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**PROSTITUTION / SERVITUDE / SLAVERY.
PICTURING FEMALE DEPENDENCIES IN
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY AMSTERDAM**



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Prostitution / Servitude / Slavery. Picturing Female Dependencies in Seventeenth Century
Amsterdam

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Abstract

This working paper seeks to explore the concept of asymmetrical dependency from an art and cultural historical perspective. Prostitution and sex work are central domains in which female dependency was negotiated and bargained over during the early modern period. The aim of this project is to modify the network of different asymmetrical dependencies as it relates to female occupations, in particular to female prostitution in Amsterdam in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which is critically shaped by the role of the globalized metropolis in Dutch colonialism. The final section will focus on the concrete example of the exhibition on Dutch still lives “Augenlust,” co-curated by the author (LVR-Landesmuseum Bonn, 23.09.22–20.02.23, held in cooperation with the Museum Allard Pierson Amsterdam), in which several cabinets were dedicated to the theme of asymmetrical dependency.

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I. Introduction

Prostitution and sex work are a central field of negotiation relating to urban modes of female dependency in the early modern period. The aim of this project is to readjust the web of different asymmetrical dependencies in the realm of female occupations. In particular it will focus on female prostitution and its broader associations and implications in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Amsterdam, which were significantly shaped by the role of the metropolis in Dutch colonialism. Indeed, the unheard and unexplored voices of this group of women emerge in a generically diverse and under-utilized body of visual evidence.

The new conditions of this urban environment were crucial for pre-conditioning these acts of negotiation. Amsterdam experienced extreme population growth during the period under study. In the first place, the influx of religious refugees into the city led to an exponential increase in the number of inhabitants from 54,000 in around 1600 to 240,000 in 1740. Apart from a confessional motivation, seventeenth-century Amsterdam attracted an above-average number of young female migrants for other reasons. These reasons varied. One primary reason was the demand for domestic servants – primarily female – among the city’s upper class and booming middle class. Another key reason was that the city provided exemplary care for the poor, while opportunities for unmarried pregnant women to give birth to their illegitimate children and receive medical care were also far superior to those in other cities of the time. These conditions attracted young women not only from Dutch and Flemish villages, but also from further afield in northern Germany and Scandinavia. Many of these women worked as domestic servants, in prostitution, or between the two areas.

During the pre-modern era beginning from the late fifteenth century, prostitution was closely linked both in internal and external perception to the port city of Amsterdam. Even then, legal documents, travel reports, diary entries and letters, overlapped with the growing production of fictional reports, including plays, novelizations and stories, as well as a booming visual media from paintings, statues and a variety of print media. In a growing number of novels published in this time, for example Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken’s *Brieven an Abraham Blankaart* (1787–1789) the protagonists visited the brothels of Amsterdam. In other works the city was identified, in itself, as the Babylon of “fallen girls.”

As the terminology of prostitution in its current sense has only been in use since the middle of the nineteenth century, the sources containing the terms *hoererij* or *hoeren* (whores) do not only describe the sale of sexual acts, but refer more generally to any non-normative extramarital affair that was not intended to produce offspring.¹

¹ Fernando Henriques, *Prostitution in Europe and the New World* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1963); Julie Coleman, “Corpus Linguistics and Seventeenth-Century Prostitution: Computational Linguistics and History,” *The Seventeenth Century* 33 (2017): 1–2; Wolfgang Pfeifer et al., “Prostitution,” in *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1993), digital version at <https://www.dwds.de/wb/etymwb/Prostitution> [accessed 20.10.2023].

Prostitution was legally forbidden following the *alteratie*, the deposing of the Spanish-Habsburg city government of Amsterdam by the Calvinists on 26 May 1578, and the resulting criminal prosecution produced extensive written sources that need to be delved into further. Another, perhaps unintended result was the increase of brothels throughout the entire city. The *Confessieboeken der Gevangenen* (interrogation records), which record the name, age, profession, place of birth, and offence of the delinquents being interrogated by the courts, were maintained until 1811. These show that between 1650 and 1749, over 9,000 trials against prostitutes were held, which means that one fifth of all criminal cases in Amsterdam at that time concerned 'prostitution' or connected acts.²

The female composition and control of Amsterdam's prostitution system has led previous researchers to portray the trade as progressive and to falsely characterize it in terms of female self-determination. Of the 890 *hoerenhouders* or *hoerenkeepers* (whore-keepers) mentioned in the criminal records of Amsterdam between 1650 and 1750, 'only' approximately 350 were male brothel operators.

As mentioned previously, the demography of early modern Amsterdam was further marked by the predominance of women. Indeed, records indicate that there was a 2:3 ratio of men to women among the poorest social classes. After all, one in three men went to sea at this time, and of these only two thirds returned to their hometowns. In addition, while sailors could sign on with the *Oost Indische Compagnie* (Dutch East India Company)³ in several towns, they could only receive their wages in Amsterdam and Middelburg. This meant that when on leave, and newly paid, they would frequent brothels in these cities in larger numbers than in other areas.

The wives of these sailors were also in an extremely vulnerable position, as married women were sometimes left on their own in the city for several years, with very few able to rely on regular financial support from their husbands while they were at sea. Beyond the court records relating to prostitution, other crimes committed by women in the mid-seventeenth century may be related to this situation. For instance, many of the thefts prosecuted in this period were committed by women. Further documents reporting on female convicts and especially prostitutes, and the conditions in which they lived and were educated, appear in the visitor records of the women's prison, the *spinhuis* (house of correction, where the women had to work on spinning wheels). Here female convicts, especially prostitutes, were rehabilitated and educated to work in professions outside the sex trade following their release. According to various travelogues and early tourist guides, we know that the prisons, along with their inhabitants, were exhibited to visitors for a fee. These records are another key resource into the daily lives of the women and give us an insight into their lives beyond the words of their trials and court records.

² Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore: Prostitution in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 103–4.

³ Jan Lucassen, "A Multinational and its Labor Force: The Dutch East India Company 1595–1795," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 66 (2004): 12–39.

