

DISCOURSES ON CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART

*AN EXPLORATION OF DISCOURSES ON CONTEMPORARY ART CREATED BY ARTISTS
FROM THE AFRICAN CONTINENT IN DUTCH MUSEUM PUBLICATIONS OF THE PAST TEN
YEARS*

Student name: Heleen Dijkhuizen

Student number: 581705

Supervisor: dr. E. Clark

MA Arts, Culture and Society

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master Thesis

18 June 2021

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the discourses surrounding contemporary art created by artists from the African continent. As we now live in a society in which on the one hand there is still an institutional legacy of colonialism, while on the other hand there are active processes of decolonisation. In these public debates, museums have power over the dominant discourse in society and are thus not neutral institutions. This research answers the question of which themes emerge in ethnographic and art museum discourses about contemporary art created by artists from the African continent as found in Dutch museum publications of the last ten years, and what this might indicate regarding changing meanings and interpretations of this art in Dutch society. Critical Discourse Analysis was used to analyse museum publications of the past ten years to uncover power dynamics and structural inequalities in the language that is used to describe, frame and perceive African art. In order to gain a second layer of understanding, five conversations were held with (ex) museum practitioners and scholars with expertise on the topic.

The main findings of the thesis are threefold. Firstly, the importance of which perspective is used when talking about the topic at hand, what is erased from the narrative or described in unclear language, and who has been given the power to speak about what. Secondly, the presence of lingering problematic language such as generalisations about Africa, Othering discourses and the casual use of dichotomies. Thirdly, the use of reflective language and discourse on decolonisation by museums. Museums have taken some important steps in the past ten years, as Othering discourses and other instances of problematic language were rarely found in the data. Decolonisation is concerned with researching the foundations of the production of knowledge and questioning and rejecting colonial histories and discourses. This is an active process that needs constant attention. The findings suggest that these changes are happening, but that decolonisation is far from complete. Although language plays a crucial role in this, as it can be a tool for inclusion and exclusion, the foundations of how Dutch museums think about contemporary African art have to be changed for structural power inequalities to be dismantled.

KEYWORDS: Contemporary African art, Critical Discourse Analysis, museums, Othering, decolonisation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| ABSTRACT | 2 |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | 3 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | 5 |
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 6 |
| 1.1 ON CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART | 7 |
| 2. LITERATURE REVIEW | 9 |
| 2.1 MUSEUMS AS SITES OF POWER..... | 9 |
| 2.2 OTHERING DISCOURSES..... | 11 |
| 2.3 ART FROM AFRICAN ARTISTS IN THE NETHERLANDS PRIOR TO 1980 | 13 |
| 2.4 CRITICAL TURN IN THE LATE 1980S AND ITS AFTERMATH | 15 |
| 2.5 DECOLONISATION OF THE MUSEUM | 18 |
| 2.6 SUB CONCLUSION AND EXPECTATIONS | 22 |
| 3. METHODOLOGY | 23 |
| 3.1 SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION: MUSEUM TEXTS | 24 |
| 3.2 ADDITIONAL DATA: CONVERSATIONS WITH EXPERTS | 25 |
| 3.3 OPERATIONALISATION..... | 26 |
| 3.4 CODING AND ANALYSIS | 28 |
| 4. RESULTS | 30 |
| 4.1 VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES | 30 |
| 4.1.1 <i>Whose voice is heard?</i> | 31 |
| 4.1.2 <i>Erasure and European perspectives</i> | 33 |
| 4.1.3 <i>The framing of Dutch wax prints</i> | 34 |
| 4.2 LINGERING PROBLEMATIC LANGUAGE | 36 |
| 4.2.1 <i>Generalisations about Africa</i> | 36 |
| 4.2.2 <i>Problematic vocabularies</i> | 36 |
| 4.2.3 <i>Othering discourses</i> | 37 |
| 4.2.4 <i>Discovery narrative</i> | 38 |
| 4.3 DECOLONIAL LANGUAGE | 39 |
| 4.4 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESULTS..... | 41 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 4.4.1 <i>Voices and perspectives</i> | 41 |
| 4.4.2 <i>Change of language</i> | 42 |
| 4.4.3 <i>Decolonialisation and criticism</i> | 43 |
| 5. CONCLUSION | 45 |
| 5.1 LIMITATIONS | 47 |
| 5.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH | 47 |
| 6. REFERENCES | 49 |
| 7. APPENDICES | 53 |
| A. OVERVIEW OF PRIMARY DATA..... | 53 |
| B. CODEBOOK | 55 |
| C. CODETREE | 57 |
| D. OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS..... | 58 |
| E. INFORMED CONSENT FORM | 59 |
| F. CONVERSATION GUIDE | 62 |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This master thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of certain important people. I would first and foremost like to thank my thesis supervisor Dr. Emily Clark, who provided me not only with invaluable feedback and expertise, but also a sense of optimism and trust that kept me going during this unusual time to write a master thesis. Although I enjoyed our bi-weekly Zoom meetings a great deal, I am still up for a coffee meeting in the future.

Secondly, I must send a special thank you to Pauline Burmann of African Arts and Theory for letting me explore her library to collect the vast majority of my data. This thesis would not have been possible without her help and kindness and I am most grateful for that. Finding such an authority on this topic who is also willing to help and think along with me, was truly a pleasure. Her important work and fascinating stories became an inspiration during the writing of this thesis.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my friends for the academic guidance, moral support and coffee breaks in the library. Being able to share our stressful and frustrating experiences, but also moments of joy and success, truly kept me going. Thank you as well to the special people in my life outside of academia, for distracting me with something to smile about, you know who you are. Finally, but most importantly, I want to thank my parents for always supporting and encouraging me in both my academic and life endeavours. This research project and the five years at university leading up to this moment would not have been possible without you.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the art world has been dominated by public debate, academic research, media attention and social activism surrounding representation and post-colonialism. While articles and reports are published about the restitution of colonially looted objects in the possession of European nations and ethnographic museums, institutions across the cultural sector are condemned for the lack of representation and inclusion in the staff and audiences. The “Western” definition of the modern and contemporary art canon is increasingly questioned and media pay close attention to how art is exhibited in museums.

Recently there has been a slightly rising interest in contemporary art created by artists from the African continent or the African diaspora, which is part of a wider critical turn in the interest in art from artists who were previously located in the margins of the art world (Banks, 2018). In the Netherlands, there are a few galleries that specialise in (contemporary) non-Western art, but established museums are hardly exhibiting African artists (Veldkamp, 2007). Contemporary research on the Othering of Africa and its diaspora in Western museum practices analyses how the curational approaches to the display and interpretation of African art and art from the African diaspora have changed over time in Western art institutions. Case studies in Britain and France have demonstrated how art with African provenance has been subject to discursive practices of Othering in both ethnographic and fine art contexts (Dixon, 2016). At the same time, as society is starting processes of decolonisation, museums are also part of this movement and are revisiting their collections and researching problematic discourses. These two coexisting discourses of Othering and decolonisation of African art in museums has led to the following research question:

What themes emerge in ethnographic and art museum discourses about contemporary art created by artists from the African continent as found in Dutch museum publications of the last ten years, and what might this indicate regarding changing meanings and interpretations of this art in Dutch society?

This thesis will give new academic insights into the discourses surrounding contemporary art created by artists from the African continent, by contextualising them in a history of knowledge about exhibition practices and discourses in museums. As the research surrounding this specific topic is relatively scarce, this reinforces the academic relevance of this thesis. This research will add to the current societal debate about representation and the heritage of colonialism in society and art institutions. The research question will be investigated through the qualitative method of Critical Discourse Analysis of museum

publications, as well as conversations and reflections with museum professionals and authorities on contemporary African art.

This thesis is structured into four parts. First, the literature review will draw from broad scholarship on power and discourse in museum practices, theories on Otherness and contemporary debates on the decolonisation of the museum. This will be illustrated by the changing history of exhibitions and discourses surrounding contemporary African art in Dutch museums. Then, the methods of this thesis will be introduced, containing a detailed explanation of the sampling of museum publications, the framework for Critical Discourse Analysis and the additional data of conversations with experts. After the methodology, the results of the analysis are presented in three distinct but complex themes which correspond with the three scholarly discussions of the literature review; voices and perspectives, lingering problematic language, and critical language. This is followed by a concluding discussion about the meanings, relevance and implications of the results, as well as limitations and suggestions for further research.

1.1 ON CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART

Before discussing the discourse surrounding contemporary African art, it is important to establish what exactly is encompassed by that term. The book “Contemporary African Art Since 1980” by Okwui Enwezor and Chica Okeke-Agulu was the first major survey of contemporary African art and artists, spanning over thirty years. The authors acknowledge that the terms “African art” or “African artist” can be disabling labels because Africa has long been marginalised and seen as a place of limited institutional and artistic power (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009, p. 11). Indeed, the book made up for the period in which there was no attention for contemporary African art, but critics contested the work because of the “implicit, ethnocentric, culture-essentialistic character” of it (Bouwhuis, 2014b, p. 1). The art of 54 heterogeneous countries simply cannot be described and introduced to the world in one book. Furthermore, it has historically been difficult to define modern or contemporary African art, as the boundaries between different types of visual media did not always fit the categories of Western Europe. In the first instances of the collecting and exhibiting of “non-traditional” African art, (Dutch) museums were debating what constituted modern or contemporary art. Some of the art found in different African countries was from autodidactic artists or made for commercial purposes, such as hand-painted movie posters in Ghana and Nigeria (Faber et al., 2011).

For the sake of this thesis, only discourse on art from artists from the African continent is used and the diasporas and Afro-communities are not taken into analysis. In the scholarly tradition, African art is seen as “sub-Saharan expressive culture”, while art produced by Northern Africans is ordinarily not considered African art but is assigned the label “Arab or Islamic” (Francis, 2013). Not only the term “African” but also the term “art” is somewhat problematic here, as it has historically excluded non-Western artists and has been built on colonial foundations. This will be further explored in the literature review.

The immense diversity of art from Africa cannot be contained in one term. Because this thesis is about discourse and language and their meanings, I strive to use terms such as “contemporary art created by artists from the African continent” where possible. This thesis thus does not aim to determine the correct or incorrect ways to talk or think about the objects and artists in question, as these ideas are constantly shifting and are driven by a multivalent discussion from many different voices with different positionalities. Rather, this thesis aims to identify and describe both progressive and conservative elements in museum discourses in order to contribute to a better understanding of what is happening or not happening in museums in the recent past, and perhaps make suggestions for the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

“The only place in history allowed for the artists of other cultures and their works is as a footnote to the development of art in the West” (Karp, 1991, p. 13).

The history of knowledge of African art in “Western” art institutions is a history that is defined by colonial relations, orientalisering (Said, 2003) and Othering discourses. Drawing from broad scholarship on postcolonialism, otherness and power relations in museum practices, this review will establish changes over time in the exhibition histories and discourses of Dutch ethnographic and fine art museums surrounding art from the African continent. First, museums will be established as sites of power, which, when presuming neutrality, will exclude and include certain people and cultures in processes of Othering. This will then be illustrated by the exhibition history of art from the African continent in Dutch museums prior to 1980 and the explanation of a critical turn in the two decades that followed and what this meant for Dutch museums. While the data of this research draws from the past ten years, evidence from older publications is included in this discussion, to connect it to the review of literature. The chapter will end with the development of decolonisation in the museum world and establish the contemporary context of this thesis research.

2.1 MUSEUMS AS SITES OF POWER

Through the exhibitions they curate and the objects they collect, museums display the world to their audiences and shape their collective knowledge about it. Museums “tell us about who we are, who other people are and how we came to be in the situation we are now” (Crang, 2003, p. 256). These institutions are part of our social memory and tell and retell the stories of who we are as people. However, museums develop the narrative and discourse on art and this is generally the dominant narrative in society. Because this often happens in the “back” regions of the museum, the public passively absorbs the exhibition as facts when the chosen narrative is exhibited (Crang, 2003). The authority that museums possess to decide what gets exhibited and collected and whose stories and versions of history get told, makes them biased authorities in society. Indeed, museums cannot make claims of neutrality and universality because every choice in representation and curation is a political choice about which of many possible stories are told (Jones, 1993). Thus, museums are sites of power (Pieterse, 1997).

When discussing museums as sites of power, it is almost impossible to circumvent the influence of Michel Foucault, who has been a key figure in the study of knowledge, power and discourse. Although he remains known for his work on the history of sexuality and disciplinary power, he is also acknowledged for his influence on theories of race and postcolonialism (Rangan & Chow, 2013). Foucault argued that knowledge is always a form of power and that the *effectiveness* of power/knowledge had to be central, rather than if that knowledge was true or not (Hall, 2013b). In other words, in his study of the production of knowledge and meaning through discourse, he did not treat discourse as a merely linguistic concept, but as a phenomenon that encompasses a system of statements, texts, actions and sources at a particular time. Discourse gives meaning to the language a society uses to talk about a topic and take action, and thus this concept attempts to bridge the gap between what one says (language) and what one does (practice) (Hall, 2013b). In the case that certain discursive elements all belong to the same object or event, they belong to the same *discursive practice*. As Foucault situated much of his research in history, this is connected to his idea that certain truths or systems of meaning only gain societal acceptance in certain historical contexts.

Foucault's notions on power/knowledge and discourse relate to the role of museums in society. They are places of power and with the knowledge they possess, they define certain discourses about people, arts and culture. They create and distribute knowledge about the objects in their collections and displays, specifically through discourse in the form of research, display plaques, curator talks and publications. Taking a Foucauldian approach, Macdonald argues that power and knowledge are thoroughly connected, as "power is involved in the construction of truths, and knowledge has implications for power (Macdonald, 2010, p. 3). Indeed, the power of museums is involved with the construction of truths about art and culture, and that knowledge has implications for power. It is important to explore these distributions of power within a museum setting and ask questions about who gains or loses power by certain display modes, who is excluded, or who has authority in the making of an exhibition. This approach can lead to insights about how power is distributed in a museum between makers, exhibitions and audiences and what this entails and enables (Macdonald, 2010).

