” or exposed them to information of which they were not previously aware. The reviews, while not dispositive of any particular metric, do support the anecdotal information provided by the Museum staff that a large percentage of visitors are European, though it is clear that an almost equal number of visitors come from North America. The information from the reviews also corroborates to some extent the earlier work by Smeulders (2012), who determined that the locals comprise only 4% of total visitors to the Museum. Finally, the compiled ratings also indicate that the Museum is well-received by the vast majority of visitors who chose to provide a review.

### **Slavery Exhibitions**

Based on my research questions, specifically those focused on the presentation of African and African descendant heritage, my primary focus in evaluating the Museum naturally gravitated to the slavery exhibitions. The Museum is separated into three major exhibitions, with two of the three (*Lands of Abraham* and the *Slave Trade*) revolving around a history of slavery and containing a multitude of artifacts of slavery. Due to the large size and scope of the Museum, and to draw focus to the narratives surrounding the Museum’s interpretation of the transatlantic slave trade, my analysis is centered on the displays found in the *Slave Trade* exhibition. In my report to the Museum, I offer particularized descriptions and analysis of many of the displays and artifacts. An example of these recommendations is set forth in Appendix B. The report details many of the displays and artifacts and offers specific observations and recommendations for the Museum’s consideration. Here, however, I focus on broader analysis of the display and presentation of artifacts of slavery in Kura Hulanda and museums like it.

That said, one observation regarding the *Lands of Abraham* should be noted first. Both Dekker and former director Jay Havisser have stated that the exhibits are intended to demonstrate

a chronology of slavery and to make clear that the institution of slavery began long before the transatlantic slave trade (Pier n.d.; Havisser “Slave Trade” video 2007). However, the exhibits in the *Lands of Abraham* are comprised primarily of artifacts meant to chronicle an “evolution of writing” and currency (Pier n.d.). The guides will typically offer information describing an enslavement of Jewish people by the Egyptians and other non-African slavery, but there is otherwise little context in the exhibitions to delineate earlier periods of slavery from transatlantic slavery.

A critical and overarching characteristic of transatlantic slavery is that it was based and perpetuated on the basis of race (Painter 2010). Moreover, the legalized system of chattel slavery by which Africans were treated as the personal property of their owners differed significantly from other schemes of forced labor such as domestic servitude, prisoners of war, and modern human trafficking (Painter 2010; Nimako, et al. 2014). By failing to sufficiently draw these distinctions, the Museum runs the risk of fostering tropes that, for example, suggest enslaved Africans had the same experiences as White people who have been enslaved, or that White culpability for the transatlantic slave trade should be minimized because African tribes had enslaved one another before Western contact ever occurred. The NMAAHC, for example, provides helpful guidance here in its *Slavery and Freedom* exhibition which explains how slavery began to be based on race. A similar approach would serve as an important mode of transition from Kura Hulanda’s *Lands of Abraham* exhibit to its *Slave Trade* exhibit.

### **Artifacts of Slavery**

To analyze the Museum’s display of artifacts related to the slave trade, I employ Cubitt’s framework for the analysis of atrocity materials (2011). Arising out of the 2007 bicentenary of the end of British participation in the slave trade, Laurajane Smith, Geoffrey Cubitt, and others

reflected on myriad experiences of the many museums in Great Britain that sought to present histories of slavery and abolition in their book, *Representing Enslavement and Abolition in Museums* (2011). Cubitt, in particular, addresses the presentation of “atrocious materials” in museums: “images, texts, objects, audio-visual installations and so on – whose common feature is their capacity to depict, represent, evoke or imaginatively reconstruct the physical brutality of slavery and the physical sufferings of the enslaved” (Cubitt 2011: 229). Recognizing that these extreme images of suffering and atrocity can provide a “shock value” that can “jolt viewers out of complacency” and prompt empathetic responses, while also carrying the potential for “compassion fatigue” and voyeurism among other problematics (234), Cubitt identifies five problem areas in the deployment of these materials that the subject museums faced. These five areas provide an analytical framework for evaluating the exhibits in the Kura Hulanda Museum which may be instructive.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Kura Hulanda is its extensive exhibition of items used in the slave trade and about the conditions of slavery. Because of the potential effect on visitors and the direct relation of these artifacts to the enslaved, analysis of these displays is vital to uncover how the artifacts are used in the Museum, whether the artifacts serve to sufficiently relate the experiences of enslaved Africans, and to interrogate the potentially problematic nature of these displays.

Cubitt notes that the deployment of atrocious materials is “fraught with risks and ambiguities” that arise partly on account of the nature of the materials themselves, partly from the methods of display, and partly from the “uncertain resonances of slavery’s ‘difficult’ history within contemporary [ ] society” (234). These risks and ambiguities are also present in Kura Hulanda, where many of the artifacts are displayed without elaborate contextual information, and in light of

the persisting contested Dutch view of slavery. Cubitt identifies five general headings by which to assess the problems that may arise in the exhibition of these materials: familiarity, reductionism, disempowerment and exploitation, symbolization, and empathy (234). I discuss each in turn as they apply to Kura Hulanda.

### *1. Familiarity*

Familiarity has been associated with the term “compassion fatigue” to describe a “numbing of sensibility” and emotional responses that may occur when viewers become accustomed to atrocity content and to viewing the content in generally safe places such as museums (234). One risk here is a “standardization” of atrocity material: chains and shackles predominating, and easily reproduced images like the engravings found in Stedman’s *Narratives*,<sup>4</sup> both of which are prevalent at Kura Hulanda. An accumulation of these materials can be counterproductive if they are presented without interpretation, leading visitors to simply walk by them and become numb to the gravity of the artifacts.

I noted this phenomenon in my own observations. While I photographed each of the *Narratives* images during my field work and observed them on display at least three times, I did not discern the specific origin of the images or the context in which they were produced until reviewing the photographs after returning from Curaçao. This may be attributed to the sheer volume of artifacts that I had already observed, leading to the kind of compassion fatigue Cubitt describes. A contributing factor may also be the mode of display. In the Museum, the images are accompanied by small, 8.5”x11” printed placards with the original captions from Stedman’s *Narratives*. However, the text is not offset by quotes and is not cited, which may be confusing to the visitor. While the display begins with a brief description of Stedman and the title of the book, the small size and consistent font as is used throughout the Museum contribute to visitor fatigue

and may result in visitors glossing over the descriptions and thus, failing to comprehend the context of the imagery, as I did.

## 2. *Reductionism*

Reductionism can occur in three interconnected ways. First, an unyielding emphasis on artifacts of slavery's brutality (whips, chains, shackles) and the viciousness of the Middle Passage has the potential for reducing the "complex cruelties and oppressions" of slavery to crude physical objects (235). As a result, important aspects of the lives of the enslaved and the less tangible atrocities of slavery, such as family separation, suppression of African culture and religion, and sexual assault of enslaved women can be overlooked in favor of the more easily conspicuous physical artifacts (235).