Critical attention needs to be given to various forms of urban female dependency within Amsterdam in the seventeenth century, ranging from prostitution to slavery to other forms of domestic servitude, as well as to the allegedly self-determined work in brothels mentioned above. We can gain some knowledge of these women and their world from the contemporary fictional and non-fictional texts, pamphlets, reports and plays of the period. *Le Putanisme d'Amsterdam* (the Putanism in Amsterdam) of 1681, for example, A book that provides information on how to deal with prostitutes compares the purchase of prostitutes to a slave market⁴, while *D'openhertige Juffrouw* (The open-hearted virgin) (1699) describes the exchange, hire, and sale of prostitutes as directly comparable to the ways enslaved women were treated in Turkey⁵. In *De Amstedamsche speelhuizen* (The Amsterdam Playhouses) of 1793, a prostitute is quoted as saying that she would rather change places with a Black maid or slave in Batavia than live in the *speelhuizen* and brothels as if she were in prison.⁶

This last example points to further questions that need to be asked in relation to prostitutes from Amsterdam's Black and Asian communities, which were made up of formerly enslaved persons who settled primarily in the Jodenbreestraat area in the seventeenth century. Some of these, including a woman named Christina, born to an enslaved mother in Batavia and brought to Amsterdam at the age of five by her owner Adrianus van der Geugten, were imprisoned in the *spinhuis* in 1766 for their "immoral life style."⁷ The daughters of slaveholders were another group that complexify the asymmetrical dependencies of early modern Amsterdam. For example, Wilhelmina Balk, whose father was the owner of the plantation *De Vriendschap* (the Friendship) in Berbice in present-day Guyana, was appointed by him as sole heiress and raised by a guardian in Amsterdam.⁸ It was precisely from Guyana that many slaves came to the metropolis in the eighteenth century, but their legal status did not change despite the abolition of slavery. How should we define the forms of dependency of people in Amsterdam who were no longer enslaved? And, what was the servant relationship like for women in Amsterdam hailing from the colonies, for Black Jewish women and for daughters of slaveholders? Clearly, the sources offer an array of methodological challenges.

⁴ Anonymous, *Le Putanisme d'Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Jogchemse de Rhin, 1681).

⁵ Anonymous, *D'openhertige juffrouw, of D'ontdekte geveinsdheid* (Amsterdam: Widow of Gijsbert de Groot, 1699): vol. 1, 172.

⁶ Anonymous, *De Amstedamsche speelhuizen* (Amsterdam, 1793?), vol. 1.

⁷ Leo Balai, *Geschiedenis van de Amsterdamsche slavenhandel over de belangen van Amsterdamsche regenten bij de trans-atlantische slavenhandel* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2013): 34; Markus Balkenhol, "Tracing Slavery: An Ethnography of Diaspora, Affect, and Cultural Heritage in Amsterdam" (Phd diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2014); Carl Harnack, "Slavernij in beeld," in *De Slavernij in Oost en West. Het Amsterdam-onderzoek*, ed. Pepijn Brandon, Guno Jones, Nancy Jouwe and Matthias van Rossum (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2020): 236–38.

⁸ See the British Guiana Colonists Index "B": <https://www.vc.id.au/tb/bgcolonistsB.html> [accessed 20.03.2024].

II. Methods and Challenges: Initial Thoughts

The theoretical horizon against which the concrete, source-based project work of this study has been developed is closely linked to the Cluster's broader questions about modes and models of dependency and is informed, to this extent, by a broader approach than the traditional European binary opposition of "slavery versus freedom" – an opposition whose terminological weaknesses are particularly evident in gender-related topics. For this reason, the theoretical approach adopted here focuses on *practices* and regards not only relations between people, but also between people and objects of material culture as equally important to understanding asymmetrical dependencies. The Cluster's methodological principles, theoretical frameworks and terminologies have been summarized in an exploratory paper published in 2021.⁹ The specific asymmetry of the dependencies experienced by historical actors in the field of early modern female prostitution may be conditioned by factors of gender, (proto-)racism, colonial marginalization, and religious cultures – or by any conceivable combination of these factors. This project asks which factors led to the long silence surrounding asymmetrical dependency in this area, and which new sources need to be consulted in order to reveal them.¹⁰

By focusing on concrete case studies, rather than attempting an overview of unspecified social groups and tacitly assuming their homogeneity, the project draws on the methodology prominent in previous work produced at the BCDSS: the micro-historical approach put forward by Tomich and Zeuske.¹¹ This essay adopts, then, the concept of "comparative microhistories" as a tool to analyze several cases and to create from them the basis for a broader understanding of the issue at hand. Thus, this project also connects to the Cluster's concentration on a "micro-spatial approach".¹² In particular, I focus on a specific historical setting – the prosperous city of Amsterdam as a field of negotiation that brings to light asymmetrical dependencies of a very specific kind: female prostitution.

Another study that could be of great importance for the project from a theoretical-hermeneutical point of view, but which, in contrast to the texts mentioned so far, has not yet played such a decisive role in the Cluster's work, is Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*. This study asks us to think about forms of dependency and their progressive dissolution, not as constituents of the narrative arc of justice and progress in humanity's history, but as an

⁹ Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter, Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler and Stephan Conermann, "On Asymmetrical Dependency," *Concept Paper 1*, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (2021), https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/images/pdf-files/concept-papers/bcdss_cp_1-on-asymmetrical-dependency.pdf [accessed 20.03.2024].

¹⁰ Lisa Hellman, Sinah Kloß, Christian Mader, Jutta Wimmler and Julia Winnebeck, "Interview: A Window on our Research Perspectives," *DEPENDENT. The Magazine of the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies*, 2021-1: 16–22.

¹¹ Dale Tomich and Michael Zeuske, "The Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World Economy and Comparative Microhistories," *Review – Fernand Braudel Center* 31, no. 2 (2008): 91–100.

¹² Christian G. De Vito and Anne Gerritsen, "Micro-Spatial Histories of Global Labour: Towards a New Global History," in *Micro-Spatial Histories of Global Labour*, ed. Christian G. De Vito and Anne Gerritsen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 1–28.

affirmation of a deeply constrained and compromised conception of slavery and freedom.¹³ Hartman challenges the assumption that the forms of dependency endured by people classified as socially “different” even after the end of their respective dependency relations are merely the result of ongoing patterns of exclusion, a situation for which inclusion is the only viable solution. Instead, Hartman asks us to consider a different question, namely, what is meant by freedom? If freedom is *simply* the opposite of slavery, then it is a hollow concept. Thus, my project tries to re-evaluate concrete historical modes of dependency with a special focus on the possible ambivalence that inheres in the terms “slavery” and “freedom,” which merely appear to be mutually exclusive.