2.2 OTHERING DISCOURSES

One of the expressions of power asymmetries in museums is the practice of *Othering*. Explicitly or implicitly referring to someone or something as “Other” is founded in asymmetric binaries which distinguish between the more and less powerful person or object (Dixon, 2016). In these binaries, there is always a power relation. When one talks about white/black, men/women, the Self and the Other, one of these has more power than the other (Hall, 2013a). In these binaries, perspective matters, as they are typically shaped by the dominant side of the distinction, the group in power. Museums and their discourses are built on dichotomies between the self and the other, the coloniser and the colonised, the Occident and the Orient, in which the museum is aligned with the dominant perspective in the dichotomy. Within the context of this thesis, Othering specifically refers to the way Africa, Africans and art by African artists are (historically) framed as being inferior to the art world, culture and canon of “the West”.

Edward Said laid the foundations of this critique by stating that the Orient is a cultural construction created by the Occident (the West) and *Orientalism* is a framework and a way of thinking about the Orient. His development of European colonising powers diminishing and exoticising cultures from Africa, Central and South America, Asia, the Middle East and Oceania as the Other is the foundation of understanding the notion of othering and otherness in different contexts (Dixon, 2016). Said argued that the Orient was not a geographical or ontological place, but rather a discursive one. East and West constitute each other as categories and form a dialectical pair wherein each is “oriented” by the other (Said, 2003).

Stuart Hall (1992) explores the rise and effects of the concept of “the West” in his research “the West and the Rest”. According to him, “[...] “the West” is a *historical*, not a geographical, construct” (Hall, 1992, p. 186). With the West, or Western, we mean a developed, modern and industrialised society. This concept functions firstly as a structure to categorise societies, secondly as a set of images that represents things, thirdly as a model of comparison and a way to explain difference, and fourthly it provides criteria of evaluation and functions as an ideology (Hall, 1992). Thus, the meaning of the West is based on a binarism, as we construct it as an (imagined) place that is developed and modern, while simultaneously creating the non-West/rest/Other/Orient as a place that is unable to develop itself. These dichotomies mutually constitute each other as categories.

In the museum context, exhibitions are often designed for, and by, a white, middle class, heterosexual, male Dutch/Western audience and the museum assumes that the audience

does not share history or heritage with the cultures on display (Modest & Lelijveld, 2018, p. 82). James Clifford (1997) introduces the museum as a *contact zone*, whereby he refers to a space of colonial encounters, where social distances are met in the museum. He challenges the role of museums in displaying Other cultures, in which they should not be neutral, but introduce political debates and negotiations, which are part of the contact work of museums. Often, museum objects do not only belong to the museum but also to stakeholders such as the original creators or owners and their descendants, from whom the objects were often taken without permission, which was the usual procedure for historical collecting practices. He introduces case studies about mostly small tribal museums in North America, but also challenges the big institutions to rethink their collection and curatorial practices (Clifford, 1997).

Ethnographic museums have historically collected and exhibited objects and narratives of “Other” peoples and cultures for “Western” audiences. Their origins lie in the colonial exhibitions of the late 19th century, in which “imperial hierarchies” were on display (Pieterse, 1997, p. 123). The people residing in colonised places, including Africa, were often contrasted with Western, non-European societies and were thought to be “exotic” or “primitive”. When Europeans collected objects from Africa for ethnographic purposes during colonialism, they were stripped from their context. In Africa, they might have been “just” objects with different uses: cooking, religious rituals, decoration or other purposes. The origin of its production and utilisation was irrelevant for its scientific classification and taxonomic description (Fabian, 2004). These objects only became “Other” when they were collected and displayed and used to tell stories about people and cultures outside of Europe. Thus, ethnographic museums do not reflect natural distinctions, but they create cultural ones (Lidchi, 2013). Not only did these museums constitute "the Other," but as this is part of a dichotomy, by creating the Other, ethnographic museums also created and reinforced the identity and history of the West. Through visual and discursive framings of non-Western objects as primitive and exotic, museums helped to construct a story of an advanced and modern West that benevolently "helped" the people of its colonies to achieve semblances of modernity.

Karp analyses how a museum, as an “arena of discourse” (1991, p. 11), defines the art and culture of the Other, namely by exoticising and assimilating their Otherness. Through exoticising cultures, not only the differences between cultures are portrayed, but also the similarities. By displaying the sameness, the exoticness of the Others is understood; the

differences are highlighted by the absence of the qualities of the dominant culture. Even when stressing the “positive” sides of Otherness, such as describing Africans as being close to nature or more group-oriented, their lack of the qualities that the Western man possesses, is highlighted. Exoticising can also be done by inverting the familiar; showing how something familiar is done differently by the Other. On the other hand, assimilating strategies are harder to recognise, as they speak to what the audience sees as familiar or natural. Othering through assimilating can be done by isolating the Other culture and stripping it from its cultural contexts, motives and resources, or placing it in a different context. For instance, by displaying “traditional” or “classical” African art next to “Western” modern art, one strips away the cultural context of the artefacts (Karp, 1991).

2.3 ART FROM AFRICAN ARTISTS IN THE NETHERLANDS PRIOR TO 1980

These frameworks and dynamics of othering, power and discourse, can be seen in the history of exhibiting objects of African origin in the Netherlands. In the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the image of Africa and simultaneously African art was still exotic, undeveloped and primitive and was only exhibited in ethnographic (or colonial) museums. It was not until after the Second World War that the art museums in the Netherlands started gaining interest in art from the African continent. This was characterised by a change in perspective by Europeans as understanding African art not only as ethnographic objects, but perhaps also as objects of aesthetic and artistic value, yet still not befitting the Western category of “modern art”.

Dutch museums started exhibiting this on a small scale with exhibitions such as “Hedendaagse Negerkunst uit Centraal Afrika” (“Contemporary Negro Art from Central Africa”) in 1957 in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Haags Gemeentemuseum, and Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde¹. Interestingly, this was a collaboration of an ethnographic museum together with fine art museums. The exhibition “Hedendaagse Schilders uit Zuid-Afrika” (“Contemporary Painters from South Africa”) in 1958 could also be seen in various art museums across the Netherlands.

¹ The Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde changed its name to Wereldmuseum in 2000.

In the “Hedendaagse Schilders uit Zuid-Afrika” catalogue from 1957, different uses of vocabulary and linguistic sentiment stand out. The discourse is defined by a curiosity for, but also by a superiority towards the African continent and its artists. Africa is still seen as an undeveloped place, while the white, Dutch man is presented as to teach the African people how to paint, sculpt and etch. When describing the artists, the author states: “actually, all of the exhibited works in these main departments come from the young negroes, and namely the “évolués” (“developed”)”² (Italiaander, 1957, p. 2). There is excessive use of colonial language and problematic vocabulary, for example by always emphasising that the art is made by non-white/non-European people: “the etches at this exhibition are the first negro-etches, that were ever made in Africa”³ (Italiaander, 1957, p. 2). The importance of “tribes” is also emphasised, and there are comparisons of African people with prehistoric people. A sentence that stands out is “Art is always the mirror of the soul of a race”⁴ (Italiaander, 1957, p. 3), indicating that views on art were motivated by theories and views on the hierarchies of racial groups. The usage of Othering discourses was dominant in 1957 and the differences between the Netherlands/Europe and Central Africa were emphasised as much as possible. There was a perhaps genuine curiosity and even appreciation for the art, but the discourse at the time suggests that this came from a patronising and racist motivation.

In this example, the art is framed in ways that reflect wider social discourses and means of understanding difference. During this time, the prevalence of *Social Darwinism* in society can be perceived in museum discourses as well. Social Darwinism provided a world view that legitimised the exploitation, mass murder and subjugation of indigenous peoples during colonialism. In a sense, the natural sciences that Darwinism was based in, extended and mutated into a social concept. The specificity of Social Darwinism was the fact that it was mapping racial discourse into the identification of what was “fitness” and “intelligence” and especially linking this to whiteness (Claeys, 2000). According to this ideological framework, European colonisers felt as if they were fulfilling their duty as the “superior” race (Dafler, 2005). Because Social Darwinism permeated the social and political discourse, this was also extended to how society thought about the culture and art of these “inferior” races. In turn,

² “trouwens alle in deze hoofdafdelingen tentoongestelde werken zijn afkomstig van jonge negers, en wel van de „évolués” („ontwikkelden”)”

³ “De etsen op deze tentoonstelling zijn de allereerste neger-etsen, die ooit in Afrika gemaakt zijn”

⁴ “Kunst is altijd de spiegel van de ziel van een ras.”

their art and culture were seen as inferior and on a different standard than European civilisation and artistic expression.

Until this point, only the othering practices and exhibition histories of ethnographic museums have been discussed. This is because the interest of fine art museums for African art (at least in the Netherlands) was virtually non-existent. It was seen as a task of ethnographic museums because the objects from Africa were at first not viewed as art, let alone modern art. In 1984, the Museum Of Modern Art organised the controversial exhibition “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art”, in which art by artists such as Picasso and Gauguin was exhibited alongside objects made by indigenous people from Africa, Oceania and North America (Museum of Modern Art, n.d.). The exhibit was critiqued on the fact that the objects were completely stripped of all context by assimilating practices, and instead placed these “primitive” and “exotic” aesthetics on a par with modern western art (Karp, 1991). The African, Oceanian and North American objects were only appreciated for the aesthetics and as inspiration for modern Western artists, which was still based on ideas about the exotic and the primitive. However, in the late 1980s and 1990s certain developments came into existence that tried to change this dominant view of art from outside of Europe.

2.4 CRITICAL TURN IN THE LATE 1980S AND ITS AFTERMATH

In the 1980s, the “cultural turn” took place in broad social and human scholarship in fields such as anthropology, sociology, gender studies, literary studies, history and cultural studies. During this time various sciences turned to each other for new insights and social scientists began to pay attention to human experiences instead of merely focussing on objective behaviours and outcomes. This cultural turning point also left its mark on (the study of) politics and new social movements (Jasper, 2010; Kalb & Tak, 2005). This critical voice also reached the museum world in the late-1980s, during which time museum and gallery professionals became more critical and self-reflective about the meaning of their exhibitions to diverse audiences and not only for the description and display without context (Dixon, 2016, p. 32). Various symposia and conferences were held, in which art museums and ethnographic museums discussed their position in society. The exhibition “Magiciens de la Terre” (“Magiciens of the Earth”) in the Centre Pompidou in 1989 can be seen as a landmark (and a controversial event) which characterised a new period of time for the exhibition of “non-Western” art in fine art museums in Europe and the United States. This exhibition

inspired many art museums across the world, as it put modern art from Europe and various places outside of Europe next to each other (Cohen-Solal, 2014).

In 1991, curator Susan Vogel advocated for museums to be self-aware and reflective about their exhibiting practices. In the early 1990s, African art was far from being established as a given in art museums. She argued that the meanings of African art in museums have been attributed to Western views, and much of the vision on Africa and African art has been established through Western culture. Thus, she urged that “unless we acknowledge that African art as we see it has been shaped by us as much as by Africans, we cannot see it at all” (Vogel, 1991, p. 195). Indeed, in the 1990s, much discourse was produced on postcolonialism and critiques on “othering” practices in ethnographic museums, but the question remains if this ever actually gained ground in art museums. It was argued that challenging the authorities of curators and institutions and sharing the power over representation was needed to establish real change and a break of “the dusty, dated molds of past representations” (Jones, 1993, p. 216). During this critical period, reflexive discourses on othering and representation in museology were developed (see e.g. Karp et al., 1992; Karp & Lavine, 1991).

In the Dutch context, ethnographic museums are not only displaying and collecting ethnographic artefacts and cultural objects, but also contemporary African *l’art pour l’art*, (Veldkamp, 2006). Already since the 1980s, Dutch ethnographic museums have taken the lead in exhibiting and collecting modern and contemporary art from African artists. The identity of ethnographic museums was changing and institutions wished to stay up to date and relevant in the developments of the art world. However, this development keeps the old colonial divides in place, as it tells the modern or contemporary artists that they belong in “museums of mankind”, simply because they are not from “the West” but from the former colonies (Njami, 2012). In 1980 the Tropenmuseum showed modern art from Africa in “Moderne Kunst in Afrika” (“Modern Art in Africa”) ushering in a new era in the Dutch museum realm. Other art exhibitions were also held in the ethnographic museum of Rotterdam, the Museum voor Volkenkunde, namely the solo exhibition “Twins Seven Seven” 1987 and group exhibition “Kunst uit een andere wereld” (“Art from another world”) in 1988.

Het Groninger Museum, an art museum, organised an exhibition called “Africa Now” in 1991. The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam organised “Zuiderkruis” (“Southern Cross”) in

1993, in collaboration with the Thami Mnyele Foundation⁵. These were the first exhibitions featuring African art to take place after/during the critical turn in Dutch art museums. The exhibition catalogue of “Africa Now” starts with multiple essays and introductions by the people involved in creating the exhibit. In the introduction by Jean Pigozzi, a renowned collector of contemporary African art, discourses of “Othering” are very present. He stresses how he cannot pronounce the names of the artists he collected and how they come from “exotic places” that he cannot find on his globe (Groninger Museum, 1991, p. 13). However, in other essays, some self-reflective language and critique on the closedness of museums is offered, stating that it was a “failure to recognize, or worse, ignorance or contempt” that African art had been absent from exhibitions in museums of modern and contemporary art (Groninger Museum, 1991, p. 16).