In museums like Kura Hulanda, where physical artifacts drive the collection, these pitfalls can easily arise. Descriptions and narratives providing more elaborate context of slavery and enslavement, such as those which detail the experiences of Africans separated from their families after their arrival in Curaçao, the restrictions on marriage of enslaved Africans (see *Curacao Papers*, p.5), and the impact of the Catholic Diocese in Venezuela on the religious practices of enslaved Africans in Curaçao<sup>5</sup> are just some of the narratives that could be further elaborated in the Museum to provide context to the physical artifacts. Moreover, display of the artifacts without the inclusion of these kinds of narratives serves to further erase the perspectives of enslaved Africans and promote perceptions that dehumanize those who were enslaved.

This point also brings attention to the lack of African and Afro-Curaçaoan voices in the Museum's displays. There is an extensive use of historical quotes from White slave ship captains, physicians, travelers, and military personnel to "tell the story" of slavery and of the conditions endured by enslaved Africans. But with the exception of selected passages from *The Interesting*



*Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), the autobiography of an African man enslaved in Barbados and Virginia who ultimately purchased his freedom, there are no discernable narratives from enslaved Africans or their descendants in the Museum, and certainly none from Afro-Curaçaoans. This again highlights the global perspective of the Museum's narratives, which could benefit from the inclusion of local people's voices, both past and present.

The second mode of reductionism can occur when a fixation on the predatory capture, brutal bondage, and sadism of the Middle Passage overshadows the need to analyze slavery's "intimate connections" to Western capitalism and imperialism, and the economic and racialized construction of these governmentalities (235). In doing so, slavery may be remembered as a short-lived deviation from an otherwise "progressive modernizing project," protected from scrutiny and avoiding important critical analysis of the underlying causalities and systems that supported the slave trade (235). In the Netherlands, where the connection between the Dutch Golden Age and slavery has long been ignored and denied, providing a space in which the brutality of the slave trade and its far-reaching impact can be contextualized in the larger economic and globalized successes of the Netherlands can provide a significant mode of education and information to the traveling Dutch public who may not otherwise understand or appreciate these connections.

Finally, and perhaps most significant for exploration with the Afro-Curaçaoan community in this case, is that a pervasive depiction of enslaved Africans as victims can perpetuate and reinforce attitudes of racial superiority and serve to deny them agency and identity. By focusing on the suffering inflicted on enslaved Africans and overlooking African resistance and examples of African culture and values, enslaved Africans become portrayed as "stereotypical victims," coupled with perpetuating the notion that emancipation was a benefit conferred upon them by gracious White rulers. In its *West African Kingdoms* exhibit, Kura Hulanda displays many

beautiful and intriguing examples of art, culture, and society from many different African nations and cultures. An effort to more explicitly connect these cultures to the slavery exhibitions could provide needed context to the lives and achievements of enslaved Africans and restore the agency and identity that can be lost in the overwhelming display of bondage and subjugation.

This point also provides a multitude of additional presentational opportunities in Kura Hulanda to evoke the voices of enslaved Africans and to disrupt these problematic impacts. First and foremost, the Museum could explore the story of Tula and the 1795 revolt in its exhibitions. While there is a specific museum dedicated to Tula on the island located at Landhuis Knip (the location where Tula was enslaved), that museum is located some 43 kilometers from downtown Willemstad and is not easily accessible to many tourists like those arriving via the cruise terminal. For these kinds of daily visitors, Kura Hulanda may be the only local history museum they visit in their short time on the island; if they do not learn about Tula and the 1795 revolt there, they likely will not be exposed to that important aspect of Curaçao's history and Afro-Curaçaoan heritage at all. The story of Tula could also serve as a bridge to broader discussions of enslaved uprisings and resistance that weakened systems of enslavement from within, sowing discord between White enslavers and abolitionists and inspiring revolution across the Caribbean (see e.g., Oostindie 2011; Klooster and Oostindie 2011).

Another opportunity to present African resistance, creativity, and intelligence would be to feature an exhibition on the Papiamentu language. Other museums, such as the Museum of London Docklands, have used audio recordings to evoke “cultural assaults” on enslaved Africans such as the suppression of African languages (236). Importantly, no major museum on Curaçao (Savonet, Museo Tula, Curaçao Museum) features a significant exhibition on the Papiamentu language.<sup>6</sup> This glaring omission of a fundamental aspect of Afro-Curaçaoan creativity, intelligence, and

heritage begs for a featured place in the museums of Curaçao.

More specifically, recent scholarship on the origins of Papiamentu has come to the forefront, affording a unique opportunity for a museum like Kura Hulanda to feature the story of Curaçao's native language in a new display that would capture the current state of research while featuring a primary story of African resistance, creativity, and influence on Curaçaoan culture and society. The current scholarship elaborates the perspective that Papiamentu is a Portuguese-based creole that first developed in West Africa and was brought to the ABC islands by enslaved Africans and slave-traders, where it was relexified<sup>7</sup> by Spanish and became Papiamentu.

Building upon foundational works by Frank Martinus (1996) and Nicolas Quint (2000), the most recent and substantive proponent of this viewpoint is Dutch linguist and philologist Bart Jacobs. Jacobs' hypothesis proposes that Papiamentu derives from the Upper Guinea branch of Portuguese-based creoles, which includes the sister creoles of the Cape Verde Islands, and Guinea-Bissau and Casamance, Senegal. Numerous scholars agree that the proto-variety from which both these creoles sprang formed originally on the island of Cape Verde around the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, diffused to continental Africa around the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and was brought to Curacao in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Jacobs 2012). Jacob's identification of a purely West African source for Papiamentu, the survival and elaboration of the language through the Middle Passage, and the infiltration of the language throughout the White European and Sephardic Jewish populations of Curaçao (as opposed to the imposition of Dutch or Portuguese on the African population), all demonstrate a significant aspect of African influence, resistance, and intelligence that would augment Kura Hulanda's collections significantly.

### *3. Disempowerment and Exploitation*

Problems of disempowerment and exploitation can arise from atrocity images themselves;

more specifically, the complex history associated with these images and the multiple meanings and interpretations the images can invoke as viewed by differently-situated viewers. The meaning of any one particular image can vary, dependent largely upon the attitudes, assumptions, and knowledge of the viewer, and importantly, as it relates to Kura Hulanda, on the contexts of display. “Those who deploy images of atrocity in museum settings or elsewhere must be alert to the ghosts of earlier uses and to the misunderstandings or conflicts that can arise when images are viewed from different angles by different viewers” (Cubitt 2011: 237).

During the British bicentennial displays analyzed by Cubitt, most of the atrocity imagery that was presented in the museums was taken from 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century abolition movements. Thus, the predominant representation was one of “black people as victims and passive sufferers, lacking agency in their own affairs, and white people, at least potentially, as virtuous, redemptive and emancipatory agents” (Cubitt 2011: 238).