Direct testimonies from enslaved people are rare in written sources within and beyond the Colonial-era Netherlands and its territories, partly due to the fact that writing and reading were forbidden in many colonies to enslaved people, who also had no access to writing materials. The autobiographical documents that have been preserved are from formerly enslaved people who talk about their lives in the past, almost as though viewed in a rear-view mirror. One important person is Boston Band, a resistance fighter and writing ex-slave, who was deported to Suriname in 1749 and died in 1766. He was previously one of the leaders of the rebellious slaves in East Surinam and is regarded as an important representative of the Maroons (runaway slaves). The Boston Band’s text is of great importance in the field of Dutch history of slavery, even though it has only survived in Dutch translation, rather than in the original.¹⁴ The written records of the formerly enslaved Angela van Bengalen, who was freed together with her children, can also be cited in this context. She was married several times, even though she was a *heelslag* (born as a child of two slaves), which contravened the rule that only enslaved persons with one enslaved parent could marry a European. She inherited, among other things, land from her three husbands.¹⁵

In this project, I will focus on images as key sources alongside juridical records, death and baptismal registers or administrative documents. Of particular interest are artefacts that directly or indirectly provide information on the theme of prostitution and asymmetric dependence. As a methodological approach to dealing with the victim archive, which is often difficult or indeed impossible to reconstruct, I will draw on Saidiya Hartman’s approach of critical fabulation.¹⁶ This theorem facilitates a multifaceted inquiry and, above all, eschews the mistake of trying to answer the question solely from the perpetrator archive. In her essay “Venus in Two Acts” (2008), she first draws attention to the fact that archives must be viewed critically and therefore asks specifically about the archive of the prisoners, then about the archive of the victims, and finally about how the wide archival gaps can be closed. She calls

¹³ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection. Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Frank Dragtenstein, *Alles voor de vrede. Die brieven van Boston Band tussen 1757 en 1763* (Amsterdam: Amrit, 2010).

¹⁵ Eveline Sint Nicolaas and Valika Smeulders, eds., *Slavery. The Story of João, Wally, Oopjen, Paulus, van Bengalen, Surapati, Sapali, Tula, Dirk, Lohkay* (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2021): 14.

¹⁶ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14.

these gaps the “silence of the archive”¹⁷ – gaps that reflect a specific aspect of the situation of those enslaved or forced into prostitution, and that often do not reveal the direct voice of the colonized. In order to give the silenced a voice and close these gaps, the literary scholar proposes to tell a counter-history. For this, however, it is necessary to become aware of the immanent structure of “violence in the archive.” This in turn raises the question of how the stories of Black prisoners can be told with dignity without reproducing the violence. How can we succeed in adopting new perspectives that bypass the cruel representations of the colonizers? Saidiya Hartman proposes a way for dealing with the “violence of the archive” by means of what she calls “critical fabulation.” Critical fabulation is meant to encourage dealing with the gaps in the archive that have been created by the lack of Black perspectives.¹⁸ They are not meant to be filled by these unknown perspectives alone, but rather to serve as a starting point for a story that moves along the line between truth and fiction, asking, “What if?” or “What could have been?” She explains:

By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.¹⁹

The aim is not to create a story based on the supposed facts of the archive as studied by earlier scholars, but one that goes beyond them. Hartman encourages us to look critically at the archive and to go beyond its boundaries. The challenge is to “both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling.”²⁰

My project applies Hartman’s concept of critical fabulation to the field of visualizations and the field of prostitution and other forms of asymmetrical dependency and covers the entire spectrum from female labor to sexualized enslavement in the early modern era. The application of Hartmann’s literary method to fields of art historical research includes, for example, artefacts shown in the backgrounds of an image, images in the broadest sense of

¹⁷ See Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”: 12, “Admittedly my own writing is unable to exceed the limits of the sayable dictated by the archive. It depends upon the legal records, surgeons’ journals, ledgers, ship manifests, and captains’ logs, and in this regard falters before the archive’s silence and reproduces its omissions. The irreparable violence of the Atlantic slave trade resides precisely in all the stories that we cannot know and that will never be recovered. This formidable obstacle or constitutive impossibility defines the parameters of my work.” See also the development of the concept in: Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019) and Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

¹⁸ See Kristina Maurer, “Critical fabulation als Perspektive für ein dekolonisierendes Theater,” <https://theaterdekolonisierenseminar.wordpress.com/2020/12/15/critical-fabulation-als-perspektive-fur-ein-dekolonisierendes-theater/> [accessed 20.03.2024]

¹⁹ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”: 11.

²⁰ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”: 11.

the visual sciences, sketches, drawings and symbols as well as descriptions of images that no longer exist.

III. Prostitution, Labor, Servitude – or Slavery?

One characteristic of asymmetrical dependencies in premodern Europe is gender-related access to and exclusion from power structures, as well as a fundamental imbalance in the exercise of domination and violence. From a cultural-historical point of view, one of the oldest forms of these processes of power and violence is female prostitution, which even in its earliest ancient examples was obviously linked explicitly to urban social and power structures. The term “prostitution” has been used since the sixteenth century to refer to the sale of bodies as a trade.²¹ In the entry “Prostituiren,” the *Great Complete Encyclopedia of All Sciences and Arts* published by Johann Heinrich Zedler between 1731 and 1754 explains the term as broadly referring to “offering oneself for sale, presenting oneself, indicating oneself, giving oneself for sale; likewise, making oneself mean and contemptible, or bringing oneself into disgrace and ridicule through imprudent speeches and deeds.”²² While prostitution can be read as a synonym for “demeaning oneself, diminishing oneself and insulting oneself,” it denotes “in particular, however, the lending or offering for fornication, or other indecent and disgraceful pursuits.”²³ The European early modern period is no exception to this definition. Economically important metropolises at the international level such as London or Amsterdam were sites of flourishing female prostitution, often induced by poverty. As we will see below, Amsterdam was a center of the phenomenon in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries due to its specific social and economic structure as the largest city in the Netherlands.

In what follows, I will firstly outline Amsterdam’s prostitution system and its characteristics, and then present and discuss selected examples to highlight the extent to which the images expose strong asymmetric dependencies. The same images also help to address the question of overlap between the field of prostitution and those of female servitude and human trafficking. I will consider whether female prostitution in Amsterdam can be compared, paralleled or contrasted with different forms of dependency up to and including colonial slavery. Were there differences in the degree of visibility of female prostitution in the colonies in contrast to the – presumably – more socially regulated and sanctioned urban space of Amsterdam? In doing so, I will consider how specific “archives of victims” should be

²¹ Douglas Harper, “Prostitute,” Online Etymology Dictionary, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/prostitute> [accessed 20.10.2023], quoted after: Sydney Houston-Goudge, “Common Woman to Commodity: Changing Perceptions of Prostitution in Early Modern England, c.1450–1750” (M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 2011): 1 with further literature.

²² Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon*, vol. 29 (Leipzig, 1731): 947; William Gordon, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, vol. 3, Q-Z (London: Bloomsbury, 1994).

²³ See the original text in Zedler, *Universal-Lexicon*, vol. 29, 947: “Prostituiren, Prostituere, bedeutet in den Rechten so viel, als sich selbst feil und darbiethen, dargeben, angeben, zu verkauffen geben; desgleichen sich gemein und verächtlich machen, oder sich durch unbesonnene Reden und Thaten in Schande und Spott bringen.”

reconstructed in relation to their variability and how they overlap in both personal and structural terms.

Another chapter will delve more deeply into the question of how the problem of the non-represented can be considered in terms of Benjaminian hermeneutics, of what is marginalized or suppressed by discourses of power, and of how visual sources relate to textual sources in the area of asymmetrical dependence. The extent to which both areas are intertwined ultimately leads me to first tentative ideas, not yet a theory. account for the specifics of the source material analyzed and open up general considerations on asymmetrical dependencies.

The final chapter will focus on the broader outreach of the project, specifically an exhibition at the LVR-Landesmuseum Bonn, for which I acted as co-curator. Three cabinets of this exhibition address the close intertwining of female labor, female criminality, and slavery of women and others.

III.1 Research Areas

This project has close links to three Research Areas within the Cluster:

(1) Research Area B (Embodied Dependencies) concerns the non-textual sources of asymmetrical dependencies. My project starts from the premise that the depiction of a prostitute / maid / slave / Black woman offers the possibility of illuminating the research topic in areas a) about which textual sources provide little or no information, and b) for which there are normative sources that need to be matched with constructions given in images. The pictorial corpus is extensive, especially for Amsterdam, and ranges from city views depicting a wide variety of ethnic groups to painted or engraved portraits, emblems or early photographs of families with servants in the colonies as well as in Amsterdam. Of special note are sources containing illustrations, including medical treatises and books (for example on venereal diseases), publications dealing with education and marriage, and pornographic literature. Travel reports (diaries, letters) and early travel guides to Amsterdam, including the visit to the *spinhuis*, are just as important as the baptismal, marriage and death registers. For example, the *ondertrouwregisters*, which have been preserved in their entirety for Amsterdam from 1565 to 1811, make it possible to investigate Amsterdam's Afro-Atlantic community and its prosopography, which has only recently been comprehensively addressed²⁴.

(2) In relation to Research Area D (Labor and Spatiality) which addresses the intrinsic ambivalence of the different forms of labor and dependency, the project focuses on the tension between the position of prostitutes in relation to maids or domestic servants, as well as to (former) slaves and the direct descendants of enslaved persons.

²⁴ Mark Ponte, "Al de swarten die hier ter stede comen. Een Afro-Atlantische gemeenschap in zeventiende-eeuws," *The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 15, no. 4 (2019): 33–62.

(3) The content of the project relates to questions of gender, otherness and intersectionality problems raised in Research Area E.

III.2 Slavery versus Prostitution in Word and Image, and Blind Spots in Stedman's *Narrative of Surinam* (1796)

One extremely important source for the project that still needs to be analyzed in detail is John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*.²⁵ This text, which was first published in English in 1796 and translated into numerous other European languages within the next few years, is the revised version of a diary that Stedman had written while he was a member of the Scottish Brigade of the Dutch army during the suppression of several slave uprisings in Suriname between 1772 and 1777.²⁶ Parts of the text were heavily edited by an anonymous writer commissioned by the publisher, but the diary had been extensively illustrated by Stedman himself. On the basis of these original illustrations, a total of eighty prints were created – by William Blake among others – which were added to the printed text with its edited content (**fig. 1**). The genesis of this highly regarded publication on slavery in Suriname thus already reflects the most diverse interests within the slavery debates of the late eighteenth century: author, anonymous writer and publisher represented quite different points of view and interests when it came to the question of the justification or abolition of slavery in the overseas colonies of the great European powers. A close comparison of the *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, the original version of Stedman's illustrated text, with the version finally published in print, therefore reveals very impressively the negotiation processes behind the publication history of the *Narrative*, and captures in a sort of microcosm the entire problem of reconstructing the source material. The thematic fields of "prostitution," "rape" and "slavery" as the two dominant forms of female dependence in the colonial field of action prove to be the focal points of these negotiation processes. In his diary entries, Stedman mentions, as if in passing, his numerous sexual contacts with female slaves.²⁷ Although these sometimes appear in the form of direct or mediated prostitution, they should not be equated with it in all cases. This means that while "slave" and "prostitute" do *overlap* as terms here, they are not synonymous. These mentions are completely erased in the printed versions in which Stedman's relationship with Joanna (**fig. 2**), a fifteen-year-old slave who lived with him in a form of concubinage and with whom he fathered a son, is brought into focus and romanticized.²⁸ Their shared history was completely removed from the 1824 publication

²⁵ John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam. Transcribed for the First Time from the 1790 Manuscript*, ed. Richard Price and Sally Price (Baltimore: Open Road, 1988).

²⁶ John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London, 1796).

²⁷ Mario Klarer, "Humanitarian Pornography. John Gabriel Stedman's 'Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam' (1796)," *New Literary History* 36 (2005): 559–87.

²⁸ Beryl Gilroy, *Stedman and Joanna – A Love in Bondage. Dedicated Love in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Vantage Press, 1991).

of the *Narrative*. By readjusting the dependency relationships of female figures – mostly nameless slaves in the diary versus the “wife” Joanna in the printed *Narrative* – not only the options, but also the limitations, of the fields of action for dependent female bodies subjected to colonial violence become clear: rape, contractual prostitution, concubinage.²⁹ This project will contrast such colonial negotiation processes with contemporaneous fields of action in Amsterdam, while the analysis of Stedman’s records will focus on the hitherto neglected relationship between image and text.



Fig. 1: William Blake: engraving of a Dutch plantation owner and female enslaved person, book illustration of the work of John Gabriel Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Year’s Expedition*, published in London 2nd December 1793, by J. Johnson. St. Paul’s Church Yard.