Until the end of the 20th century, African art was seen as objects of material culture and was often displayed as stripped away from its context. Both traditional African artefacts, and the modern and contemporary African art are not in line with Western artistic standards. Because Western museums are still used to the traditional African art, contemporary African art was sometimes seen as not recognisably African (Leyten, 2004). Thus, there was a problem of categorising contemporary art: it either represents something universal or individual (from a “Western” perspective); or it is specifically categorised as art from elsewhere. These existing expectations can lead to contemporary artists being put in restrictive boxes or not being able to fit in either of these categories and getting lost. Leyten (2004) argues that even though Dutch museums became more open to non-Western art after the critical turn, they still do not embrace it. At the beginning of the 21st century, there was no integration of contemporary African art in Dutch fine art museums, and thus it is often collected and displayed by ethnographic museums. Simon Njami states that at the beginning of the 21st century, Dutch art museums did not have a clear position on contemporary African art, as there was a lack of knowledge and interest in contemporary African art and postcolonialism. He criticises the lack of thematic or group exhibitions and the overall inclusion of contemporary African artists in Dutch exhibition policy. During the first decade of the 21st century, only two exhibitions were hosted (“Snap Judgements” in the Stedelijk

⁵ This residency program for African (diasporan) artists has had considerable impact in the exhibition practices of Dutch museums because it introduces them to upcoming artists from the African continent and the diasporas.

Museum Amsterdam in 2008, curated by Okwui Enwezor, and “Unpacking Europe” in the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum in 2002) or solo work was exhibited by artists who studied at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. “This in itself is symptomatic of a lack of knowledge or of interest in African contemporary issues and postcolonial discourse” (Njami, 2012, p. 148). Njami is correct in stating that there was a lack of representation in the early 2000s. During the second decade of the 21st century, this seems to have changed due to processes of decolonisation and critical debates that are taking place in the public sphere.

2.5 DECOLONISATION OF THE MUSEUM

Since the critical turn during the 1980s and 1990s, there has been more recognition for artists who previously lived in the margins of the art world, such as African and African Diasporan artists. The critical landscape of contemporary African art in the Western art world has changed and been reshaped (Banks, 2018). Ethnographic museums were greatly impacted by critiques grounded in the paradigms of post-coloniality and multiculturalism, as a diversity of voices became louder and they simply could not go forth with their colonial perspectives and dominant discourses as the only stories to be told. Now, museums do not exhibit the “treasures” that Europe acquired from the former colonies, or tell narratives about the “exotic” cultures of colonised people, but, more and more, reveal the real histories of the colonial divide and rule (Pieterse, 1997). Different identities become more visible in museums, as migrant, diaspora, multicultural, transnational, sexual, gender and other identities became part of museum discourse (Pieterse, 1997).

The discourse that has dominated the field of museology this century in the last ten years has been a discourse of decolonisation. Decolonising is a complex term because it entails much more than merely the process by which colonies become independent from their colonisers, especially in a museum context. Decolonising, or decoloniality⁶, means to recognise and undo the hierarchies of race, gender and heteropatriarchy and class and the influence of global capitalism and the notion of Western modernity. It “seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western

⁶ Walter D. Mignolo separates the term decolonisation, which he sees as the geographic decolonisation of colonised states, as well as the fact that decolonisation leaves the current political theory and economy intact. Instead, he uses the term *decoloniality* (Mignolo, 2017).

rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 17). Indeed, decolonisation or decoloniality is about reconsidering the foundations of how knowledge is produced and recognising the influence of colonialism on this knowledge and the use of language.

In a museum context, L’Internationale defines decolonisation as “both resisting the reproduction of colonial taxonomies, while simultaneously vindicating radical multiplicity” (L’Internationale Online, 2015, p. 5). Indeed, it is not a process by which the goal is to return to how the world was before colonisation, but rather starting a new chapter by addressing the power imbalances of the imperial past and the influence colonialism still has today, especially in the context of institutions such as museums, and then move forward (L’Internationale Online, 2015). Museums all over the world are researching and starting processes of decolonising their history, policies, collections and exhibitions, and exploring new forms of knowledge that can be created from them. As part of this, in recent publications, the racist, discriminatory and colonial terms of the recent past have been analysed and contextualised.

Okwui Enwezor was a highly influential art critic and curator on the topic of global contemporary art from the global south, but especially from the African continent. Even though Enwezor was already active before the decolonial critique gained ground, he was doing the work that decolonisation demands. In his essay “The Postcolonial Constellation”, he criticises the colonial gaze that the world of modern art still holds. Modern art was founded between imperialism and postcolonial discourses and Enwezor argues for a dismantling and rebuilding on the Western knowledge paradigm that art history, the museum world, and modern art was founded. Additionally, he argues for the paradigm of the “global modern”, which complicates and scrutinises the Eurocentric discourses of modern art (Enwezor, 2003). Thus, these critiques of decolonisation are preceded by key actors such as Enwezor, rather than following neat lines of successive changes in thought. His work in curating exhibitions on African contemporary art and photography and “global art” as a whole, and his writings on how new knowledge formation processes were needed about this art, truly indicate not a mere expansion of the existing concept of modern art, but a reconfiguration of the term to include new and alternative ways of thinking about art and modernity.

One (in)famous example of an ethnographic museum that recently attempted to “decolonise itself” is the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) (the Musée du Congo until 1960) located in Tervuren, Belgium. Founded and funded in 1898 by Leopold II (who legally owned the colony of Congo), following the 1897 World Exhibition in Brussels, where

among other exoticising practices, a “human zoo” was on display, the museum’s purpose was to spread propaganda for colonial exploitation (Verbergt, 2020). In December 2018, the museum reopened its doors, after a renovation project that took 20 years, but also accelerated the decolonisation processes. Reactions to the outcome of the renovations were mixed in the popular media as well as in scholarship and the museum world. Some critics say that the renovation did not go far enough, as the museum is still filled with colonial and looted art and artefacts, while talks of restitution and repatriation have been unsuccessful. However, proponents argue that the renovation has been successful, because even though many items are the same, they are contextualised in a different manner, and the voices of the people of Congo and Rwanda are being heard (Marshall, 2018). On the other side of the spectrum, some critics argue that the museum is apologising too much and has become too focused on the violence and death of the colonial era (Birnbaum, 2019).

Similarly, Dutch ethnographic (or “world”) museums are also researching their collections for problematic objects and narratives and making attempts to “decolonise” the museum. This process of decolonising the museum has included the publication “Words Matter”, which was published by four world museums in the Netherlands in 2018. This guide not only explains why these words are problematic, but also offers alternatives. Museums are often still seen as places where beautiful objects are on display in neutral and apolitical places, but they are also a player in the public debate (Modest & Lelijveld, 2018). Museums have a role in society where they have an influence on the public debate and the future of society. The use of words in this function is very important and something these institutions have experience with. “Our objects may be timeless, but the ways we speak about them are not” (Modest & Lelijveld, 2018, p. 8). Thus, museums have to be critical about what language they use and have to continuously research and review their voice. This unfinished guide consists of critical essays on representation in museums and includes a glossary of terms in the cultural sector that should be avoided or used with caution. An example of the types of debates that the publication attends to is the term “allochtoon”, which was introduced in the 1970s in the Netherlands as an identity category to replace the word “immigrant”. These days, the term is avoided because it has developed negative connotations (Modest & Lelijveld, 2018, p. 91).

In fine art museums, decolonisation processes seem to be more subtle than in ethnographic contexts, but are nonetheless necessary, and happening in the museum world. Perhaps the process is less focused on specific objects, but more on the “Western” art canon,

othering practices and representation of art from all over the world. For a long time, there was no interest in modern or contemporary African art to be found in (Dutch) fine art museums. In the Netherlands, the big fine art museums have been reluctant in collecting art from makers with African origins (Veldkamp, 2007). The art was seen as simply not good enough or too difficult to understand for the audiences. The reasons for this remain unclear for now, but it can be speculated that the fact that African art (and non-Western art in general) has been excluded from art museums, makes the issue of decolonisation less urgent. The *absence* of this art is easier to ignore, unlike the explicitly racist collections, discourses and histories of ethnographic museums. Is it easier for these art museums to not speak about decolonisation or representation at all, instead of actively speaking out about their own perhaps racist histories and foundations of knowledge?

Dixon (2016) states that artists from Africa and its diasporas are often linked to politics of identity and resistance by Western European institutions and treated as such by mainstream publics. Blackness is constructed as “*perpetually* marginal, ‘new,’ urban, masculine, masculinist and youth-oriented” (Dixon, 2016, p. 241). Indeed, Western institutions often read African artists and their art as concerned with identity politics and resistance and resilience against racism. Building on this idea, artists with a ‘marginalised background’ are presumed or expected to create art that is based on the experience of their identity or background. Conversely, the work of the non-marginalised artist (white, male, European) is seen as universal and does not have to be explained by where they come from or what their ethnic background is (Modest & Lelijveld, 2018, pp. 59–60). Chikukwa (2011) describes how there is an issue with Western curators acting as the voice for African artists and framing their art within such existing narratives, even though African people have sought to tell their own stories. Curators from the African continent and the diasporas have challenged Western curators for telling “the African story”. There are concerns about the over-representation of South Africa and the few artists who travel in these mega exhibitions, and Africa being represented as a homogeneous country, instead of a heterogeneous continent, whose art is not stagnant, but continuing to develop over time (Chikukwa, 2011). It is also argued that changes in Western museums have been conventional, temporary, and tokenistic or symbolic, such as inviting guest curators, organising one-off events, or checking the box of inclusion by holding one temporary exhibition on “African art”, never to be repeated (Dixon, 2016). These are temporary initiatives, often sporadic and not sustainable for the long term, as opposed to deeper changes within the institution and its structures and

discourses, such as diversifying the permanent staff, substantially changing collecting practices, or scrutinising and transforming the language used and thus the ideas about difference it conveys.

2.6 SUB CONCLUSION AND EXPECTATIONS

As cultural institutions that are defined by and simultaneously define dominant discourses in society, museums should be seen as sites of power. This power gives them the authority to change or preserve knowledge about and discourse surrounding contemporary art created by artists from the African continent. The history of exhibiting art by makers from the African continent in the Netherlands has been a history of marginalisation and Othering: a footnote to “Western” modern art. However, the last ten years seem to have been defined by a process of decolonisation. Based on this framework, expectations for the outcomes of this research can be established. As the legacy of colonialism is still alive in society, I expect there to be evidence of Othering practices and the avoidance of topics such as colonialism in the data. As active developments of decolonisation are taking place, I anticipate there to be discourse on this process, as well as changes in language that reflect a newly critical eye on issues of representation and the heritage of colonialism. However, I am also quite sceptical and think that discourses of decolonisation are perhaps treated as a trend of the moment which museums have to address, but do not take seriously enough.

3. METHODOLOGY

The goal of this research is to explore the discourses that surround contemporary art from makers from the African continent in the contexts of ethnographic and fine art museums between 2010 and 2021. This is done based on the following research question:

What themes emerge in the discourses about contemporary art created by artists from the African continent, found in publications by Dutch ethnographic and art museums over the last ten years, and what might this indicate regarding changing meanings and interpretations of this art in Dutch society?

This research will be based on qualitative methods in an explorative study. This is a study on framing and discourse on an ethically and socially sensitive topic, which requires careful exploration rather than quantitative testing. The interest of this thesis lays in what words mean and how they are used, not in how many times they are used. Additionally, qualitative research leaves space for personal thoughts and ideas, such as self-critical reflection about positionality and power, as well as interpretation and the uncovering of the meanings and patterns of language. This allows for the exploration of the museum discourse of the course of the last ten years and place it in a broader history of museum discourse on contemporary art from makers from the African continent, which requires interpretation on the part of the researcher drawing from the knowledge of this history as established in the previous chapter. This is why the literature review is important in this research, as it not only provides a theoretical basis for analysis, but also gives historical context to the data.

Museum publications, including catalogues, website texts and information booklets, press releases and an essay have been chosen as the primary data source to answer the research question. Museum publications are one form of museum discourse that is spread outside of the boundaries of the museum walls and contributes to the public debate, but also to the historical and academic record. The data will be analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis because with the topic at hand, the aim is to explore the power structures and critique these as being possibly problematic, but additionally introduce solutions and improvements for the future.

Furthermore, conversations with experts of contemporary and/or African art and professionals in the museum world have been selected to discuss the study's findings and observations after the primary analysis. A combination of these two methods has been chosen

to triangulate the data. The museum discourse from documents acts as a first layer, with the reflections of those who are behind the discourse acting as a second layer of data to confirm or perhaps even further complicate the initial findings. Through these two methods, I both analyse the discourse of the museums according to my own interpretations and incorporate an additional layer of interpretation by knowledgeable insiders. I will identify how and if discourses of “Otherness” and colonialism are reflected in the documents. Finally, by interpreting this data in connection with the existing literature on the history of this topic, it is possible to explore what the language used in these publications reflects about broader societal ways of thinking about contemporary art from Africa.

3.1 SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION: MUSEUM TEXTS

The main data source that will be used is museum texts. Documents are often static and present a situation in a particular time, but are also socially constructed and can give us information about the content and deeper meanings (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 278). The texts consist of (relevant parts of) catalogues, informational flyers, texts on museum websites and promotional material, which will reveal the perspectives of the institutions and the discourses that they use, rather than those of other authorities. The documents have been selected using purposive sampling and have been selected on criteria that are directly related to the research topic (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 167). These criteria are the following:

- Published by an established Dutch fine art museum or ethnographic museum or in collaboration with one;
- Published between 2010 and 2021;
- Written on the topic of exhibitions related to contemporary art created by makers of African origins, policy on discourse or decolonisation.