A primary example of the tensions that arose out of these displays concerned the iconic *Brookes* slave ship diagram, a version of which is similarly deployed in Kura Hulanda (Figures 4.9, 4.10, and 4.11).<sup>8</sup> During the British bicentennial, the representation and implication of the image took on two divergent positions. To some curators, the image was a graphic representation of the conditions of the Middle Passage, bringing to the forefront the sufferings of the enslaved and the “commercial callousness of slavery’s commodification of human lives and bodies” (238). To others, the image was a “deeply compromised” artifact that reinforced the racialized subordination and absolute disempowerment of enslaved Africans (238).

The key here would lie again in the context in which the artifact is presented. Some museums that presented the image in their 2007 British bicentennial exhibits specifically captioned the diagram to, for example, explain that it presented enslaved Africans as “dehumanised objects

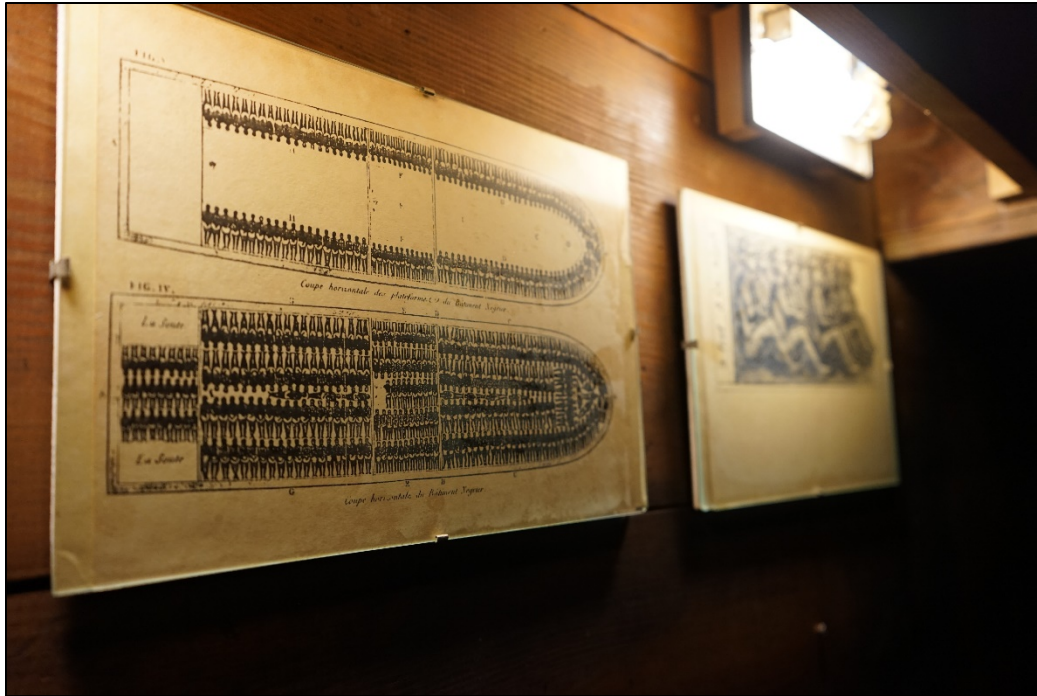


Figure 4.9. *Brookes* slave ship diagram as presented in the replica ship's cargo hold in Museum Kura Hulanda. Photo by author.

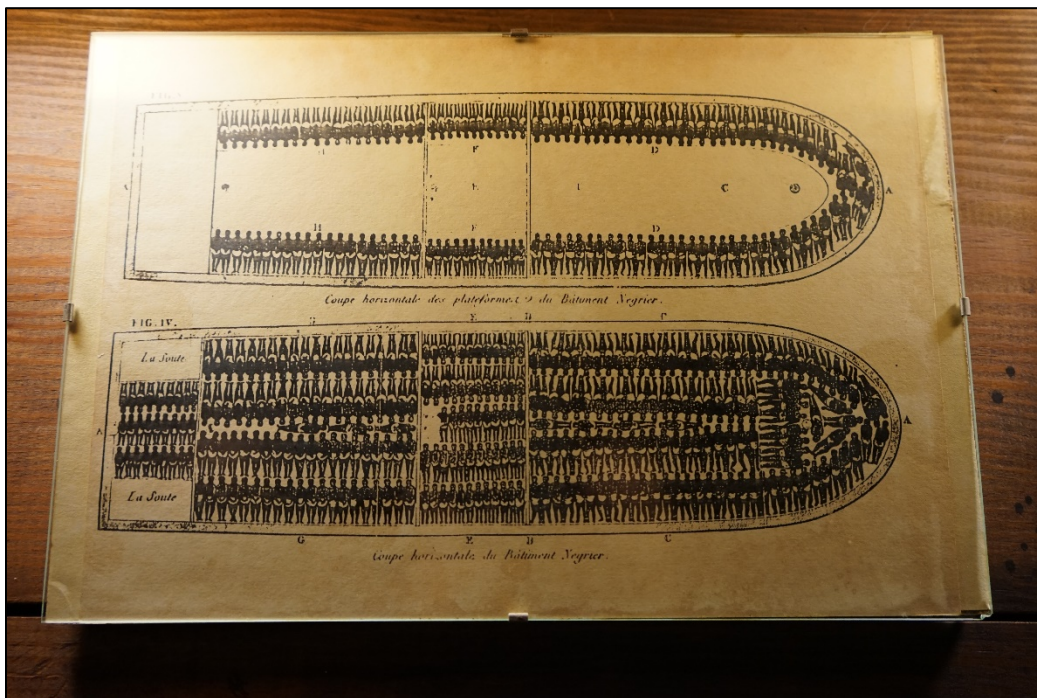


Figure 4.10. Close-up view of *Brookes* slave ship diagram on display in the replica ship's cargo hold in Museum Kura Hulanda. Photo by author.