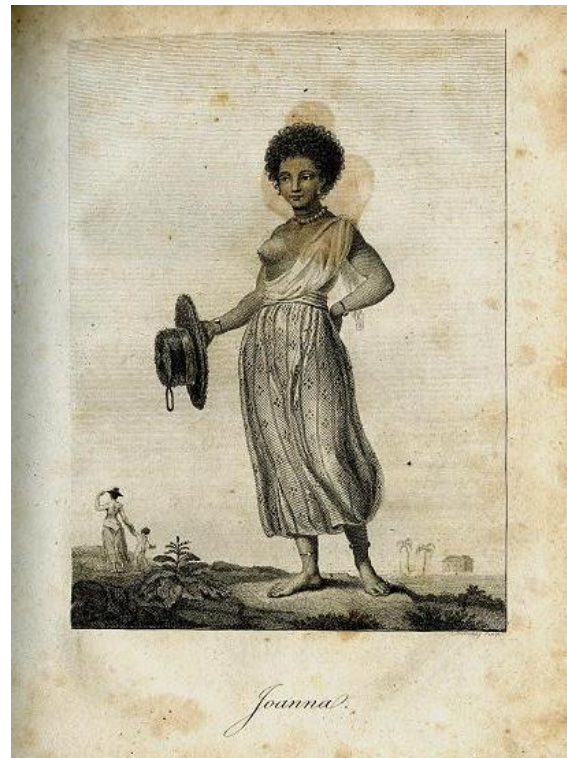


Fig. 2: William Blake: Joanna, engraving in: John Gabriel Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Year’s Expedition*, published in London 2nd December 1793, by J. Johnson. St. Paul’s Church Yard.

²⁹ Jenny Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery. A Literary Archaeology of Black Women’s Lives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 17–18.

IV. Picturing the Dimensions of Female Dependencies in Early Modern Amsterdam: Three Examples

IV.1 The *Aalmoezeniers'* Cycle: Female Poverty and Prostitution

The two paintings discussed in this chapter make up part of a cycle of five paintings in total. The complete cycle was created in the late 1620s by an artist unknown today, commissioned by the college of the Amsterdam *Aalmoezeniershuis* (the overseers of the poor's house) and deals indirectly with the theme of female labor and prostitution.³⁰ The individual paintings in the cycle refer to specific activities relating to the care of the poor, with various poorhouse regents appearing in the scenes. The largest painting shows the registration of the poor, with a second painting showing the distribution of bread. The artist's depiction of young women crowding round a bread counter is particularly striking. Two narrower paintings show the donation of clothes and a visit to the hemp-beating factory respectively. The latter was an institution that served to re-educate delinquent girls and women who had committed crimes such as illicit prostitution or begging. The fifth painting, square in shape, is entitled, "The House Call" and will be the focus of my reflections below (**fig. 3**). The five-part cycle was intended for the Regent's Room, which no longer exists.

³⁰ Norbert Middelkoop, "Schutters, gildebroeders en regentessen: Het Amsterdams corporatiestuk 1525–1850" (PhD. diss., Amsterdam University, 2019): 842–45; Ronni Baer, *Class Distinctions. Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2016); Birgit Ulrike Münch, "Das Hostienwunder in der Wohnstube. Visualisierte Armutsdiskurse der Amsterdamer *Aalmoezeniers*," in *Kunst & Katholizismus in der niederländischen Republik = Art & Catholicism in the Dutch Republic*, ed. Esther Meier and Almut Pollmer Schmidt (Petersberg: Imhof, 2022): 183–95. An online resource with extensive text by Norbert Middelkoop is the Amsterdam Museum database: <http://hdl.handle.net/11259/collection.37812>.



Fig. 3: Anonymous: *Aalmoezeniers Cycle: The Visit*, Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam 1626–ca. 1628.

The paintings are remarkable in several respects, beginning with the ways in which the regents are portrayed amidst a representation of the broader activities of the *Aalmoezeniers*, and simultaneously depicting the seven works of mercy.³¹ This virtue cycle goes back to chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew, which describes the correct ways of dealing with poverty and wealth.³² The distribution of bread directly depicts the feeding of the hungry and thirsty, while clothing the naked is shown in the scene of the donating of clothes. Visiting the sick, sheltering strangers and burying the dead are shown in the so-called House Call. The work of mercy of visiting the imprisoned is represented in the image of the hemp beaters. Probably for this reason, the artist relocated the work of mercy to a basement room, where one of the overseers is shown entering down a dark stone staircase (**fig. 3, detail**). This iconographic subtext is not surprising, for as Ralf van Bühren pointed out, the works of mercy were a highly

³¹ On charitable works of art, see: Sheila D. Muller, *Charity in the Dutch Republic. Pictures of Rich and Poor for Charitable Institutions* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985).

³² Matt. 25.31–46.

popular subject in both the northern and southern Netherlands and were taken up by many different confessions.³³



Fig. 3, detail: Aalmoezeniers Cycle: The Visit, Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam 1626–ca. 1628, detail: Brothel Scene, picture, hung on the chimney piece.

Amsterdam's gathering economic power led to a rapid increase in population, including the sudden influx of refugees at a level that few cities experienced during this period. In 1600, Amsterdam had 60,000 inhabitants, but thirty years later – at the time the cycle was painted

³³ Ralf van Büren, *Die Werke der Barmherzigkeit in der Kunst des 12.–18. Jahrhunderts. Zum Wandel eines Bildmotivs vor dem Hintergrund neuzeitlicher Rhetorikrezeption*, Studien zur Kunstgeschichte 115 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1998): 45; Sylvaine Hänsel, "Caritas und Pietas – Wohltäter im Porträt. Armut, Familie und Repräsentation in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts," in *Die andere Familie. Repräsentationskritische Analysen von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Arbeitskreis 'Repräsentationen' (Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main, 2013): 385–418.

– this number had increased to 115,000.³⁴ The expansion of the economy also attracted an equally growing number of refugees. An important factor, which was highlighted in the writings of Lotte van de Pol amongst others, were the immigrants who would come to the city for a fixed period, and often returned more than once. The number of single immigrant women, in particular, was extremely high and contributed to the high disproportion of male and female members of the population, which was generally recorded as 2:3 throughout the whole century. Unemployment and a broader situation of hopelessness led to a crime rate of over 50 percent among the poor female population.³⁵ The large proportion of single women, infants and children within the cycle appears to be a direct reference to the impoverished female household as a target group of the *Aalmoezeniers*.