The data collected has been selected based on the above criteria, but the availability of data also was an important part of the collection process. Because museums and libraries were closed during the research period due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resources were scarce to find. Some texts have been accessed through museum websites, the Rijksmuseum online library, the Erasmus University Library; two catalogues have been sent to the researcher by the museums themselves and one publication was a scan that was received from one of the research participants. However, the majority of the data comes from the library of African Arts and Theory, a private collection based in Amsterdam. Even though the collected data

does not represent the entirety of existing publications, it does give a representative image. The data consists of a mix of (parts of) catalogues, booklets and website texts from 14 different museums. In total, 25 documents were collected, which varied in length and word count (from 250-word website texts to 50-page catalogues). It also should be noted that even though the majority of the publications were written in English, some were written in Dutch. An overview of the data and its specificities can be found in appendix A.

3.2 ADDITIONAL DATA: CONVERSATIONS WITH EXPERTS

In order to gain a second layer of understanding of the discourses used in museums on contemporary art from makers from the African continent, and to provide supplemental data to the limited amount of primary data, five conversations were held with (ex) museum practitioners and scholars. This data was selected to gain further insight into the choices that are made by the people who are in charge of writing texts about African art and its possible meanings. Considering the recent shift in museum culture with regards to the decolonisation of the museum and reflection upon (past) colonial and Othering practices, hearing the perspectives from insiders was deemed useful for the completion of this research. Thus, next to the documents, four semi-structured in-depth conversations were held with curators and experts on contemporary African art. The sample was based on the theoretical relevance of the units of analysis and was collected through snowballing. In this type of sampling, a small group of relevant people is sampled and these people propose other people that might be useful to the researcher (Bryman, 2016, p. 415). Thus, I started by emailing three people whom I had found online, who then gave me new names to contact. After a couple of emails, these suggested names started to overlap, which let me know that I found the right people to contact. Not everybody was able or willing to participate, but as I did not need big numbers of participants, the four people I reached were enough.

The first person I spoke to is a curator and critic at a museum of modern art, specialised in contemporary and global art and gender. The second person is an ex-curator of African collections at ethnographic museums. The third person I spoke to is an independent writer and curator on the topic of among others, African art. The fourth person is a researcher and curator, specialised in the topic of contemporary art, globalisation and diversity. All had experience with curating exhibitions and writing texts on the topic of contemporary art by makers from the African continent. Even though the sample was collected through snowballing, it still represents perspectives from both art museums and ethnographic

museums, as well as those of people who are not bound to a museum institution. The participants had been active in the field for circa fifteen to forty years respectively. An overview of the respondents can be found in appendix D.

These conversations serve as metadata to reflect on the findings that came from the analysis of the documents. The participants are informed subjects with whom I can discuss and check my preliminary results. In-depth interviews provided the detailed and elaborated answers required to write a thick description, or meaningful interpretation, of the topic (Rapley, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were chosen rather than unstructured interviews, as I was looking for specific information and wanted to gain as much insight into the situation as possible with pre-formulated questions on topics that reflected my initial findings. Four conversations were held during the final stages of the analysis and one was held when all the results were written down. Thus, the conversations do not always cover the same topics or results, but instead were guided by what the researcher and the respondent deemed important during the conversation. A guide with topics, questions and examples to discuss, was prepared based on the (preliminary) results and can be found in appendix F.

Because of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the conversations were conducted online through Zoom, Skype and over the phone. These media have to be considered when conducting and analysing interviews because there can be positives and negatives connected to this. Using virtual resources is more flexible, saves costs and time for travelling, and it might encourage people to participate in an interview (Bryman, 2016, p. 492) and during a pandemic it secures health safety. Some limitations are that there can be technological problems before and during the interview (Bryman, 2016, p. 492). In practice, the only downside to this type of interviewing was that technical difficulties occurred during the interview on the phone, and sometimes it would have been easier to visit the experts, as they wanted to show publications or books to me during the calls. The calls lasted from around 40 to around 55 minutes and were conducted in Dutch. The conversations were transcribed and simultaneously translated in the form of summarising notes. As the conversations sometimes drifted off-topic, these parts have been left out. These choices have been made because this data would not be coded and would function as a second opinion and insight into the results.

3.3 OPERATIONALISATION

To carry out a research project, the concepts that are central to the study have to be operationalised. Operationalisation transforms the defined concepts into indicators to measure

during the research (Babbie, 2016). In the case of this thesis, the concepts of postcolonial discourse, othering, representation, decolonisation of the museum, contemporary African art, ethnographic museums and fine art museums have been conceptualised in the literature review and have been operationalised into a measuring instrument with indicators, as seen in the table below. These concepts and codes have been created based on the theories in the literature review and theories of Critical Discourse Analysis. Additional codes emerged during the coding process, which are marked in the table with an asterisk. The third column of the table indicates details about the concepts and specific codes and includes examples.

For the practical side of discourse analysis, work by Machin and Mayr (2012) has been used. In this guide, different parts of critical discourse analysis are outlined, which the coding process was roughly based on. Three out of the seven points that they cover were used in the operationalisation, as the other points were too linguistic for the purpose of this research:

- Semiotic choices: what vocabulary does an author use? Are there certain words that are used often or words that are avoided?
- Representing people: which language choices are made to identify and represent people?
- Concealing and taking for granted: how are agency and responsibility obscured by language (Machin & Mayr, 2012)

| Concept | Specific codes | Details and examples |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Colonialism Social Darwinism | Colonial language | “negro art”, comparing Africans with prehistoric people: prehistoric, past, undeveloped |
| Decolonisation | Decolonising language Reflective language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-reflective language - Reflection on museums - Reflection on society | Actively voicing concerns e.g.: representation, worldview, revisions, contemporary developments, up-to-date, inclusion, problematising dichotomies |
| Othering (Hall, 2013a; Said, 2003) | Dichotomy Exoticism Generalisations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advanced vs. primitive - Africa vs. Europe - Developed vs. undeveloped - First world vs. third world - Modern vs. traditional - Us vs. them - Rich vs. poor - West vs. rest - White vs. Black Casual use of “Western” and “non-Western” Talking about Africa in a non-specific manner |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| Putting identifying labels on art or an artist | Labelling language | Use of geographic labels Unnecessary adjectives |
| Historical statements | Language on colonial past | History of the museum, the Netherlands, Europe, Africa, African countries, apartheid in South Africa |
| Art related to politics of identity and resistance (Dixon, 2016) | Language on political art Language on identity Language on race | Apartheid Post-apartheid Colonialism Racism White vs. black South Africa |
| Description of Dutch wax prints * | Mentioning of Dutch wax prints | Use in art Relation to the Netherlands Economic benefits Critical view |
| The use of euphemisms or erasing certain histories or narratives that say something about hidden power dynamics* | Erasure/euphemism | African artists not named or only named by first name What is not said? Erasing certain histories e.g.: such issues, such forces, debates, social political situation. |
| Identifying vocabulary based on the Words Matter publication (Modest & Lelijveld, 2018) | Vocabulary | e.g.: migrant, African art, Black, different, minority, traditional, primitive, exotic, allochtoon, "blank" |
| Discovering narrative* | Uniqueness of the exhibit Sense of helping the artist Focus on the collector instead of the art/artist | e.g.: for the first time, never seen before |
| Who is speaking: who has authority over the discourse? | Voice of the artist Voice of expert Voice of institution Voice of the curator | What is actually said? Is it substantial or illustrative? Is the language objective or subjective? |
| What value is placed on the art and artists? | Words of value | e.g.: significant, famous, prestigious Listing prestigious prizes Emphasising international fame |

Table 1. Operationalisation

3.4 CODING AND ANALYSIS

As preparation for analysis, the publication texts were coded using the software program ATLAS.ti., by which the codes were based on the operationalisation. Attention was paid to who

was speaking in the text, what kind of language was used, or if certain words or terminology stood out. These instances of language were marked with an initial code, after which codes were grouped into bigger themes. It was done the other way around if it was discovered that a code was too broad to encompass the diversity of the theme. For an overview of the code tree and code book, see appendices B and C.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to analyse the museum texts. According to this method, reality is a social construct and individuals can never be truly objective (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 391). This method of analysis can uncover power dynamics in the language that is used to describe, frame and perceive African art. CDA highlights issues of structural inequalities and power asymmetries (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Scholars such as Foucault and Fairclough have been influential in the development of CDA. Fairclough (1992 as cited in Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000) introduced a three-dimensional framework to critically analyse discourse, which I partly based my analysis on. The first two dimensions, discourse-as-text and discourse-as-discursive-practice, are heavily reliant on the study of linguistics. As this is a sociological thesis, mainly the third dimension of discourse-as-social-practice has been used. Fairclough describes this dimension as “the way in which discourse is being represented, respoken, or rewritten sheds light on the emergence of new orders of discourse, struggles over normativity, attempts at control, and resistance against regimes of power.” (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 449). CDA focuses on the juncture of language, discourse, speech and social structure and most importantly, uncovers power relations. Treating these relations as problematic is what makes this kind of discourse analysis critical. CDA has to have effects on society too; it as to empower the powerless and voiceless, expose problematic power structures and encourage people to advocate social change (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). This is also the goal of this thesis, as I will try to uncover “Othering” discourses and decolonising discourses, analyse these with a critical eye and keep practice and the real world in mind.

After the coding process, the codes and the parts of texts that stood out were sifted through and written down. At first, many different themes were established after several readings of the data. Then, these were grouped into three bigger themes which would form the basis of the findings. The publications were treated as discourse-as-social-practice and thus attention was paid to hidden power structures in language. Instances of discourse were compared and contrasted, exceptional cases were highlighted and special attention was paid to what was *not* said in the texts. With the help of the network function of ATLAS.ti., relations between codes were made and interpreted.

4. RESULTS

The aim of this research is to explore the discourse surrounding contemporary art created by artists from the African continent in Dutch museum publications, contextualised by histories of “Otherness” and a current framework of decolonisation and reflection. This is done based on the following research question:

What themes emerge in ethnographic and art museum discourses about contemporary art created by artists from the African continent as found in Dutch museum publications of the last ten years, and might this indicate regarding changing meanings and interpretations of this art in Dutch society?

In order to answer this question, the literature review has provided a broad framework on changes in museum discourses and perspectives over time, while also setting out a history of knowledge regarding the changing meanings of “African art” in the Dutch museum world. With a critical turn in the 1980s and a process of decolonisation in the 21st century, this study is an empirical exploration of how the discourse of the last 10 years fit into this history. 25 documents have been analysed and coded, of which the most important emerging themes will be discussed and interpreted below. The full coding book can be found in appendix B. The results are categorised into three themes which are all related to language and power. First, the theme of voices and perspectives will be addressed; secondly, there will be an interpretation of lingering problematic language; and thirdly the use of decolonial language will be discussed. Finally, after the description of findings which were based on Critical Discourse Analysis, the second layer of findings consisting of reflections by experts will be discussed.

4.1 VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES

The first theme that emerged from the data was voices and perspectives; whose voices are heard, who is speaking in the text, whose perspective is used and what is not said? When it comes to Critical Discourse Analysis, it is important to research who speaks, who is telling the story and who has the authority when it comes to which language is used. Is there a multitude of voices and who or what do they represent? Which side is highlighted when describing colonialism, how are African artists described compared to European artists, what topics are avoided or erased? In this section, the findings on whose voice is heard will be explored and connected to power and knowledge theories; as well as the topic of erasure and

stories from different perspectives which are exemplified by how the publications tackle the story of Dutch wax prints.

4.1.1 WHOSE VOICE IS HEARD?

In general, the analysed texts are written in name of the publishing or exhibiting institution and the writers are not explicitly named. However, in some cases, the authors of texts are explicitly mentioned, for example when it concerns an essay or an introduction by the curator or co-curator of the exhibition, director of the institution, or other involved persons such as collectors or experts on the topic. There are instances in the data where there is a multiplicity of voices heard, by including various people and perspectives on the topic. By for example inviting guest curators whose expertise is on contemporary art by artists from the African continent, or asking activists to write an essay for the catalogue, the museum creates a more inclusive image of the exhibition.

Overall, the language surrounding African art and artists can be interpreted as seeming neutral and descriptive. Attention is paid to describing the story of the artist, the meanings of the artworks, the historical and geographic context, the place in the oeuvre of the artist and the materials used. There are rarely explicit hints of critical judgement of the artworks, except for words of appraisal: "What makes the work of this *great* [emphasis added], unknown photographer from Polokwane so exceptional is that the way he made his portraits drew absolutely no distinction whatsoever between his customers: he was apartheid-neutral." (Barents, 2014, p. 13). In this example, the artist is described as "great", indicating a positive judgement, but the art is described in objective terms as "exceptional" because the artist was apartheid-neutral, which is a supposedly rare characteristic when it comes to art made during the apartheid era. However, although discourse can seem neutral, institutions can address the audience, assuming they have a certain identity. Practices of exclusion are not always intentional or conscious, but can be implied because the own perspective is taken for granted (Modest & Lelijveld, 2018, p. 35). Authors sometimes play into the stereotypes that the museum audience might have of Africa, the artists from the continent and the lives people lead: "[...] the scenes can be surprising to contemporary audiences who probably have a very

different view of Kinshasa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”⁷ (*Making Africa - Continent van hedendaags design*, 2016, para. I and We). This example indicates not only that the contemporary audience of the museum is uninformed about the situation in the Democratic Republic Congo (DRC), but implicitly it also suggests that the DRC does not fall into the category of “contemporary”. In this case, the assumption about the audience is quite explicit, but it can also be more implicit by using indicators such as “we” and “they”.

Not only the voice of the institution is heard in the publications, but in certain texts, the artist takes over to speak about their work in their own words. It can be expected that the input of the artist is used in the discourse that is voiced by the institution, but these instances are less explicit than when the artist’s words are put in quotation marks. Although it is important to detect who is speaking and who has the power over what is said, it is also necessary to look at what the artists actually say. As the goal of this thesis is not to analyse content and decide on definitions, only the functions of the text by artists have been included and analysed. The functions of language vary between being purely illustrative quotes, to almost the entire text consisting of the artists’ own words, such as interviews with the artists, or leaving the description of the art entirely up to the artist. Often, the artists then talk about the meaning or origin of their work, or their own identity and sense of belonging. The following quote illustrates how artist Nicholas Hlobo speaks about his work in an interview published by Museum Beelden aan Zee: “The environment definitely plays a role; what surrounds me and where my feet rest. What’s in the air. It all comes together in my work. I’m not influenced by the media or the news.”⁸ (Museum Beelden aan Zee, 2016). In these types of texts, the dominant narrative of the museum discourse is not used, but the artist rather has the power over what is said and not said and which language is used to achieve this.