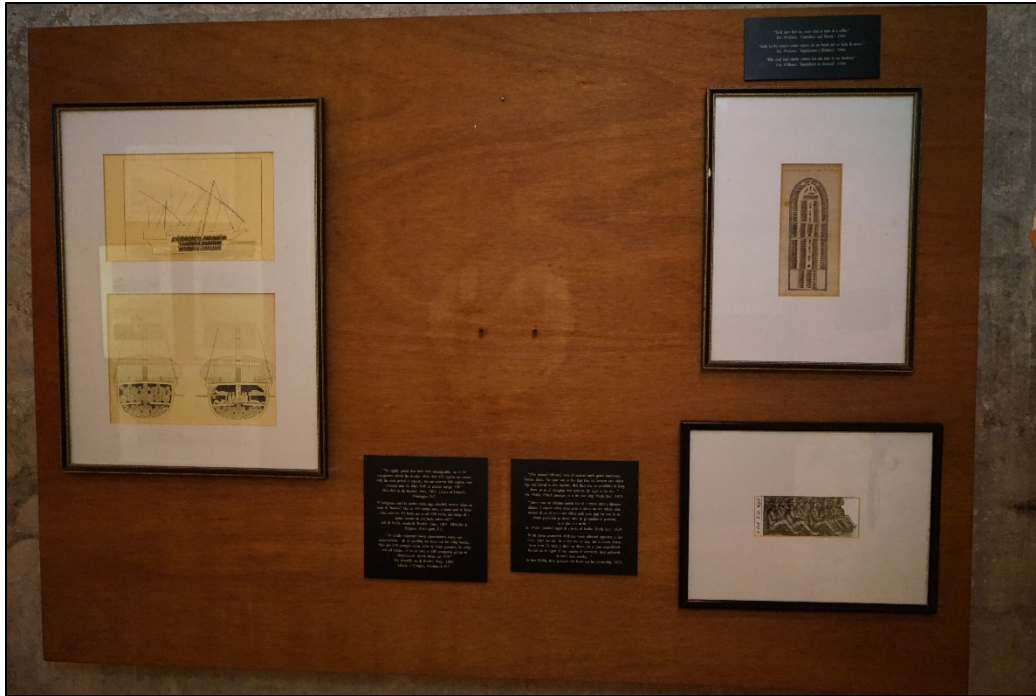


Figure 4.11. Additional imagery similar to the *Brookes* diagram on display in the Curaçao exhibition. Photo by author.

illustrative of the “suffocating horror” of the Middle Passage (240).

The difficulty in the presentation at Kura Hulanda lies in the fact that the diagram is presented without context. It appears twice: first, outside the stairwell leading to the replica ship’s hold, and again in the hold itself. In both cases, the artifact is presented without explanation. This is not the case, however, for those who experience the Museum with a guide. During the guided tours, guests are provided commentary on the conditions of the Middle Passage, during which the *Brookes* diagram may be used for illustration.

The Museum can evaluate its position on the diagram, but in any event, should consider providing some level of written narrative context to assist viewers in understanding the implications and purpose of the diagram as it existed at the time of creation as well as its meaning in current understandings of the complexities of the slave trade.

#### 4. *Symbolization*

Symbolization arises by way of the special kind of significance that attaches to objects merely by virtue of their inclusion in a museum, what is known as the “museum effect” (241). This effect acts to enlarge the consequence of an object from the singular value it held in the past to a signifying value that arises out of the object’s role as part of larger displays, narratives, or meanings that a museum may seek to evoke or that visitors draw from their experience in the museum. The object gains a different value - emotional or otherwise - in the present than it held in the past simply by the acts of it being rescued, cleaned, researched, arranged, described, and displayed in a museum (241).

Williams writes that this effect can take on a particular significance in the case of atrocity materials. He says that the emotional impact of these objects on a viewer depends, at least in part, on the “presumption that they embody a specific history of traumatic violence; they are real objects that were once, in a particular time and place, put to horrific use or implicated in a specific context of atrocity” (Williams 2007: 31, cited in Cubitt 2011: 241). The particular history associated with the objects, however, is often untold, thus rendering the objects “somewhat generic and interchangeable” (31, 241).

According to Cubitt, this generalization can most often be seen in the case of museums’ extensive use of punitive or restrictive hardware – chains, shackles, manacles, leg irons, collars, bridles, and other instruments of restraint or torture (242). As Cubitt notes in reference to the 2007 British bicentennial displays, the objects were essentially obligatory; their starkness, preexisting symbolic resonances, and ability to provoke the imagination of suffering and oppression lent to the ready understandability of the objects, both by curators and visitors (243-44). The objects were, and are, “quintessential markers of slavery’s horrendous physical abuses, and by metaphoric



extension, as the ultimate symbolic expressions of slavery in general” (244).

The modes of display of these artifacts varied from museum to museum, and from display to display in any one museum. Some museums displayed the artifacts as material evidence of slavery’s inhumanity, while others fashioned displays intended to evoke a “memorializing contemplation” (244). The International Slavery Museum, for example, laid shackles plainly on a bare piece of wood, the simplicity of the display intended to illustrate the cold harshness of the objects. The Royal Naval Museum presented a set of irons with the dispassionate title “Equipment of the Trade.” In other museums, visitors were invited to handle the objects in an effort to enhance the visitors’ understanding of the experience of bondage (246).

Similar features are seen in Kura Hulanda. In the Curaçao display, a trunk of chains is displayed without explanation or narrative (Figure 4.12). Shackles are displayed throughout the museum, often ornamental to displays that seem to have no particular correlation to the hardware



Figure 4.12. Chains laid in an open truck in the Curaçao exhibit. Photo by author.



or its effects (Figures 4.13, 4.14, and 4.15). Almost all of the devices are uncased, allowing visitors to handle them, discern their weight, and derive a sensory experience from them.



Figures 4.13 and 4.14. Shackles and other restrictive hardware adorning displays featuring, respectively, Olaudah Equiano and Christianizing of enslaved Africans' names by their captors. Photos by author.

Perhaps most jarring of the displays is that of a collar with spikes used for various modes of punishment. The artifact is displayed in a case in the *Surinam* exhibit along with drawings of a similar device, and nearby is a reproduction of a painting of an enslaved man locked in the same kind of collar on display (Figures 4.16, 4.17, and 4.18). Unlike many of the other artifacts on display, this object is contextualized, both by the artistic renderings and through the accompanying placarded text. The image of the man is moving and sets it apart from many of the other displays of punitive and restrictive hardware. Dekker has said that the item came from a family in Suriname

(Pier n.d.), but without provenance or attribution in the display, the artifact loses some of the specificity that could further elaborate the particular history of this item.



Figure 4.15. Shackles adorning a display about the WIC. Photo by author.

### 5. *Empathy*

Finally, there can be problems in the display of atrocity materials arising out of the empathy such displays may evoke. Slavery exhibits can achieve understanding and emotional impact partly through the visitor's empathetic connection to the plight of the enslaved (Cubitt 2011: 246-47). Empathy that is evoked by objects and images of physical suffering can be powerful and may serve positive outcomes, but it may also be problematic. "The readiness with which we take bodily suffering as our imaginative point of entry to the enslaved condition may obstruct us from engaging effectively with other aspects of that condition, including the interweaving of experiences of enslavement and experiences of resistance" (247).