The complexity of the sequence of images is most evident in the so-called House Call. Here the two *Aalmoezeniers* are in the center of the picture in a simple-looking living room with different groups of people. In the foreground on the right sits an elderly man who points with his index finger to his swollen ankle, and thus to his inability to work. The sick woman in the bed behind him raises her hands to heaven in prayer, while one of the *Aalmoezeniers'* caretakers is depicted gesticulating to a group of women beside her bed. So far, scholars have interpreted the room as a unified pictorial surface, but it is clear that the left-hand side has a different argumentative focus. This half of the picture also shows an elderly couple who are not idle, but busy looking after small children, including an infant who has just been changed while the father of the house dries the nappy by the fireplace. A young woman in the middle ground on the left admonishes two young children, while another woman is bent over a washtub in the foreground, and a little girl seen from the back sits in a spinning chair. In the left half of the picture, children are already at work, and thus experience an education strongly characterized by the work ethic. In various prints, the spinning wheel stands for female education, so for example in a woodcut by Lieven de Witte, entitled “Van de aerbeyt der menschen,” or “from the Work: the People.”³⁶ This institution became a popular destination for the educated middle classes to visit, especially at the time when the painting was created.

In 2001, Dieter Beaujean investigated the extent to which paintings in the Northern Netherlands can provide keys to further layers of meaning, but his findings are sobering. Among some 1,000 paintings he examined, he found very few images that could be

³⁴ Jan De Vries, “The Population and Economy of the Preindustrial Netherlands,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 15 (1985): 661–82; Jan De Vries and Ad van der Woude, *Nederland 1500–1815. De eerste ronde van moderne economische groei* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2005): 39; Ulrich Ufer, *Welthandelszentrum Amsterdam. Globale Dynamik und modernes Leben im 17. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgarter Historische Forschungen 8 (Köln: Böhlau, 2008): 95–96.

³⁵ Lotte C. van de Pol, “The Lure of the Big City: Female Migration to Amsterdam,” in *Women of the Golden Age. An International Debate on Women in Seventeenth Century Holland, England, and Italy*, ed. Els Kloek, Nicole Teeuwen and Marijke Huisman (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994): 73–81; Lotte C. van de Pol and Erika Kuijpers, “Poor Women’s Migration to the City: The Attraction of the Amsterdam Health Care and Social Assistance in Early Modern Times,” *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 1 (2005): 44–60; Birgit Ulrike Münch, “Arbeitende Frauen,” in *Augenlust? Niederländische Stillleben im Detail*, ed. Alexandra Käss, Birgit Ulrike Münch and Torsten Valk (Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2022): 176–85.

³⁶ Lieven de Witte, Woodcut: “Van den aerbeyt der menschen,” in Andries vander Muelen, *Een zuverlic boexkin van der ketyvigheyt der menschelicker naturen* (Gent: J. Lambrecht, 1543).

interpreted as an essential part of an iconological concept.³⁷ This makes it even more remarkable that a hidden layer of meaning of a cautionary nature can be shown in the painting of the “House Call”: here, above the fireplace, is a frameless picture attached to the wall with nails, which Van Bühren has interpreted as a wedding party, intended to offer a strong contrast to the sparse interior of the living room.³⁸ However, the careless hanging of the picture, and above all the suggestion of the staircase on the left and finally the couple in the centre of the table – the man grasping his partner by the waist in a posture indicating sex – clearly indicate the negative character of the depiction, which hints at a brothel scene. In numerous Dutch 17th century paintings, the staircase symbolises the fact that events take place far from the eye, in the dark. Numerous brothel scenes, for example, contain the staircase in the background. Thus, the image is by no means a “picture of better times,” but rather a didactic admonition to take the righteous path at an early age. The fact that the artist has further placed a second, framed, picture within the first, frameless, one speaks for his unique pictorial wit. This is emphasized by the placement of a small child’s chair at the lower edge of the picture, virtually inviting the little viewer to look at the brothel scene and to recognize it as a warning example of the “wrong way.”

IV.2 Imprisoned Women as / Forced to Play Prostitutes: Bartholomeus van der Helsts *Portrait of the Regents of the spinhuis*

The *spinhuis* was an Amsterdam invention that had opened as a women’s prison in 1597, two years after the equivalent for men, the *rasphuis*.³⁹ It took in unemployed women, women who had allegedly or actually committed a crime, those who were “causing trouble” or prostituting themselves without permission. It served as a reformatory, but also as a tourist attraction. Many travel guides of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries recommend a visit to the *spinhuis*. For a fee, both male and female spectators could watch the sinful women through a grille. Prints and paintings show that, again for a fee, the women entertained their audience by sometimes wearing heavy make-up and provocative clothing, performing an alleged offence and being punished for it.

In the background of the painting by Bartholomeus van der Helst’s *Regents of the Spinhuis* from 1650 (**fig. 4 and fig. 4, detail**),⁴⁰ we see a scene featuring the regent raising his slipper at a young woman who tries to duck. The spinning wheel as a symbol of female labor was eponymous for the institution. It served as a sign of the will to work, and the idea was that it was only through introducing a person to a culture of work that a criminal could be brought back to the path to virtue. The pedagogical impetus is striking; and the belief that children should be introduced to physical work at a very early age, with girls set to work on the spinning

³⁷ Dieter Beaujean, *Bilder in Bildern. Studien zur niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 2001): 212.

³⁸ Van Bühren, *Die Werke der Barmherzigkeit*: 48.

³⁹ Olfert Dapper, *Historische beschryvinghe van Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1663): 32–33.

⁴⁰ Norbert Middelkoop, Gusta Reichwein and Judith van Gent, *De oude meesters van de stad Amsterdam. Schilderijen tot 1800* (Amsterdam: Amsterdams Historisch Museum, 2008): 104–5.

wheel, is found in numerous sources. In various other contexts, the reference to the spinning wheel is also tangible as a warning against inactivity. A sentence emblazoned above the entrance to the Amsterdam *spinhuis* on the corner of Achterburgwal is still legible today: it informs those entering about the function of the institution: “Schrik niet ik wreek geen quaat maar dwing tot goet. Straf is myn hant maar lieflyk myn gemoet.”⁴¹ Some of the *spinhuis*’s inmates came from the colonies, such as a woman named Christina.⁴² She was the daughter of a mother enslaved in Batavia, and had been brought to Amsterdam as a five-year-old by her owner, Adrianus van der Geugten. Because of her “immoral way of life” she was imprisoned in the *spinhuis* in 1766.⁴³ As hard and sometimes unfair as life in the *spinhuis* may have been, the Netherlands and Amsterdam are distinguished by a large number of charitable institutions, orphanages and foundations for old men and women, and are thus far ahead of other European countries of the time.