In contrast, primarily in publications by ethnographic museums, there are instances in which the function of the artist’s quote is unclear and only seems to be used to technically give the artist a voice:

’Today there are no rules. You can wear caftans how you like, have fun with it and feel modern’ – Zhor Raïs [...] ‘Today my collections are produced between Morocco

⁷ “[...] scenes kunnen verrassend zijn voor hedendaagse toeschouwers die waarschijnlijk een heel ander beeld hebben van Kinshasa en de Democratische Republiek Congo”

⁸ “De omgeving speelt zeker een rol; wat mij omringt en waar mijn voeten op rusten. Wat er in de lucht zit. Dat alles komt samen in mijn werk. Ik word niet beïnvloed door de media of het nieuws.”

and India and combine these two colourful spicy worlds to create my brand identity that all women can wear.’ – Zineb Joundy. (Tropen Museum, 2019, p. 9)

The artists’ quotes above do not have much content and might not have any additional value to what is written. By giving artists the authority to speak on their own behalf, but not give them the chance to say something substantial may not actually give them any real power.

4.1.2 ERASURE AND EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

As stated in the “Words Matter” publication, one of the colonial narratives that is still practised in museums, is euphemistic language and erasure. Whenever a part of a narrative or history remains untold, the museum visitor continues to be uninformed about it (Modest & Lelijveld, 2018, p. 84). Indeed, some things were not treated at all in the texts that were analysed, or euphemistic language was used to describe certain contexts. Texts sometimes do not deal with specific topics, but use general words such as “issues”, “tensions” or “histories”. For example, in one publication the problematic relations and histories between the Netherlands and South Africa are called “historic links” (Barents, 2014). Perhaps this is done to avoid problematic stories or otherwise simply because the museum does not have enough knowledge about certain complex societal issues. Indeed, these vague wordings are mostly used concerning the European colonial past or the time of apartheid in South Africa. Another specific example of erasure can be found in a description of the artist Dorothy Akpene Amenuke, in which was said that in the 15th and 16th century “Textiles from the Netherlands were traded for gold, wood, cocoa and other commodities from Ghana” (Bouwhuis, 2014a, p. 28). These “age-old trade relations” (Bouwhuis, 2014a, p. 14) were of course rooted in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Why are such histories not explained? Unless the audience already has sufficient knowledge about the topic, the museum visitor does not learn anything about the scale of colonial violence or the real context surrounding the art on display.

Part of erasure is also the withholding of the names of artists, especially when they are central to the text. Overall, most artists are named in the pieces about them, or the artists that are exhibited in group exhibitions are named in the introduction alongside some general comments about their art:

The land aspect is thematised by numerous artists. Earth is an essential element in the work of Dineo Seshee Bopape. It is testimony to ownership, claiming and dispossession of land, as well as being a metaphor for new life and for mourning.

Bronwyn Katz engages with the notion of land as lived experience. (Mabaso & Braat, 2018, p. 9)

However, in some introductions of catalogues and publications, the discourse is very generalising and any relevant specifics are erased. For example, in the catalogue “How Far How Near” by the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, there is an introductory section on the history of exhibiting “non-Western” art in the museum. What stands out is that on multiple occasions, in the same paragraph or sentence, the “Western” artists are named, while the “non-Western” artists are not, and are instead described in a generalising way:

This time, it is the work of African artists that is central to How Far How Near, displayed among objects from the collection such as a bronze figure by Jacques Lipchitz and the colorful wall hanging by Roger Bissière, which were also on view in the exhibition of 1955. (Bouwhuis, 2014a, p. 13)

This makes one wonder why European artists would be named in this text, while non-European artists are not named, especially in a text in which the past faults of the Stedelijk are attempted to be rectified. Perhaps because the artists were unknown, but even this would be worth mentioning. Something similar was the case in the publication “Africa Now: Jean Pigozzi Collection” by the Groninger Museum in 1991⁹, in which collector Jean Pigozzi took the time to name eight European artists that the African artists would never have heard of, even though the exhibition was not about them but about the artists from Africa. Although these two excerpts are not on the same level of problematic, we could cautiously say that without treating European and non-European artists the same way, even if it is on a level of making the effort of naming them, true equality is not reached. By keeping up these erasure practices, African artists are still set apart as being other than European artists, existing beside them, to illustrate them, as it were.

4.1.3 *THE FRAMING OF DUTCH WAX PRINTS*

One of the codes that emerged during the analysis was the subject of Dutch wax prints. Contemporary artists from the African continent often use this material in their art, but it also has a controversial origin story involving the Netherlands. During the colonisation of

⁹ See paragraph 2.4 of the literature review for more context on this publication.

Indonesia, the Dutch made machine-made imitations of the Indonesian batik waxing technique. However, these imitations did not gain ground in Indonesia, and instead the Dutch found an export market for the colourful cloths in West Africa. In contemporary times, the cloth is considered as something that identifies “African” and “African diasporan” culture, even though its history is rooted in colonialism. Still, the material is often referred to as Dutch wax prints, or “Hollandaise”, and is partly produced at the Vlisco factory in the Netherlands. The reason why this theme is relevant in this discussion is not only because it was a recurring subject in the data, but because it is told from different perspectives and in each publication, different sides of the story are highlighted. The perspective on the textile seemingly also depends on the art and artist who uses it. For instance, Yinka Shonibare is an artist who researches the cultural identity of globalisation in his art, questions postcoloniality and uses Dutch wax prints as a symbol of colonialism. Thus, when writing about his art, the paradoxicality of the fabric is impossible to avoid: “The self-portraits present a new way of working with the wax batik, an artificial ‘African’ construct that is in fact a product of colonial times” (Museum Helmond, 2016, para. Self Portrait (after Andy Warhol)).

Although the controversial story of the textile was not always explicitly named in the texts, sometimes there was a reference to it. In these references, the connection to the Netherlands was frequently stressed, and most times put in a positive light, emphasising the economic benefits and appetite for trade of the Dutch during colonial times: “Dutch Wax is often considered typically African but, as the name implies, is often produced in the Netherlands” (Bouwhuis, 2014a, p. 28), and “the Dutch textile company, has been market leader in Africa for almost a century. No continent was ever “too far” when considering the Dutch appetite for trade.” (Bouwhuis, 2014a, p. 25). This practice of not telling the entire story, but still emphasising the economic benefits for the Netherlands conceals the colonial histories and actually maintains some of these power imbalances.

In this section, the influence of who is speaking and what perspective is highlighted has been explored. Indeed, museums are sites of power that can decide which story and whose narrative is told (Pieterse, 1997). Stories such as the history of Dutch wax prints is one where it shows that Dutch museums are not neutral institutions and are part of the dominant narrative in society, to which they also contribute. Museums possess certain knowledge, and with that knowledge comes power over the construction of truths (Macdonald, 2010). The exploration of this theme of voices and perspectives has led to insights about how power is

distributed in museums when it comes to the discourse surrounding contemporary art created by artists from the African continent.

4.2 LINGERING PROBLEMATIC LANGUAGE

Because part of the literature review was focused on an exploration of Othering discourses in the museum context, this was also part of the analysis. Thus, lingering problematic language will be discussed in this section of the findings. As the data came from the last ten years, explicit problematic language, such as language rooted in Social Darwinism as was used in the 20th century, was not found. However, discourses such as generalisations, problematic vocabulary, and a narrative of discovery, could sometimes still be distinguished.

4.2.1 *GENERALISATIONS ABOUT AFRICA*

In museum discourses, it has become common to avoid generalisations and instead be as specific as possible when describing to which group someone or something belongs (Modest & Lelijveld, 2018). This could be found in the data as well, as the artists are labelled with the country or city they come from or the ethnic or social group they belong to or identify with. However, in some cases, generalisations about Africa are still made. This does not happen often, but there is one publication that stands out when it comes to these generalising discourses and can serve as a counterexample. In the (Dutch) booklet of “Making Africa” in the Kunsthal Rotterdam, terms such as “the traditional African story” or “African traditions” are used (Vitra Design Museum, 2016). A possible explanation for this type of language is a lack of knowledge about which specific stories or traditions are meant when the author(s) wrote the texts. However, using generalising terms reinforces the homogeneous image the West has of a continent consisting of 54 heterogeneous countries.

4.2.2 *PROBLEMATIC VOCABULARIES*

The “Words Matter” publication was used as a guideline to detect instances of problematic terminology in the data. Terminology that stood out in the publications were words related to colonialism and race, even though race generally seems to be avoided in most publications unless the artist directly talks about it in citations. Words that were mentioned in the glossary of terms in the “Words Matter” publication of terms to avoid, were only found very sporadically during the coding process. As this publication was made in 2018

and debates about certain terms are only of recent years, the use of problematic terms should perhaps be taken lightly. Changing the use of certain language takes time and sometimes words that seem problematic now were not seen as such when they were used. For example, the Dutch word “blank” (“fair”) was still used instead of “wit” (“white”) in the Making Africa booklet from 2016. Similarly, in an interview with the director of the Wereldmuseum in the “Afrika010” catalogue, he says that he would rather not use the terms “allochtoon” and “autochtoon” but then continues to use those terms in the text.

In “Tell Freedom: 15 South African artists”, the word “slaves” is used, rather than “enslaved people”. This catalogue, and the art and artists featured in it, is very focused on political art about the colonial history of South Africa and the Netherlands, and the apartheid era. Yet vocabulary such as “slave” was not changed yet when the catalogue was published in 2018: “In January 1658, Amersfoort, pirated a Portuguese slaving vessel off the coast of West Africa. In its hold, 500 male and female Angolan slaves, destined to be sold in the slave markets of Brazil.” (Mabaso & Braat, 2018, p. 73). By using the word slave instead of enslaved (person/people), one reduces that person to their inherent identity of being a slave, even though this was done by force and inhumane practices. “The term also denies the humanity of the person, reducing them to being no more than the property of another.” (Modest & Lelijveld, 2018, p. 138). Additionally, the use of language such as “destined” in the explanation of the artwork, the text reduces the people even more to what Europeans made them into.

The use of these type of words is quite sporadic and thus can seem too trivial, but Critical Discourse Analysis, attention has to be paid towards small instances of language. The fact that these discourses are only sporadically used in the last ten years is a telling sign of how far the progress in decolonising the language has come and how language and discourse change over time.

4.2.3 OTHERING DISCOURSES

Based on Othering theories by Hall and Said, careful attention was paid to dichotomies and othering vocabulary. Although the use of Othering discourses can hardly be detected in the data, they are occasionally used in a nonchalant and exemplifying manner. The binarisms are predominantly merely used to illustrate how museums *used* to describe art by artists from the African continent. However, by exemplifying this, the author can sometimes become unaware of the stigmas that such language still brings along. This type of Othering is

perhaps different from what used to be done in the last century, whereby Othering was explicit and exoticising: “These innovative and real artists lived and worked in often unbelievably difficult conditions in places like [...]. I wanted to buy the entire show. [...] only the works by the artists from exotic places.” (Groninger Museum, 1991, p. 13). This type of language is not used anymore in the data that were analysed for this study.

Generally speaking, the word “non-Western” or “Western” is still used often in the data, in a nonchalant way, or just put between quotation marks, without recognising the meaning of these words. As was carefully explained in the literature review, these dichotomies of “the West” and “the rest” mutually constitute each other as categories. The “West” is not a geographical place, but a discursive, thus by continuously using this word without explaining the context, these binarisms persevere. Similar to the nonchalant use of the term “Western”, the use of “Othering” terms is also still used for illustrative purposes: “The relationship between countries in the West and their former colonies still influence the relationships between countries today. The over-consumption in the Western world has a serious impact on so-called ‘third world countries’” (Museum Helmond, 2016, par. Climate Shit Drawings). In this example, on the one side, the relationship between Europe and its former colonies is criticised, but on the other side, problematic words are used without much consideration. Indeed, terms such as these are widely recognised as language to be avoided, but museums still look for words that can replace them and consequently continue to convey the same dichotomies.

4.2.4 DISCOVERY NARRATIVE

Another discourse that emerged from the data was a narrative of discovery. Exhibitions and artists are almost always introduced or mentioned with words such as “first major solo exhibition”, “debut museum solo”, or “for the first time in the Netherlands”. Because of the frequency of such language, it was decided to include it in the analysis. There are several interpretations and possible explanations for this narrative. This finding could be explained by the pressure of the Dutch cultural policy on a museum to always produce unique, blockbuster exhibits. By framing an exhibition as unique and never seen before, the museum tries to attract more visitors. By using this type of language, the uniqueness of the exhibition is shown, possibly also emphasising how rare it is to exhibit a certain artist, art or group show. A possible, but more radical theory would be the *white saviour narrative*, which is important to mention when discussing the sociology of arts and studies of race and racism.

The “white saviour” is often characterised as pure, good and with good morals, especially when compared to people of colour, who are more passive and weaker and supposed to praise and look up to the white person (Dixon, 2016). Although this is often a framework used in Hollywood productions and literary novels, it could also be applied to museum discourses and the “white cube” of the museum “discovering” African artists. However, such claims should not be made without careful consideration and this topic would need more research to be interpreted in this framework.