While an emotional connection to people of the past can create an appreciation of the



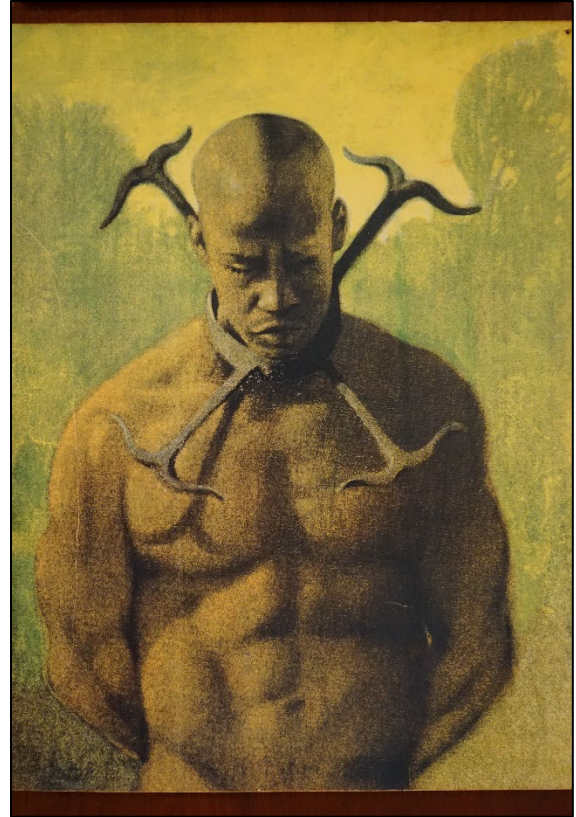
Figure 4.16. Encased punishment collar with spikes in *Surinam* exhibit. Photo by author.

suffering endured by the enslaved, it is often less important to empathize with the experience of enslaved Africans than it is to grasp how so many members of White colonial societies were implicated in slavery itself and the structures that supported it (248).

Cubitt and others suggest, however, that museum presentations can be framed such that visitors are engaged in ways that transcend simple empathy and solidarity and propel the visitor into critical inquiry. By acknowledging that the experiences of enslaved people in the past are not “graspable or containable,” visitors may be induced to reevaluate their own connection to the past (248, citing Bonnell and Simon 2007: 68-70).

Identified by Cubitt as the most striking of these kinds of displays were Middle Passage displays, typically in the form of set pieces “designed to offer a particular concentration of meaning and affect” within the larger museum experience (249). Museums varied in their presentations, with some quite literally constructing a darkened “passage,” to others providing a measured space





Figures 4.17 and 4.18. Reproduction of painting of enslaved man in iron punishment collar with spikes. Photos by author.

by which visitors could physically set themselves into the amount of space typically allotted per person on a slave ship. Many employed audio-visual experiences, ranging from music to voice-overs to video of actors recreating the shipboard experience (249).

In Kura Hulanda, one of the most riveting displays, and one that certainly garners significant attention in online visitor reviews and media descriptions, is that of the recreation of a slave ship's cargo hold (Figures 4.19 and 4.20). This presentation can be characterized as experiential, where it is intended that the visitor "experience" a situation akin to one had in the past (Landsberg 2018). Like the remainder of the Museum, there are no audio or visual elements to augment the experience.

Conversely, the NMAAHC specifically chose to avoid this kind of reproduction. As Mary



Figure 4.19. Guide describing conditions endured by enslaved Africans during Middle Passage. Photo by author.



Figure 4.20. Replica of slave ship's cargo hold. Photo by author.

Elliott, co-curator of the *Slavery and Freedom* exhibition explained, the NMAAHC's exhibition on the Middle Passage was intended to recognize rather than reproduce the experience of the Middle Passage. Located in a dark alcove, using audio of ocean waves and voice-overs of African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans reading narratives of the experiences of the enslaved, remnants of the slave ship São José are displayed along with other artifacts. In describing the museum's choices, Elliott has said "[t]his isn't Slave Disneyland. You aren't going to feel what they felt. Sometimes you have to be quiet with it" (Miles 2017: 84).

Both modes of presentation can be instructive, moving, and effective. As Cubitt notes, there is no obvious criteria for measuring the success of these presentations, with visitor reactions likely varying widely. Having made the choice of a more literal experience, it remains to be assessed whether the display at Kura Hulanda could be more effective, and if so, how. For example, would an audio overlay such as that used at the NMAAHC be effective? Are video reenactments useful, or even desirable? These questions are emblematic of those that could be posed to engaged community members.

### **Additional Critical Analysis of Museum-wide Themes**

Due to the sheer volume of artifacts and displays in the Museum, it is not possible to assess every aspect in detail. There are, however, certain overarching features for which analysis can be particularly instructive. A brief discussion of those elements is provided here.

#### "Slave" versus Enslaved

Perhaps the most apparent feature in the Museum that demonstrates the passage of time and the advancement of scholarly thought since the displays were first erected in 1999 is the use of the term "slave" to describe and refer to Africans held in bondage, as opposed to the terms enslaved or enslaved Africans. Throughout the written descriptions and captions in the Museum,

enslaved Africans are typically referred to as “slaves.” This is not to say that the use of “slave” is exclusive, but it is prevalent.

I reviewed and analyzed the use of the term “slave” in the *Slave Trade* exhibition.<sup>9</sup> In this exhibition, there are 236 total writings, including placards, descriptive captions, and information panels. I searched the text of all 236 writings for the term “slave” occurring in reference to persons in the Museum’s original descriptions, narratives, and explanations; I did not include direct quotes or excerpts from books or other published material, in which the term “slave” appears regularly. I excluded references to “slave ship,” “slave prison,” “slavery,” and “slave trade,” all of which generally refer to inanimate objects or concepts, not persons.

In the *Slave Trade* exhibition alone, the term “slave” appears in reference to persons 35 times.<sup>10</sup> The term “enslaved” appears only twice, and one of those occurrences is in reference to “enslaved Arawack [*sic*] Indians.”

Perspectives on the term “slave,” though not widely problematized until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, have evolved such that the current understanding and position in the social sciences views the term as one that dehumanizes Africans forcefully brought to the Western hemisphere. The choice of terminology is important and impactful, as Jackson explains, because it “contributes to dismantling entrenched systems of representation that continue to conflate the conditions of slavery that Africans suffered with an essentialized nature of ‘being a slave’” (Jackson 2011: 457).

Making this choice in a museum space frequented by Dutch visitors is especially important. Noting that use of “enslaved” acknowledges that the condition of slavery was imposed on persons who resisted their captivity, Nimako, et al. (2014) point out that the distinction has not been commonly accepted into the Dutch lexicon. Early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Afro-Dutch community introduced the concept by adopting the phrase “*tot slaaf gemaakt*,” literally translated as “those

who have been made a slave” (34). The phrase has yet to find significant footing in Dutch society and continues to be debated even amongst scholars in the Netherlands.<sup>11</sup>

By replacing these references, museums like Kura Hulanda can take a significant step in presenting enslaved Africans as more than just the bonded condition that was violently forced upon them, while also encouraging Dutch visitors to reflect on its use in Dutch society.

### Dutch prosperity

It is indisputable that the Dutch empire was built on slavery. Scholars have recognized that the slave trade and slavery, as part of the Dutch colonial system and integral to the Dutch identity as master seafarers and traders, unquestionably contributed to the prosperity and wealth of the Netherlands, even if it was not its main source of prosperity (Horton and Kardux 2004, citing Postma 1990). Recounting the impact of the transatlantic slave trade on the success of the Dutch commercial enterprise and the nation's cultural renaissance in the 17th century, Kardux even goes so far as to characterize the era as the “gilded” age rather than the Golden Age (Horton and Kardux 2004: 63).