Fig. 4: Bartholomeus van der Helst: Regents of the Spinhuis, dated in the middle of the book (alphabet Anno 1650), 233x317 cm; Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum.

⁴¹ “Do not cry / weep, for my intention is not to seek vengeance for transgressions but to compel you towards virtue. My hand may be unyielding, yet my heart is gentle.” Translated by the author. In the following: Unless otherwise stated, the translations are by the author.

⁴² Lotte C. van de Pol, “The Whore, the Bawd, and the Artist: The Reality of Imagery of 17th Century Dutch Prostitution,” *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2 (2010), <https://jhna.org/articles/whore-bawd-artist-reality-imagery-seventeenth-century-dutch-prostitution/> [accessed 20.10.2023]; Lotte C. van de Pol, “Prostitutie en de Amsterdamse burgerij: Eerbegripen in een vroegmoderne stedelijke samenleving,” in *Cultuur en maatschappij in nederland, 1500–1850: Een historisch-antropologisch perspectief*, ed. Peter te Boekhorst, Peter Burk and Willem Frijhoff (Amsterdam: Boom, 1992): 179–218.

⁴³ Julia Holzmann, *Geschichte der Sklaverei in der Niederländischen Republik. Recht, Rassismus und Handlungsmacht Schwarzer Menschen und People of Color, 1680–1863* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2022): 209–43, see also 279–80.



Fig. 4, detail: Bartholomeus van der Helst: Regents of the Spinhuis, dated in the middle of the book (alphabet Anno 1650), 233x317 cm; Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, detail of the “prostitutes” and visitors.

IV.3 Christiaan van Couwenbergh’s *Three White Men and a Black Woman* / The Sexual Harassment / The Rape)

Christiaan van Couwenbergh’s painting signifies a caesura and a crossing of boundaries that has been addressed surprisingly rarely in previous scholarship; when it has been mentioned, it has been described in terminologically problematic ways (**fig. 5**). Dated to 1632, it shows three white men in an interior room about to rape a Black woman.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Birgit Ulrike Münch, “Verloren im Theater des Grauens. Sexuelle Gewalt, male bonding und black-facing in Christiaan van Couwenberghs unethischem Bild,” in *Sinn und Sinnlichkeit in der Kunst*, ed. Helen Boënecker et al. (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2023): 28–35.



Fig. 5: Christiaan van Couwenbergh: *The Sexual Harassment / The Rape*, 105x125 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Strasbourg, 1632.

In sensual cycles, or in a painting of the Prodigal Son, Couwenbergh depicts sexual desire, women and men seducing each other, sometimes without a clear dominance of one sex. The painting under discussion, however, is quite different: a naked man sits on the bed with its dark blue coverlet, which is placed diagonally in the room; he has grabbed the unclothed woman and pulled her onto his lap. Her hand, placed on top of his, would suggest consensus if seen by itself, but her right arm, held in a defensive stance, and the fact that her mouth is open in a cry, indicate her distress and suggests that she is begging for help. Behind the seated couple is a clothed man who has also raised his hands in a defensive gesture but seems to be smiling mischievously. Most significant is the man in the foreground to the left, who is dressed only in a white loincloth. He is communicating with the viewer whom he seems to be addressing, pointing to the raptus scene with his right index finger.

As recently as 1999 in the catalogue of the exhibition on Dutch classicism, which was shown in Rotterdam and Frankfurt, the painting is described as intriguing and even comical, even though the woman is being held apparently against her will. However, the prior interpretations and terminology have been criticized by Diane Wolfthal in her work *Images of*

Rape, which directly refers to this painting.⁴⁵ It is also notable that, despite Couwenbergh's remarkable oeuvre, very little work has been carried out on this painting and the artist himself. The painting remains a rare example of such a drastic interpretation of a rape scene.

Paul Vandebroek described the painting as "Rape of an African Woman" in the catalogue *Beeld van de andere* (Antwerp 1987) and included it in the category "Instructional Pieces and Parables."⁴⁶ A "man ready for a bath" prepares to "wash a Negress," but is laughingly mocked by a second man for this futile endeavor. In this interpretation, the painting thus shows an *impossibilium*, like the classic example in Jeremiah 13:23 (where the question is asked, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?"), or in Aesop's fable "Washing the Ethiopian White." All other researchers have ruled out any reference to Aesop and the biblical text, as no washing utensils have been included within the image and only a chamber pot is seen at the back.

However, it seems plausible that the categorization as a "didactic piece" is correct when considering the finger pointing at the lightly clothed man. But if we return to the widespread iconography of the Prodigal Son, the contemporary viewer may also have held a direct association with the loincloth-clad sinner. If the naked, standing man is a self-portrait of the artist, as in at least four other genre scenes and portraits of the period, this would cast him in the role of the penitent, placing himself not amusingly but warningly next to the crime. In any case, it seems that the subversive depths of this painting have not yet been sufficiently explored. I have suggested recently that the key to interpreting the work is a play: Gerbrand Adraenz Bredero's play "Moortje" from 1615, an adaptation of "Eunuchus," a play by the Roman comic poet Terence (ca. 190–159 BC), which the author himself describes and which he transferred to the Amsterdam of his time. For example, he turned the eunuch into a black enslaved woman.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Diane Wolfthal, *Images of Rape: The "Heroic" Tradition and Its Alternatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 45–53.

⁴⁶ Paul Vandebroek, *Beeld van de andere, vertoog over het zelf over wilden en narren, boeren en bedelaars* (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 1997): 23–27.

⁴⁷ Birgit Ulrike Münch, "Verloren im Theater des Grauens. Sexuelle Gewalt, male bonding und black-facing in Christiaan van Couwenberghs unethischem Bild," in *Sinn und Sinnlichkeit in der Kunst*, ed. Helen Boëbenecker et al. (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2023): 28–35.