4.3 DECOLONIAL LANGUAGE

During the past ten years, museums have been reflective and critical of Western history and European and Dutch culture, as well as their own museum practices. The so-called decolonisation of the museum is a heated topic in public debate and as a result, this is one of the most significant themes to emerge from the publications that were studied during this research. In some cases, the critique and reflection are aimed specifically at the museum itself, but most times it is more of a broader social commentary on the Netherlands or Europe. An exhibition such as “How far how near” in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam was specifically set up to question and reflect on how the world is represented in the history of exhibitions and the collection of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. This theme is mostly discussed in the introduction of the catalogue. Similarly, but more explicitly, the publication by Kunsthal KAdE includes a long introduction with reflections and statements involving social and economic inequality, the white gaze, injustice and power relations. The author also extends the critique to cultural institutions and speaks up about the decolonisation of museums, which the following excerpt illustrates:

The activist movement that is taking place in the Netherlands denounces discrimination and raises questions about unequal opportunities and power relations, both within but also in parallel with Dutch cultural institutions. A number of these institutions have recently started to organize debates around inclusion and processes of decolonization, challenging Eurocentric paradigms in the art world and working towards art spaces that are open to a multiplicity of (hi)stories and cultures. But the desire for change is met with both support as well as fierce resistance, and sadly on more than a few occasions, even aggressive rage, and therefore progress is insufficient and slow. (Mabaso & Braat, 2018, p. 7)

Indeed, this is an example in which the current public debate and processes of decolonising the museum are considered and how this development is “insufficient and slow” in the eyes of these authors. This degree of explicitness about the museum world is not reached in other publications, but general discussions about colonial history and decolonisation are being held. It was often found that museums use Othering terms to show how their institution, and perhaps society as a whole, has moved past these dichotomies. During the coding, these dichotomies were found very frequently, but they not used to label the art or artist as the “Other”, but to reflect on these dichotomies and to describe the colonial practices linked to these words. Thus, even though from the literature review, we know that dichotomies are an indicator of “Othering” discourses, this does not seem to be the case here:

A worldview with sharp contrasts between us and them, rich and poor, white and black, developed and underdeveloped, advanced and primitive [...] also resonates in the art world, at least in museums of modern art: *us* modern art, *them* poverty, apartheid, war and strife. (Bouwhuis, 2014a, p. 11)

By naming all these dichotomies in which the Other -and thereby also the Self- are created in a binarism, the author shows that he knows the problematic history of colonialism and that of modern art museums. This type of self-reflective language could already be slightly seen in the very problematic catalogue from 1957, in which is stated:

The European has so far interfered too little with the soul of the Afrikaner. He has despised them at times, where they deserve respect, affection and love, their work also proves that. The exhibition can contribute to the white and coloured people getting to understand and know each other better.¹⁰ (Italiaander, 1957, p. 3).

And later in the 1991 publication of *Africa Now*, these critical words were also spoken, but in more contemporary terms: “Since we Westerners have for centuries felt superior to the rest of the world, [...], we have also treated the art of those regions differently from our own art.” (Groninger Museum, 1991, p. 26). These passages show that in the past there were also statements and sentiments about intentions of change and reflections about past behaviour. It can be argued that stating a positive goal does not necessarily contribute to any real change or

¹⁰ “De Europeaan heeft zich tot nu toe te weinig om de ziel van de Afrikaner bemoeid. Hij heeft ze soms veracht, waar ze toch eerbied, genegenheid en liefde verdienen, ook hun werk bewijst dat. De tentoonstelling kan ertoe bijdragen dat de blanke en de kleurling elkaar beter leren begrijpen en kennen.”

the project of decolonising the museum. It is not only about reflecting on the past and making promises to do better, but about fundamentally challenging knowledge production processes and their structural inequalities.

The emergence of this code and the above quotations illustrate how museums use decolonial discourses in their publications surrounding contemporary art by artists from the African continent. They seem to go through a process of self-reflection and self-scrutiny to inform the audience about their knowledge of the current public debate and the colonial history of Europe and the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent their own problematic histories. The question is whether these intentions are here to stay or not. It is appropriate to treat these discourses with some scepticism, as they are often used in a way where it fulfils the decolonising “requirements” but fails to truly rethink the production of knowledge and its embedded inequalities.

4.4 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESULTS

After the Critical Discourse Analysis of the primary data was conducted, five conversations were held on the topic of contemporary art by artists from the African continent with independent curators and writers, as well as museum curators. This sub-chapter will outline their insights regarding the results of this study and the broader history this research was contextualised by. It should be noted that not every conversation covered the same topics, but these reflections did produce some interesting and new insights into the data. The insights will be organised in roughly the same manner as the results section but will be a bit broader because the conversations often deviated from these exact themes.

4.4.1 VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES

During the conversations with experts, examples from the results were brought up in order to discuss them together. When talking about perspectives on Dutch wax prints, respondent C, said that it is a typically Dutch approach to ignore the slavery aspect of old trade relations and that we are mainly proud that they still use “our” fabrics in Africa. He also noted that the perspective that Dutch museums, and “Western” society as a whole have on Africa is bad and outdated and that the good art that is made there is just not recognised.

Something that came back in the coding was that often there is an emphasis on the connection between the art, artist or country of origin, and the Netherlands or Europe. Artists often study or work somewhere in Europe, or other economic, colonial or business relations

are highlighted. Indeed, respondent D stated that for a museum to exhibit African art, there has to be some kind of reason for exhibiting, such as a connection to the Netherlands. It's a big continent with an immense number of artists, so as a museum you try to look for a connection (respondent A). South African artists are generally more on display than artists from other countries, which seems to have two reasons. Firstly, the connection between the Netherlands and South Africa causes more interest in each other's art practices. However, the bond is rooted in colonialism and imperialism and the relationship between the two has always been one with a strong power imbalance. The second reason for the flourishing South African art in the Netherlands, is that the infrastructure of the cultural field and the art world in South Africa is simply much better than those of other countries. These institutions and facilities make it easier for Dutch museums to exhibit artists from South Africa.

4.4.2 CHANGE OF LANGUAGE

The experts said that did not pay extra attention to language when writing about contemporary African art, and that they always write with the art in mind (respondent C), considering formal descriptions, the context of the art and the placement in the oeuvre (respondent A). These statements suggest that there are not many conscious decisions made about language, even though this must be the case, considering the findings of this study. Perhaps these changes were quite natural in the last decades and museum discourse changed alongside changes in society. When asked about examples of how language has changed in the past decades (depending on their experience), a couple of things were named. Respondent A named specific examples of language such as using "enslaved person" instead of "slave" (as well as in Dutch). While language itself is very colonially decided, it is also important to note that these changes do not limit themselves to decolonial debates, but also about the inclusion of gender identities (they/them language for example) and Indigenous or First Nations people. Language is alive, so museums are also working on going back into their archives to adjust the discourse.

The experts also recognised the casual use of "Western". Respondent C said that putting something between quotation marks is just an excuse, so when someone has a critique, the museum can say that they did not mean it like that. But language changes are confusing sometimes and you have to take into account these kinds of sensitivities. They also criticised terms such as art from the "global south", as this creates a new dichotomy against the "global north" (respondent E). Indeed, respondent D also confirmed that these types of new terms

only replace the existing dichotomies of “first world” and “third world” for example. Respondent B shared his experience of how difficult it is to almost have to invent new art-sociological terminology for African art in the 1980s. Another alternative right now is “diaspora art”, but again this is only used for artists with a non-European/American background (respondent d). Thus, these dichotomies still exist but are now described with different words.

When discussing generalisations, respondent D confirmed this by saying that the image of Africa has become much more complex and museums have replaced their generalising language with more specific language about histories, institutions, artists and art forms. Whenever museums do use generalising language, this is often because of a lack of knowledge about specific topics.

4.4.3 DECOLONIALISATION AND CRITICISM

Respondent A, B and C spoke actively about the critical turn in the late-1980s and 1990s, because they were active in the field and attended symposia during that time. Respondent A realised there, that if you want to change what art and which artists are represented in museums, you have to do something about it and make choices as a museum professional. She decided to change her way of curating and ask herself each time: which artists are Dutch and which come from another continent?

Talking about the last ten years of reflectiveness and decolonisation in museums, respondent A is very happy with the development, as museums must come to see that they are not neutral and that they are institutions that not only reproduce meanings but also generate them. According to her, museums should be aware that they reproduce existing power dynamics and certain prejudices (respondent A).

However, almost all the respondents were quite critical about decolonisation and the positions of museums in decolonising the art world. Generally, museums were seen as quite conservative and difficult to change. It was confirmed by the experts that there has been a shift in the last ten years in the popularity of contemporary art created by artists from the African continent. It is indeed “booming” in the art world, but as respondent C said, museums still play a minor and more conservative role in this, especially compared to the art market. There exists a discrepancy between the positive attitude towards African art in the commercial market including art fairs and the gallery circuit, and the hesitation and conservatism of the museum world. Indeed, respondent B argued that modern art museums

have quite a closed opinion on what art is, even if this is not always explicitly said. Museums do not easily exhibit something new; it is often famous and well-known artists. Respondent C stated that there is no real policy on contemporary African art and that museums sporadically do something, but are very hesitant when it comes to actual policy. Indeed, museums like to think they are progressive, but when it comes to fundamental changes, they remain conservative (respondent A).

Furthermore, there were doubts and scepticism among the experts about the perseverance of the decolonisation of the museum and if it is here to stay or if it is just a trend that will only change the museum world a little bit (respondent E). Respondent D also noted that it is difficult to decolonise the museum, because how can you decolonise if you do not establish a relationship with the community you exhibit without it becoming neo-colonialism or exoticism?

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to explore and analyse the Dutch museum discourse surrounding contemporary art created by artists from the African continent, focussing on publications of the last 10 years. In this final section of the thesis, the central research question will be answered, which is as follows:

What themes emerge in the discourses about contemporary art created by artists from the African continent, found in publications by Dutch ethnographic and art museums over the last ten years, and what might this indicate regarding changing meanings and interpretations of this art in Dutch society?

To answer this research question, existing academic theories about discourse, power, Othering and decolonisation in the museum context have been discussed to provide a framework for the research. These theories have been explored alongside historic changes in museum practices and exemplified with discourses from publications from 1957 and 1991. This has given context to the analysis of the data and the interpretations of the findings that it has produced. The Critical Discourse Analysis and additional reflective conversations have shed light on the discourses and their meanings about contemporary African art in the past ten years and what they mean for wider society. As this has been an explorative study of discourse with an ethically sensitive past and present, the conclusion and answer to the research question will be carefully stated and are not definite. Having said this, various themes have been found and interpreted in the results, and conclusions will be drawn from this in order to answer the two-part research question.

The themes that emerged from the publications have been described and interpreted in the previous section. In the museum publications, the use of different perspectives and voices can tell us a great deal about power and authority in a museum. As museums are part of the dominant discourse in society, and also help to construct and preserve this discourse, their perspective can sometimes be taken for granted. In the publications, there regularly was a tendency to erase certain perspectives or histories on for example Dutch wax prints, or use unclear terms about sensitive topics surrounding colonial history and South African apartheid. By avoiding these histories, they are not confronted and the museum audiences might not be able to challenge and change their ways of thinking. Furthermore, when conducting Critical Discourse Analysis, it is also relevant to pay attention to who is speaking. Artists get to use their voice regularly in the analysed publications, but what they say is not always substantial

and instead serves illustrative purposes. However, to truly dismantle power imbalances and structural inequalities, this is something that should be taken seriously and thought about when writing a museum publication.

Othering practices and the use of problematic language were not substantial themes in the findings of the analysis, which should of course be regarded as a positive outcome of this research. In the literature review, it was already established that during the critical turn in the late 1980s and 1990s, perspectives on Othering changed and museums became more conscious about their (past) Othering practices. As the unlearning of such practices takes time, some problematic language is still lingering beneath the surface. The use of generalisations can still be observed, and vocabulary such as “slave” has not yet completely disappeared from the museum discourses. It was also found that Othering language such as “non-Western” or “third world” was still used in a very casual manner, seemingly without thinking of the meaning and origins of such words and the power imbalances this creates.

This connects to the biggest finding of the study: the use of critical discourse and language on decolonisation. In almost every analysed publication there were instances of critical reflections and self-scrutiny towards society and the museum itself, stating the exhibition and collection errors of the past and the horrible history of (Dutch) colonialism and apartheid. This type of discourse appears multiple times not only in the last ten years, but also throughout history as illustrated with examples in the literature review. However, talking about decolonisation and reaching decoloniality are two different things, which is where the second part of the research question is answered. Decolonising is not only about using different words to describe objects because, in the end, those words still have the same meanings. As brought up by several of the experts, is there really a difference between art from “third world countries” and art from “the global south” or “non-Western” art? Has anything changed if the meanings of these terms are still the same, even though the wording has changed?

Indeed, decolonisation is about researching the foundations of how knowledge is built and acknowledging the problematic past and questioning and rejecting these discourses of exclusion and Eurocentrism. Because the power structures inherited from colonialism still exist in society, the process of decolonisation needs active work. Discourses cannot change overnight, but language also should not be taken for granted and seen as something trivial. It is an important part of society, that can be used as a tool for exclusion or inclusion.

Decolonisation is a political, social, philosophical, academic and activist knowledge framework and perhaps it is a forever ongoing process.

These findings do not mean that nothing has changed. On the contrary, this last decade has not only shown that the popularity of contemporary art created by artists from the African continent is growing, but it also shows language changes to be more representative and inclusive of this art. The fact that Othering discourses were scarcely found in the publications, and instead framed as something from the past, points towards positive development.

This conclusion raises one important question: how *should* it be done? How should museums write about contemporary art by artists from the African continent, what should they keep in mind, what words should they use and avoid, which perspectives should be emphasised? These questions are difficult to answer. One significant aspect at least is being aware of the power of language and being intentional with the type of language and discourse used when talking about contemporary art created by artists from the African continent. Most importantly, museums have to overcome their own history, knowledge and vision and look within in order to truly change. Contemporary African art should be treated as one of the main chapters, not as a footnote in art history.