Despite the unavoidable interconnectedness between the Dutch colonial and slave-trading past and the still-present prosperity of the Netherlands, however, narratives reflecting this are absent from the Museum’s displays. Current leadership at the Museum recognizes this omission and is interested in developing narratives that would connect this important aspect of Dutch history (Interview of Participant No. 2, July 19, 2018). Displays featuring the Dutch West Indies Company are a prime example where Dutch and Curaçaoan heritage could be intertwined with history to, as Lowenthal suggests, clarify the past “to infuse them with present purposes” (Lowenthal 1996: xi).



## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Nel Simon also created the *Desenkadená* monument in Willemstad's Parke di Libertad, celebrating the 1795 revolt led by Tula, an enslaved African on Curaçao.

<sup>2</sup> As the world's largest online network of travelers and one of the most reputable platforms in the tourism industry, TripAdvisor has increasingly become a source of qualitative data for assessment of the industry (Safaa, et al. 2017; Egresi and Prakash 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Reviews were also posted in the following additional languages: French (8); Italian (8); Swedish (7); Russian (5); Danish (3); Japanese (2); Hungarian (1); and Korean (1).

<sup>4</sup> John Gabriel Stedman was a Dutch-British military officer dispatched to Suriname in the 1770s to fight against enslaved Africans who had escaped from bondage. He reflected his experiences there in *The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), for which English artist William Blake was commissioned to produce engravings depicting the conditions Stedman observed. Kura Hulanda presents reproductions of 12 of Blake's images in its *Surinam* display. The illustrations are iconic representations of the conditions of enslavement and are found in numerous museums including the NMAAHC. It should also be noted that at the time of Dutch control, the English spelling of the country was "Surinam," which is also how Kura Hulanda titles its exhibition. The spelling was changed to Suriname in 1978. Where the exhibition is referenced here, it will be spelled as presented in Kura Hulanda; references to the nation will follow the current convention.

<sup>5</sup> As noted, the ABC islands were declared part of the Catholic Diocese of Coro during Spanish occupation, and despite an early ban by the WIC, Catholic priests were permitted to work on Curacao beginning in 1690 (Fouse 2002). Of great importance was the priests' willingness to minister to the enslaved Africans in Papiamentu. The Catholic church remained influential until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Dutch rethought their approach to the increasingly influential free Afro-Curaçaoan population. Dutch Protestant clergy were then sent to Curacao in an effort to more closely control the Christianization of enslaved people and free Afro-Curaçaoans. Dutch clergy would go on to produce numerous evangelical texts in Papiamentu, some of the earliest Papiamentu writings (Jacobs 2013).

<sup>6</sup> The Museo Tula does have a small placard explaining that Afro-Curaçaoan culture was born of the cultural intermixing that occurred between the enslaved and the minority White population, including the speaking of Papiamentu by White slave holders.

<sup>7</sup> Relexification is the process through which the vocabulary of a language is largely replaced by that of another language, without altering the original language's grammar (Matthews 2007).

<sup>8</sup> The version on display in Kura Hulanda appears to be a French translation of the original diagram, but its origination and how it came to be chosen for display in the Museum are not currently known.

<sup>9</sup> Due to the vastness of the Museum, as well as the specific pertinence of this issue in the *Slave Trade* exhibit, analysis of the use of the term "slave" was limited to the writings found in the displays in the *Slave Trade* exhibit.

<sup>10</sup> This count refers to the number of placards or panels on which the term appears. Many of the writings include the term numerous times, but the review was not for a word count, but rather the number of writings on which it occurred irrespective of the number of times it appears in each particular placard.

<sup>11</sup> For example, a webpage provided for the African Studies Centre at the University of Leiden still employs the term "slave" (see "Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and abolition," University of Leiden, at <https://www.ascleiden.nl/content/webdossiers/dutch-involvement-transatlantic-slave-trade-and-abolition>, accessed January 3, 2020). The National Institute of Dutch Slavery Past and Heritage (NiNsee), in its interactive website intended for youth educational purposes, addresses the debate head-on, acknowledging the differing perspectives along with the absence of a Dutch word equivalent to "enslaved" (See "Word Use Accountability," Slavery and You, at <https://www.slavernijennij.nl/verantwoording-woordgebruik/>, accessed January 3, 2020).

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The significance of representations regarding the African experience during the slavery era and beyond go to the very core of race relations in modern Dutch society, the roots of which are derived from ideologies developed during Dutch colonialism and involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, and continue to pervade in Dutch society (Weiner 2014a; Essed and Hoving 2014).

Dutch society has long overlooked and ignored its colonial past, with generation after generation lacking basic understanding and knowledge of the Dutch role in transatlantic slavery, much less possessing the tools by which to assess its lasting impacts. This is due, at least in some part, to a historical absence of education on the subject in Dutch (and Dutch Caribbean) schools. Weiner's (2014b) study of Dutch primary school history textbooks published since 1980 found they feature a "Eurocentric master narrative within the unique context of the Dutch history of social forgetting of slavery and scientific colonialism" (330). Additionally, although Dutch participation in the transatlantic slave trade is now part of the national school curriculum, teachers are afforded discretion in determining how they handle the subject matter (NiNsee 2018). Succinctly, there has been, and continues to be, a large scale ignoring and silencing of African perspectives in Dutch educational systems that lays the groundwork for persistent social forgetting and marginalizing of non-White populations.

Interviews of Kura Hulanda staff confirmed that this same void in educational programs is present on the ABC islands. They echoed the lack of education provided in schools on Curaçao and Bonaire regarding the Dutch involvement in the slave trade, Curaçao's role in the slave trade, as well as an absence of African and Afro-Curaçaoan narratives in primary and secondary schools.

Kura Hulanda is uniquely situated to provide some degree of counterpoise and balance to the Dutch void of recognition of its colonial legacies and the voices of the African descendant community. Its location in the heart of the Dutch Caribbean slave trade brings visitors out of the European bubble front and center to the heart of Dutch slavery. The Museum houses many artifacts associated with the narratives identified by scholars as overlooked, ignored, or purposefully unacknowledged. As such, the Museum is uniquely positioned to play a powerful role in educating White European Netherlanders and others about a past that the nation wants to, and has, collectively forgotten.

A guiding example is the NMAAHC. With respect to the design and construction of the narratives and themes at the NMAAHC, founding director Lonnie Bunch has said that whether White or Black, Americans should feel that the story presented in the museum is their story. The NMAAHC “forces white visitors to own uncomfortable memories of American whiteness” (Landsberg 2018: 209). Kura Hulanda also does this for White Dutch visitors. Visitor responses, as reported by Museum personnel, reflect a deep emotional response to the Museum’s displays. Many White Dutch visitors emerge from the Museum remarking “I feel ashamed to be Dutch right now” (Interview of Participant No. 3, July 18, 2018). Many people are emotional, even crying, in response to learning about the Dutch role in slavery (Interview of Participant No. 1, July 18, 2018).

Online reviews of the Museum reflect its effect on Dutch visitors, as well. One Dutch visitor from Nunspeet writes,

“‘Hollands Glorie turns into shame’....you become increasingly aware that our golden age also has very black edges. It touched us deeply. Our guide, historian, explained in a very penetrating way that this museum wants to warn, also for the racist expressions that we now see in our society and that the lack of respect for our fellow human beings can lead to.”

Another from Amersfoort reflects, “At a certain point you walk around with place as

substitute [*sic*] shame when you read and see what the Dutch have done. They are lessons that have been learned and should never be forgotten.” And a visitor from Leiden acknowledges the lack of Dutch education, writing “This museum is an absolute must. The history that we know so poorly is well illustrated here. Very confronting. Shocking at times. But most of all with respect.”

Many other Dutch visitors similarly described in online reviews their reactions to the Museum and its intense impact. But to fully realize this impact likely requires a more explicit recognition of the lasting impacts on Dutch success and prosperity than what appears in the Museum currently. In an effort to assist the Museum in identifying approaches to rethinking exhibit spaces, displays, and narratives in the Museum, a brief report outlining more specific suggestions will be provided to the Museum in tandem with this thesis.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In the context of my survey of the Museum, my research uncovered more questions than it answered. Of perhaps most significance is to discover why the local community is not interested in the Museum. It is possible, as many have cited in other contexts, that the posture of the Museum and its displays is perceived as showing enslaved Africans (and by extension, their descendants) as victims. Or, perhaps the Museum is perceived to evoke sympathy from White visitors instead of recognition. It may also be that the local community does not see itself empowered by the Museum, represented as resilient, resourceful, and autonomous, or as anything more than the status of “slave.” These are questions that exceed the scope of the present research, but which are critical to advancing the mission of Kura Hulanda.

That said, my analysis of the Museum’s displays reveals that the local community is simply not represented in the Museum’s universal story of slavery. As noted previously, while the presentations do generally comport with the Museum’s stated mission to exhibit collections, the

collections are not connected to the “cultural identity of the people of Curacao, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic Rim.” Despite the engaged local Museum staff, the lack of African and Afro-Caribbean voices, narratives, and artifacts, and the lasting legacy of a founder who has been perceived as divisive and “too colonial” (Smeulders 2009: 111), complicate the Museum’s connection to the local community. This disconnect, when coupled with the still-contested history of Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and persisting racial divisions in the Netherlands, suggests that local voices could contribute significantly to establishing more Curaçaoan-based narratives in the Museum. These local stories could not only increase the Museum’s appeal to the local community, but they may also serve to better inform visiting tourists not only about the global history of slavery, but also the lives of the enslaved and the lasting impacts of the transatlantic slave trade on both the European and Caribbean Netherlands.

Accordingly, I suggest that a directed effort to engage the local community, both those of African and of Dutch descent, is a reasonable next phase of research geared toward enabling the Museum to augment and evolve its displays and exhibitions in ways that will provide the local community a voice in the Museum and its presentations, and enable engagement with African and Afro-Curaçaoan heritage.

Museum theory and curatorial practices are increasingly calling for engagement of local communities in the production and presentation of heritage. Doing so can bring significant benefits to both the community and the Museum, including increasing knowledge, awareness, and interest in local and national history; creating access to knowledge to the community from the Museum and vice versa; allowing for exploration of individual connections to history and heritage; instilling pride and ownership in the community’s heritage; promoting a stronger sense of Afro-Curaçaoan identity; providing discursive spaces for the community to explore its heritage; and providing voice

and validation to the community (see Boehm 2015).

In seeking to mediate historical imbalances in power and the creation of knowledge, an engagement of the constituent communities whose heritage is presented can be impactful (see e.g., Smith, et al. 2011; Sandell 1998; Smith, 2011). Furthermore, critical anthropological evaluation and participation can be key in ensuring counterpoint to the “authorial voice” that predominates in the authorized heritage discourse, in effectively framing community participation through a broader socio-cultural understanding, and in meaningfully uncovering power discrepancies (Uzwiak 2016).

For the past few decades, heritage and museum professionals, among others, have looked to engage with local communities and under-served audiences in an effort to redistribute and alter power dynamics that have historically predominated museum exhibit-making, heritage presentation, and interpretation (Smith 2011, citing Crooke 2007: 42-63). The increased focus on the relationships between museums and their communities has led to a widespread reassessment by museums of their roles and functions (Boehm 2015). As Smith and Fouseki note, “[t]he power to represent, educate, and shape ‘collective values and social understandings’ is often defined as the *raison d’être* of museums” (Smith and Fouseki 2011: 98, citing Timothy Luke cited in Watson 2007:1), and the well-documented ability of museums to govern or regulate the social values and attitudes that define community identities arises out of power based in authority of expertise, rationality, and assumed neutrality (98). Critical reflection by museum professionals and academics, however, has led to the recognition that not only is the redistribution of power in museum-making necessary, but that community engagement and consultation are effective means by which to do so (Smith and Fouseki 2011; Smith 2011; Havisser 2015a; Havisser 2015b; Boehm 2015).

“Public outreach is required to break down the intellectual barriers often created by a Western approach which places the professional researcher superior to the subjects of the research” (Haviser 2015b:134). In other words, in order to overcome the authorized heritage discourse, it is incumbent on museums, heritage and history professionals, and other similarly-situated professionals, to employ tools such as community engagement and participation.

UNESCO has also recognized the necessity for engaging local communities, as set forth in its Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). Specifically, the Convention recognizes “that communities, in particular indigenous communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals, play an important role in the production, safeguarding, maintenance and re-creation of the intangible cultural heritage” and thus, calls for party nations to “endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management” (UNESCO ICH 2020).

Museums in the formerly colonized Dutch Caribbean, including Kura Hulanda, can reap significant benefit from engaging the local community. In his work in the Dutch Caribbean, Haviser (2015a) has noted that if Caribbean people themselves are not involved in constructing their own stories of heritage, others will surely do so, often following colonial legacies and biases (244). His research in St. Maarten indicates further, not surprisingly, that members of current Caribbean communities respond more to personally relevant accounts of past cultural lives (244). Where his team neglected to tease out the relevance of artifacts to the community, and rather focused only on material culture and archival evidence, the locals were generally disinterested and disconnected (247).

Consulting and engaging with communities can happen on multiple levels and through

various means. For example, in preparation for creating a “Slavery and the Natural World” project during Britain’s bicentenary of its abolition of the slave trade, the Natural History Museum, London, consulted with communities of those who self-identified as being of African-Caribbean heritage as well as non-African Britons. In discussion sessions, they utilized brainstorming and concept maps to better understand the participants’ knowledge and opinions, held open group discussions, questionnaires, informal meetings, and testing and trial runs of content to gauge participant reaction (120-21).

More engaged approaches by which community participants take part directly in research, curation, or creation can include participation in archival, archaeological, or genealogical research of specific local histories and cultures; encouragement of local youth programs in heritage research; empowering public participation in heritage exhibition and research to develop localized themes and relevant local perspectives; and emphasis on intangible heritage that incorporates local dance, music, art, and food (Haviser 2015b: 256-57).