5.1 LIMITATIONS

Although this research was carefully conducted, awareness of limitations is important. Although the sample size of this study was not large, the conversations with experts gave the study a reflective triangulation of data, which increased the validity of the study. I also have to address the fact that as a Dutch Master student at a European institution, I am also part of the institutional “Western” scientific apparatus. The experts I interviewed are also part of the “Western” institution, although some to a lesser extent due to their international knowledge framework and experience. The whiteness and Westernness of the people involved in this study on the discourse surrounding contemporary art by artists from the African continent is a limitation because it is hard to criticise the institutional knowledge that you are also a part of.

5.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although this research has now come to an end, this conclusion and discussion call for further research. It would be interesting to analyse publications that cover a longer period of time, to get a more complete image of the change in discourse. Using other research methods

such as conducting more interviews or an ethnographic study, or collecting other data such as images of inside the museum and doing a visual discourse analysis would also be interesting. Generally, the inclusion of intersectional perspectives would improve further research tremendously. Regarding the use Critical Discourse Analysis, media articles about contemporary African art would be fascinating to analyse, as media have more influence on the public debate than museum publications do.

As was concluded from the results, but also confirmed by the experts, museums can be quite conservative institutions, and thus to see where the “real” change is happening, one might have to look at the fast-paced art market. It would therefore be most intriguing to conduct a similar research into the art market, including art fairs and the gallery circuit, as they are commercial institutions instead of knowledge institutions.

6. REFERENCES

- Babbie, E. R. (2016). *The practice of social research*. Chapman University.
- Banks, P. A. (2018). The rise of Africa in the contemporary auction market: Myth or reality? *Poetics*, 71, 7–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2018.05.004>
- Barents, E. (2014). Apartheid & After / Why photographs matter. In E. Barents & S. O'Toole, *Apartheid & After* [Exhibition catalogue]. Huis Marseille.
- Birnbaum, M. (2019, March 15). Belgium's Africa Museum reopens, as country confronts its violent colonial past. *Washington Post*.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/this-belgian-museum-needed-a-five-year-overhaul-to-make-it-less-racist/2019/03/14/ef09a106-020e-11e9-958c-0a601226ff6b_story.html
- Blommaert, J., & Bulcaen, C. (2000). Critical Discourse Analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29(1), 447–466. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.447>
- Bouwhuis, J. (Ed.). (2014a). *How Far How Near—The World in the Stedelijk* [Exhibition catalogue]. Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
- Bouwhuis, J. (2014b). *This is not Africa, this is us* [Exhibition booklet]. West.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th Edition). Oxford University Press.
- Chikukwa, R. (2011). Curating contemporary African art: Questions of mega-exhibitions and Western influences. *African Identities*, 9(2), 225–229.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2011.556803>
- Claeys, G. (2000). The 'Survival of the Fittest' and the Origins of Social Darwinism. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 61(2), 223–240. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3654026>
- Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Harvard University Press.
- Cohen-Solal, A. (2014). Revisiting Magiciens de la Terre. *Stedelijk Studies Journal*, 1(Fall).
<https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/revisiting-magiciens-de-la-terre/>
- Crang, M. (2003). On display: The poetics, politics and interpretation of exhibitions. In M. Ogborn, A. Blunt, P. Gruffudd, D. Pinder, & J. May (Eds.), *Cultural geography in practice* (pp. 255–268). Hodder Education.
- Dafler, J. R. (2005). Social Darwinism and the language of racial oppression: Australia's stolen generations. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, 62(2), 137–150.
- Dixon, C. A. (2016). *The 'othering' of Africa and its diasporas in Western museum practices*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield]. <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/17065/>
- Enwezor, O. (2003). The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition. *Research in African Literatures*, 34(4), 57–82.
- Enwezor, O., & Okeke-Agulu, C. (2009). *Contemporary African Art Since 1980*. Damiani.

- Faber, P., Wijs, S., & van Dartel, D. (2011). *Africa at the Tropenmuseum*. KIT Publishers.
- Fabian, J. (2004). On Recognizing Things. The 'Ethnic Artefact' and the 'Ethnographic Object'. *L'Homme. Revue Française d'anthropologie*, 170, 47–60.
<https://doi.org/10.4000/lhomme.24789>
- Francis, J. (2013). The Being and Becoming of African Diaspora Art. *Journal of American Studies*, 47(2), 405–416. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875813000091>
- Groninger Museum. (1991). *Africa Now: Jean Pigozzi Collection* [Exhibition catalogue]. Groninger Museum.
- Hall, S. (1992). The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power. In S. Hall & B. Gieben (Eds.), *Formations of Modernity* (pp. 185–227).
- Hall, S. (2013a). The Spectacle of the 'Other'. In S. Hall, J. Evans, & S. Nixon (Eds.), *Representation* (Second Edition, pp. 215–287). Sage.
- Hall, S. (2013b). The work of representation. In S. Hall, J. Evans, & S. Nixon (Eds.), *Representation* (Second Edition, pp. 1–56). Sage.
- Italiaander, R. (1957). *Hedendaagse negerkunst uit Centraal-Afrika [Contemporary negro art from Central Africa]* [Exhibition catalogue]. Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
- Jasper, J. M. (2010). Cultural Approaches in the Sociology of Social Movements. In B. Klandermans & C. Roggeband (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Movements Across Disciplines* (pp. 59–109). Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-70960-4_3
- Jones, A. L. (1993). Exploding Canons: The Anthropology of Museums. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 22(1), 201–220. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.22.100193.001221>
- Kalb, D., & Tak, H. (2005). Introduction: Critical Junctions—Recapturing Anthropology and History. In D. Kalb & H. Tak (Eds.), *Critical Junctions: Anthropology and History beyond the Cultural Turn* (pp. 1–27). Berghahn Books.
- Karp, I. (1991). How Museums Define Other Cultures. *American Art*, 5(1/2), 10–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/424103>
- Karp, I., Kreamer, C. M., & Lavine, S. D. (Eds.). (1992). *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*. Smithsonian Institution.
- Karp, I., & Lavine, S. D. (Eds.). (1991). *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Smithsonian Institution.
- Leyten, H. (2004). Onbekend maakt onbemind. Xenofobie in de Nederlandse musea [Unknown makes unloved. Xenophobia in Dutch museums]. *Kunstlicht*, 25(3), 28–34.
- Lidchi, H. (2013). The poetics and the politics of exhibiting other cultures. In S. Hall, J. Evans, & S. Nixon (Eds.), *Representation* (Second Edition, pp. 120–214). Sage.
- L'Internationale Online. (2015). Decolonising Museums. *L'Internationale Books*.
- Mabaso, N., & Braat, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Tell Freedom. 15 South African artists* [Exhibition catalogue]. Kunsthal KAdE.

- Macdonald, S. (2010). Exhibitions of power and powers of exhibition: An introduction to the politics of display. In S. Macdonald (Ed.), *The Politics of Display: Museums, science, culture* (pp. 1–21). Routledge.
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How To Do Critical Discourse Analysis*. Sage.
- Marshall, A. (2018, December 8). Belgium’s Africa Museum Had a Racist Image. Can It Change That? *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/08/arts/design/africa-museum-belgium.html>
- Matthews, B., & Ross, L. (2010). *Research Methods: A practical guide for the social sciences*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Mignolo, W. (2017, January 21). *Interview - Walter Mignolo/Part 2: Key Concepts* [Interview]. <https://www.e-ir.info/2017/01/21/interview-walter-mignolopart-2-key-concepts/>
- Mignolo, W. D., & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University Press.
- Modest, W., & Lelijveld, R. (Eds.). (2018). *Words Matter: An Unfinished Guide to Word Choices in the Cultural Sector*. Tropenmuseum.
https://www.materialculture.nl/sites/default/files/2018-08/words_matter.pdf.pdf
- Museum Beelden aan Zee. (2016). *Imilonji Yembali: Melodies of History* [Exhibition booklet]. 16–21.
- Museum Helmond. (2016). *Yinka Shonibare* [Exhibition booklet]. Museum Helmond.
- Museum of Modern Art. (n.d.). *The Controversial ‘Primitivism’ Exhibition*. MoMA through Time. Retrieved 6 June 2021, from
https://www.moma.org/interactives/moma_through_time/
- Njami, S. (2012). Africa, the Netherlands and Europe. In M. ter Horst (Ed.), *Changing Perspectives: Dealing with Globalisation in the Presentation and Collection of Contemporary Art* (pp. 146–152). KIT Publishers.
- Pieterse, J. N. (1997). Multiculturalism in Museums: Discourse about Others in the Age of Globalization. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 14(4), 123–146.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/026327697014004006>
- Rangan, P., & Chow, R. (2013). Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality. In G. Huggan (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* (pp. 1–12). Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588251.013.0025>
- Rapley, T. (2011). Interviews. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman, *Qualitative Research Practice* (pp. 16–34).
- Said, E. (2003). *Orientalism*. Penguin.
- Tropen Museum. (2019). *Fashion Cities Africa* [Exhibition booklet]. Tropen museum.
- Veldkamp, F. (2006). Museum zonder oogkleppen [Museum without blinders]. *Zuidelijk Afrika Magazine*, 02, 10–13.

- Veldkamp, F. (2007). Wat de boer niet kent... [What you're not familiar with...]. *Zuidelijk Afrika Magazine*, 02, 16–19.
- Verbergt, B. (2020). Transitioning the Museum: Managing Decolonization at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (2000–2020). *Journal of Cultural Management and Cultural Policy / Zeitschrift für Kulturmanagement und Kulturpolitik*, 6(2), 141–170. <https://doi.org/10.14361/zkmm-2020-0206>
- Vitra Design Museum. (2016). *Making Africa—Continent van hedendaags design [Making Africa—Continent of contemporary design]* [Exhibition catalogue]. Vitra Design Museum.
- Vogel, S. M. (1991). Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion. In I. Karp & S. D. Lavine (Eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (pp. 191–204). The Smithsonian Institution Press in association with the American Association of Museums.

7. APPENDICES

A. OVERVIEW OF PRIMARY DATA

| Name publication | Museum name | Kind of institution | Year | Kind | Amount of pages | Language |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Project 1975 Contemporary Art and the Postcolonial Unconscious | Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam | Project space | 2010 | Publication | 8 | English |
| Ina van Zyl Shame pieces | Kunstmuseum Den Haag | Art museum | 2010 | Website text | 1 | English |
| Susan Opperman | Kunsthal, Rotterdam | Art museum | 2011 | Website | 1 | English |
| Female power | Museum Arnhem | Art museum | 2013 | Catalogue | 2 | English |
| This is not Africa, this is us | Kunsthal, Rotterdam | Art museum | 2014 | Essay | 5 | English |
| This is not Africa, this is us | Kunsthal, Rotterdam | Art museum | 2014 | Press release | 1 | English |
| Marlene Dumas - The Image as Burden | Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam | Art museum | 2014 | Website | 1 | English |
| Apartheid & After | Huis Marseille, Amsterdam | Art museum | 2014 | Catalogue | 2 | English |
| HOW FAR HOW NEAR – the world in the Stedelijk | Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam | Art museum | 2014 | Catalogue | 46 | English/Dutch |
| Making Africa - Continent van hedendaags design | Kunsthal, Rotterdam | Art museum | 2016 | Booklet | 26 | Dutch |
| Making Africa - Continent van hedendaags design | Kunsthal, Rotterdam | Art museum | 2016 | Press release | 1 | English |
| Yinka Shonibare MBE | Museum Helmond | Art museum | 2016 | Website tekst | 1 | English |
| Yinka Shonibare MBE | Museum Helmond | Art museum | 2016 | Exhibition booklet | 19 | English |

| | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------|------|---------------------|----|---------------|
| Nicholas Hlobo - Imilonji Yembali (Melodies of History) | Museum Beelden aan Zee, Den Haag | Art museum | 2016 | Booklet | 5 | Dutch |
| Afrika 010 | Wereldmuseum Rotterdam | World museum | 2016 | Catalogue | 8 | Dutch |
| Afrotopia | Afrika Museum | World museum | 2017 | Collection website | 1 | English |
| Zanele Muholi | Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam | Art museum | 2017 | Website tekst | 1 | English |
| Foam 3h: Foam X AAF | FOAM | Art museum | 2017 | Website tekst | 1 | English |
| Tell Freedom: 15 South African artists | Kunsthal KAdE, Amersfoort | Art museum | 2018 | Catalogue | 23 | English |
| Fashion Cities Africa | Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam | World museum | 2019 | Information booklet | 24 | English/Dutch |
| Welkom Today | Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam | Art museum | 2019 | Website tekst | 1 | English |
| Katharine Cooper | Kunsthal, Rotterdam | Art museum | 2019 | Press release | 1 | English |
| El Anatsui | Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam | Art museum | 2020 | Website acquisition | 1 | English |
| Robin Rhode | Voorlinden museum, Wassenaar | Art museum | 2021 | Website | 1 | English |
| Africa and the Tropen Museum | Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam | World museum | 2011 | Publication | 17 | English |