One of the most significant means by which local communities can be engaged in the museum-making process is through the recording of oral histories. This has proved successful in another of Curaçao’s museums, Savonet, which utilizes audio-visual concepts and artifacts to tell the stories of the former inhabitants of the Savonet Landhuis (plantation) (Figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3). As Jackson instructs through her work in the United States, incorporating narratives of the descendants of enslaved Africans, particularly in the context of specific families and communities, can actively contribute to the production of knowledge about plantations and to new ways of presenting these spaces (Jackson 2011). Savonet provides an instructive example of how these voices can be incorporated into presentations in Curaçao.





Figure 5.1. Audio-visual display in Savonet Museum Curaçao. Photo by author.

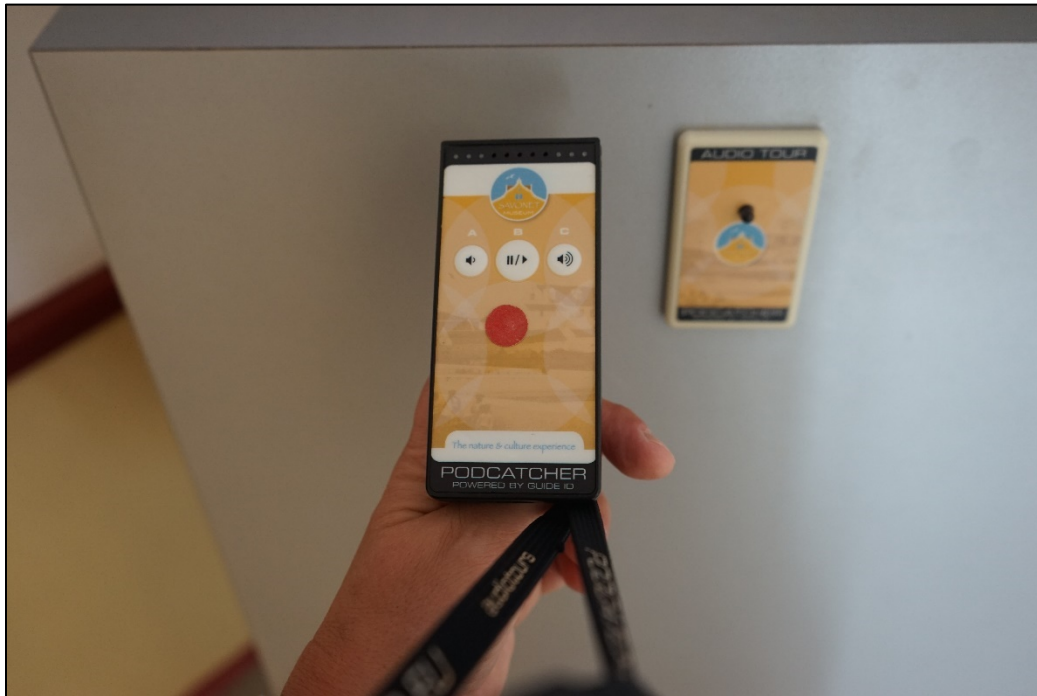


Figure 5.2. “Podcatcher” audio-visual device in Savonet Museum Curaçao. The device interfaces with video screens throughout the Museum to provide audio in the user’s chosen language. Photo by author.



Figure 5.3. Video presentation of oral history provided by Curaçaoan man of African descent, Savonet Museum Curaçao. Photo by author.

## Conclusion

Presenting a history of slavery that resonates with multiple audiences and serves necessary educational goals, while still creating sufficient appeal to attract visitors and remain sustainable is no doubt a gargantuan task. The Museum Kura Hulanda finds itself in an unenviable position of maintaining a vast collection compiled by its founder, navigating the complexities of the 400-year legacy of Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, and sustaining its position within the local business and tourist economy of Curaçao. The Museum is staffed by a group of genuinely engaged, qualified, and dedicated local people to whom these challenges fall, and who must also evaluate the Museum's lasting legacy and purpose in light of the recent death of Mr. Dekker. In accordance with the affiliation with the Museum, a copy of this thesis, a report of recommendations, the artifact inventory, and museum maps will be provided to the Museum Director in hopes that these observations may assist the Museum in evaluating how the heritage and history of Africans, Afro-Curaçaoans, and Dutch people can best be presented in the context of the displays at Kura Hulanda.

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**APPENDIX A:**

**University of South Florida Institutional Review Board Exempt Certification**



**RESEARCH INTEGRITY & COMPLIANCE**  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd, MDC35, Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 FAX (813) 974-7091

8/13/2019

April Min  
Anthropology



Tampa, FL 33619

RE: **Exempt Certification**

IRB#: Pro00037259

Title: Museum Kura Hulanda: Community Engagement in the Production  
and Presentation of African and Dutch Heritage in Curaçao

Dear Ms. Min:

On 8/8/2019, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that your research meets criteria for exemption from the federal regulations as outlined by 45 CFR 46.104(d):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests(cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

## Appendix A: University of South Florida Institutional Review Board Exempt Certification

As the principal investigator for this study, it is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted as outlined in your application and consistent with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report and with USF HRPP policies and procedures.

Please note, as per USF HRPP Policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in ARC. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant an Amendment or new application.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subjects research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristen Salomon', followed by a horizontal line.

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D.,  
Chairperson USF Institutional  
Review Board

## APPENDIX B:

### Excerpt from “Report and Recommendations to the Museum Kura Hulanda”

*Slave Trade*  
Building 3A  
Room 1b  
Case 6

Photos 2963-68

In this display case, a modern printing of *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) is displayed, paired with a trilingual placard containing a quote from Equiano’s book describing the treatment of enslaved Black people and White people on a slave ship during the Middle Passage. There is also an unidentified statue artifact in the case, placed next to the book.

Paired with these objects is a placard with a singular statement that the Dutch Reformed Church used Scripture to defend slavery. And finally, there is another placard containing quoted passages of the Christian Bible apparently used to justify slavery. The placard notes that the quotes are found in a book mislabeled as “Scriptural Views in Favor of Slavery, Randolph 1856.” The book is actually *Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery*, written by Thornton Stringfellow, a Virginia pastor who supported slavery, and was published in Richmond, Virginia by J.W. Randolph, 1856.

This collection of items lacks cohesiveness and could be confusing to visitors. First, the items originate from at least three different geographic areas. The Equiano book (one of the few narratives written by an enslaved person), was written by Equiano after he purchased his freedom and settled in England. The Stringfellow book was written by a Virginia pastor advocating the continuation of slavery in the United States. And the remaining placard mentions religious justification for slavery in the Netherlands. Each of these items could warrant individual discussion and treatment but collecting them together without further explanation as to how they might be related, if at all, is problematic. Additionally, it is unclear whether the statue is an artifact or merely decorative. If information is known, a placard describing its origin and providing some explanation of its relevance would be helpful.