B. CODEBOOK

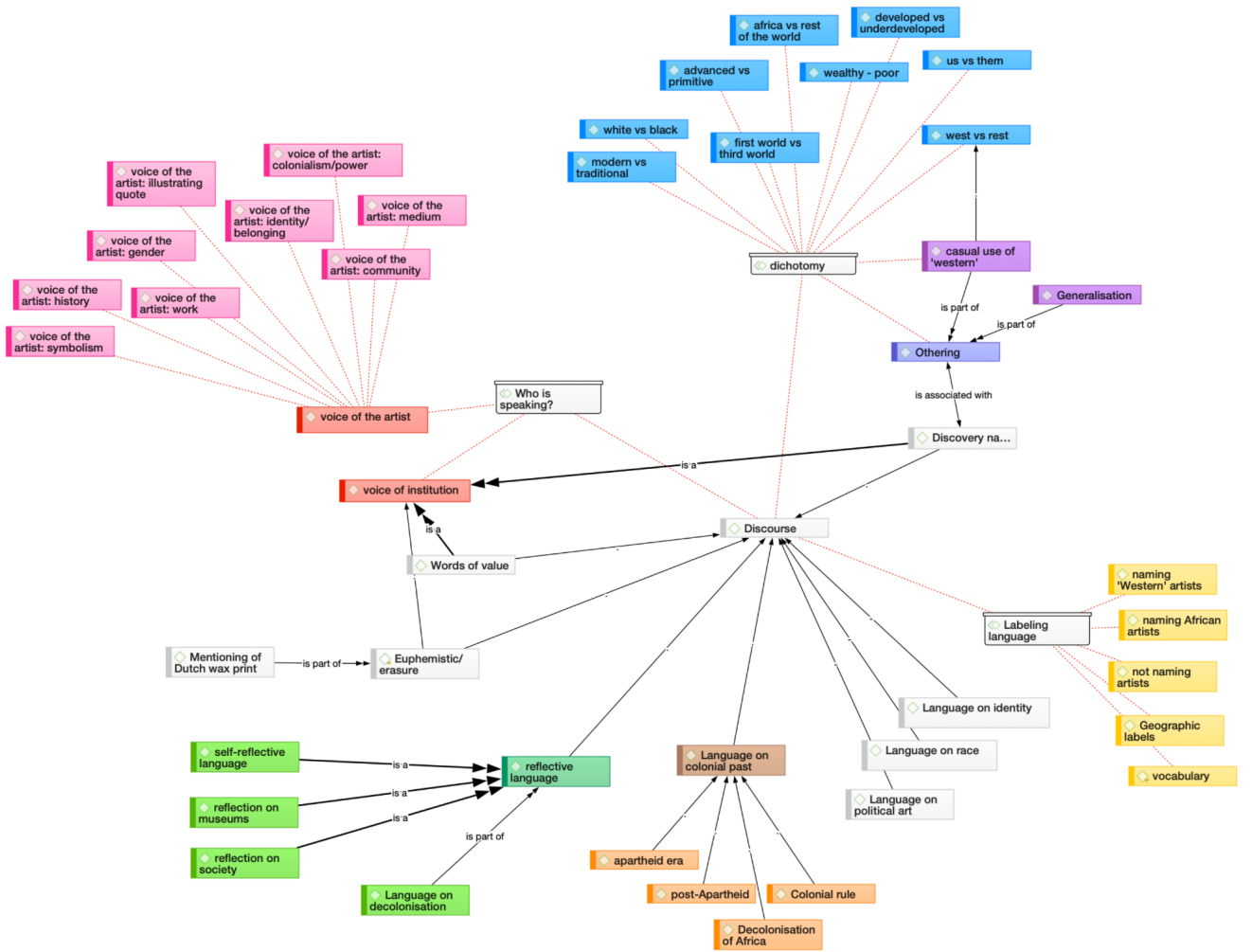
| Code | Second-level code | Examples |
|---|--|--|
| Reflective language | Self-reflective language Reflection on museums Reflection on society Language on decolonisation | “Clearly we, the modern art museums, realize something is lacking; we must have fallen short in the past, or were simply unaware of the uneven representation. Or perhaps we just considered art from other parts of the world not good enough, at least not for our museums” “We now read posts like this with some bewilderment at the ease with which racist and nonsensical comments were made about other people.” ¹¹ |
| Dichotomy (used in an illustrative and reflective manner) | Advanced vs. primitive Africa vs. rest of the world Developed vs. undeveloped First world vs. third world Modern vs. traditional Us vs. them Rich vs. poor West vs. rest White vs. Black | “elsewhere in the world” “us modern art, them poverty, apartheid, war and strife” |
| Othering (problematic use) | Casual use of ‘western’ Generalisations Problematic use of dichotomies | “seemingly incompatible worlds: Africa and heavy metal” ¹² “the over-consumption in the Western world has a serious impact on so-called ‘third world countries’” |
| Language on colonial past | Apartheid era Post-apartheid Colonial rule Decolonisation of Africa Slavery | “The relation between South Africa and the Netherlands started with the violent colonial interference of the Netherlands in the 17th century.” |
| Language on political art | | “Dumas does not shy away from controversial topics” |
| Language on identity | | “In her video works, the use of soil literally functions as a signifier of the land she has |

¹¹ “Berichten als deze lezen we nu met enige verbijstering over het gemak waarmee racistische en onzinnige opmerkingen worden gemaakt over andere mensen”

¹² “ogenschijnlijk onverenigbare werelden: Afrika en heavy metal”

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| | | lived on and which has shaped her identity and memories.” |
| Language on race | | “in which the duality of the characters is played out in racial difference” |
| Mentioning of Dutch wax prints | | “Dutch Wax, the typical, batik-printed fabric inspired by Javanese textile designs, with which Vlisco, the Dutch textile company, has been market leader in Africa for almost a century.” |
| Erasure/euphemism | | “such issues” “such forces” “South Africa’s turbulent history” “historic links between the two countries” |
| Labeling language | Geographic labels Vocabulary Not naming African artists Naming African artists Naming ‘Western’ artists | “black female artists in South Africa” “people of colour and whites” “slaves, destined to be sold” |
| Discovery narrative | | “This is the first work by El Anatsui in a public collection in the Netherlands” “first solo exhibition” |
| Voice of the artist | Voice of the artist: colonialism/power Voice of the artist: community Voice of the artist: gender Voice of the artist: history Voice of the artist: identity/belonging Voice of the artist: illustrating quote Voice of the artist: medium Voice of the artist: symbolism Voice of the artist: work | “I’m playing with the line between masculinity and femininity to create collections that tell Nigerian stories.” |
| Voice of institution | | “These works contain an interesting mix of the personal and the global” |
| Words of value | | “Marlene Dumas is considered one of the most significant and influential painters working today” “[...] like the dress Queen Maxima bought from her” |

C. CODETREE



D. OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

| Gender | Occupation | Expertise | Duration | Date | Medium or location | Code |
|---------------|--------------------------------|--|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| F | Curator art museum | Contemporary art | 45:33 minutes | 11-05-2021 | Zoom | A |
| M | Ex-curator ethnographic museum | Africa | 50:21 minutes | 12-05-2021 | Zoom | B |
| M | Independent writer and curator | Contemporary American, African American, African and Surinam art | 54:29 minutes | 14-05-2021 | Skype | C |
| M | Curator art museum | Modern and contemporary art | 41:51 minutes | 25-05-2021 | Phone call | D |
| F | Independent writer and curator | African art | 42:40 minutes | 16-06-2021 | Zoom | E |

E. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

GEINFORMEERD TOESTEMMINGSFORMULIER

| | |
|--|--|
| Onderzoek | Master scriptie Arts, Culture and Society |
| Naam van de onderzoeker | Heleen Dijkhuizen |
| Doel van het onderzoek | Ik nodig u uit om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoeksproject over het discours en de betekenis daarvan rondom hedendaagse Afrikaanse kunst in Nederlandse musea gedurende de afgelopen 10 jaar. Het doel van dit gesprek is om te reflecteren op uw eigen ervaringen met dit onderwerp en voor de onderzoeker om de voorlopige resultaten van het onderzoek te bespreken met experts. |
| Procedures | U neemt deel aan een gesprek dat ongeveer 45-60 minuten zal duren. Er zullen vragen worden gesteld over uw ervaring met het discours en het taalgebruik rondom hedendaagse Afrikaanse kunst gedurende de afgelopen decennia (afhankelijk van uw ervaring) en voornamelijk de afgelopen 10 jaar. Daarnaast zal de onderzoeker aan de hand van voorbeelden uit de data met u de voorlopige resultaten van het onderzoek bespreken. |
| Mogelijke en bestreden risico's en ongemakken | Er zijn geen duidelijke fysieke, juridische of economische risico's verbonden aan uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. U hoeft geen vragen te beantwoorden die u niet wilt beantwoorden. Deelname is vrijwillig en u bent vrij om de deelname op elk moment stop te zetten. |
| Delen van de resultaten | Het onderzoek zal worden afgerond in juni 2021 als masterscriptie voor de master Arts, Culture and Society aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. Indien de mogelijkheid zich aanbiedt om de scriptie in een vorm van een (wetenschappelijk) artikel of gepubliceerde thesis te publiceren zal de onderzoeker deze kans aannemen. De citaten uit de interviews die worden gebruikt worden anoniem gepubliceerd. |

GEINFORMEERD TOESTEMMINGSFORMULIER

| | |
|--|--|
| Onderzoek | Master scriptie Arts, Culture and Society |
| Naam van de onderzoeker | Heleen Dijkhuizen |
| Doel van het onderzoek | Ik nodig u uit om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoeksproject over het discours en de betekenis daarvan rondom hedendaagse Afrikaanse kunst in Nederlandse musea gedurende de afgelopen 10 jaar. Het doel van dit gesprek is om te reflecteren op uw eigen ervaringen met dit onderwerp en voor de onderzoeker om de voorlopige resultaten van het onderzoek te bespreken met experts. |
| Procedures | U neemt deel aan een gesprek dat ongeveer 45-60 minuten zal duren. Er zullen vragen worden gesteld over uw ervaring met het discours en het taalgebruik rondom hedendaagse Afrikaanse kunst gedurende de afgelopen decennia (afhankelijk van uw ervaring) en voornamelijk de afgelopen 10 jaar. Daarnaast zal de onderzoeker aan de hand van voorbeelden uit de data met u de voorlopige resultaten van het onderzoek bespreken. |
| Mogelijke en bestreden risico's en ongemakken | Er zijn geen duidelijke fysieke, juridische of economische risico's verbonden aan uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. U hoeft geen vragen te beantwoorden die u niet wilt beantwoorden. Deelname is vrijwillig en u bent vrij om de deelname op elk moment stop te zetten. |
| Delen van de resultaten | Het onderzoek zal worden afgerond in juni 2021 als masterscriptie voor de master Arts, Culture and Society aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. Indien de mogelijkheid zich aanbiedt om de scriptie in een vorm van een (wetenschappelijk) artikel of gepubliceerde thesis te publiceren zal de onderzoeker deze kans aannemen. De citaten uit de interviews die worden gebruikt worden anoniem gepubliceerd. |

GEINFORMEERD TOESTEMMINGSFORMULIER

| | |
|--|--|
| Onderzoek | Master scriptie Arts, Culture and Society |
| Naam van de onderzoeker | Heleen Dijkhuizen |
| Doel van het onderzoek | Ik nodig u uit om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoeksproject over het discours en de betekenis daarvan rondom hedendaagse Afrikaanse kunst in Nederlandse musea gedurende de afgelopen 10 jaar. Het doel van dit gesprek is om te reflecteren op uw eigen ervaringen met dit onderwerp en voor de onderzoeker om de voorlopige resultaten van het onderzoek te bespreken met experts. |
| Procedures | U neemt deel aan een gesprek dat ongeveer 45-60 minuten zal duren. Er zullen vragen worden gesteld over uw ervaring met het discours en het taalgebruik rondom hedendaagse Afrikaanse kunst gedurende de afgelopen decennia (afhankelijk van uw ervaring) en voornamelijk de afgelopen 10 jaar. Daarnaast zal de onderzoeker aan de hand van voorbeelden uit de data met u de voorlopige resultaten van het onderzoek bespreken. |
| Mogelijke en bestreden risico's en ongemakken | Er zijn geen duidelijke fysieke, juridische of economische risico's verbonden aan uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. U hoeft geen vragen te beantwoorden die u niet wilt beantwoorden. Deelname is vrijwillig en u bent vrij om de deelname op elk moment stop te zetten. |
| Delen van de resultaten | Het onderzoek zal worden afgerond in juni 2021 als masterscriptie voor de master Arts, Culture and Society aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. Indien de mogelijkheid zich aanbiedt om de scriptie in een vorm van een (wetenschappelijk) artikel of gepubliceerde thesis te publiceren zal de onderzoeker deze kans aannemen. De citaten uit de interviews die worden gebruikt worden anoniem gepubliceerd. |

F. CONVERSATION GUIDE

- Could you tell me more about your experience as a curator/expert of/on contemporary African art?
- How important is language to you, when talking about (contemporary African) art?
 - o Why does it matter?
 - o Why not?
- How do you write information about the art/artist when producing an exhibition? What do you keep in mind? Is something different when exhibiting art that is not from Europe/US/the 'West'?
- How has discourse/language changed in the last ±40 years? (or 20/10 years depending on their experience)
 - o Do you have specific examples of this?
- As a museum worker/curator/expert, are there also things not explicitly or directly said, or said in euphemisms?
 - o In my data, I found a couple of examples where it seems like certain issues are not explicitly mentioned, especially regarding the Dutch colonial past or the apartheid period in South Africa. One example that I found in a catalogue was: “trade relations between Ghana and the Netherlands in the 15th/16th century” and “trade in cacao, weapons, coffee and other goods”... → slavery is not mentioned here and “other goods” perhaps refers to enslaved people.
- Are there certain trends or patterns in which contemporary African artists are exhibited or the way in which they are exhibited?
 - o → It looks like it is often art about identity/politics/activism; artists from South Africa (also white artists); or artists who have a connection to Europe such as Yinka Shonibare or Marlene Dumas. Additionally, there often is a relation to the Netherlands: the artist studied here or makes art with Dutch wax prints for example.
 - o Are there more or less solo or group exhibitions? Is there a rising trend of African artists being exhibited in thematic or overview exhibitions?
- Is there a general view of Dutch museums towards contemporary African art and artists?
- What has been the influence of the Words Matter publication? What is your opinion on it?
- Do you notice a difference, or a shift between ethnographic/fine art museums and anthropologists/art historians in how they view and frame contemporary African art?
- The discourse of museums in the past ten years seems to be very reflective and critical on the museum itself or on society. → Are museums decolonising and could you comment on this?