V. Exhibiting Untold Stories

V.1 Augenlust / The Lust of the Eyes

This exhibition, which was in preparation since 2019 and took place in 2022, set itself the goal of facilitating new approaches to Dutch still lifes, and in this way negotiated questions that have rarely or only recently been asked in relation to images within this genre (fig. 6).⁴⁸ The exhibition faced several challenges. It set out to focus on a narrow group of paintings. One painting was chosen to be the center of every cabinet, with each cabinet concentrating on a single (pair of) theme(s), such as global and local; fish and seafood; slavery, female labor; man as an object; abundance of children / infant mortality, and female artists.⁴⁹ We put great emphasis on sustainability by sourcing the objects grouped around the painting in each cabinet, including everyday objects such as books and globes, from as few museums as possible in order to save on energy costs and transport. Three museums in Amsterdam were chosen as the main lenders: the University Museum of the Free University of Amsterdam, the Allard Pierson Museum and the City Archaeological Museum.

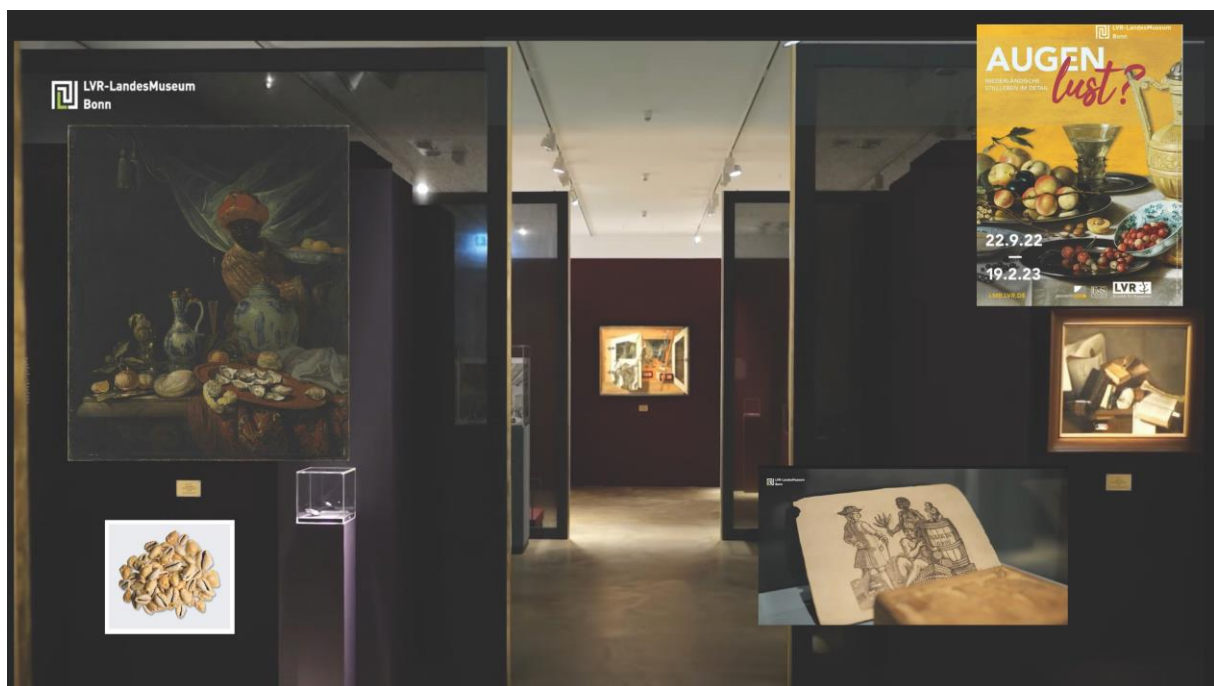


Fig. 6: View of the exhibition space of the exhibition “Augenlust” (LVR-Landesmuseum Bonn in cooperation with the Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam), co-curated by the author together with Alexandra Käss and Lothar Altringer.

⁴⁸ Alexandra Käss, Birgit Ulrike Münch and Torsten Valk, eds., *Augenlust? Niederländische Stillleben im Detail* (Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2022); see also the following review of the exhibition: Eva Lehner, Review of *Augenlust? Niederländische Stillleben im Detail*, ed. Alexandra Käss, Birgit Ulrike Münch und Thorsten Valk, Histrhen. Rheinische Geschichte wissenschaftlich bloggen, 15.02.2024, <http://histrhen.landesgeschichte.eu/2024/02/rezension-augenlust-lehner> [accessed 25.04.2024].

⁴⁹ Alexandra Käss et al.: “Augenlust? Nicht nur ein Fest für die Sinne,” in *Augenlust? Niederländische Stillleben im Detail*, ed. Alexandra Käss, Birgit Ulrike Münch and Torsten Valk (Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2022): 22–25.

It is only at first glance that still lifes follow the same patterns as each other. For instance, *trompe-l'œil* plays with our perception, while *vanitas* still lifes remind viewers of their own mortality in a moralizing way. But the literally “dead objects” (*nature morte, stilleven*) that are united in the paintings – whether fish and oysters, flowers, fruit baskets, game, snails from the New World, hourglasses or globes – are also fascinating in their own right. They tell us about the time in which the paintings were created in an astonishingly condensed way, and at the same time provide information on topics that are vital in historical and current discourse. In this way, still life painting of the seventeenth century is not only a witness to its own time of origin: its contents also provide information about the social conditions that prevailed at the time. Still lifes point to globalization and migration, to colonialism, to the unfair distribution of resources, to differences in status and exclusion based on race and gender.⁵⁰ In order for visitors to discover these themes – which are so topical today – in the pictures, it is essential to sensitize viewers to the richness of detail in still lifes, all the more so as the sensual experience holds a greater primary importance within this genre than all others.

Only a few particularly high-quality and unusual still lifes were shown, in accordance with the greater themes of reduction and sustainability focused on in the exhibition. While this might sometimes disrupt the flow of the viewing experience, the curatorial team hoped that it would engage the visitors' curiosity and lead to larger discussions beyond the frame of the exhibition. The fifteen works selected were presented in “thematic cubes” or small cabinets, which intended to offer visitors the opportunity to become fully involved in the details of each individual picture (**fig. 7 and fig. 8**). The objects assigned to the still lifes helped to draw attention to certain aspects of the pictures, and act as an invitation to view them from fresh angles, rendering visible details in the picture that are often overlooked, thus making them apparent for the first time and thereby deepening our knowledge of them. This concept not only brings the diversity and richness of detail of still lifes into focus, but also offers visitors the opportunity to use the pictures and objects to gain insights into Dutch life in the seventeenth century, and the ways these highlight how objects in the paintings were produced, earned or imported.

⁵⁰ Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence. Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (London: Duke University Press, 2016); Gloria Wekker, *Witte onschuld. Paradoxen van kolonialisme en ras* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

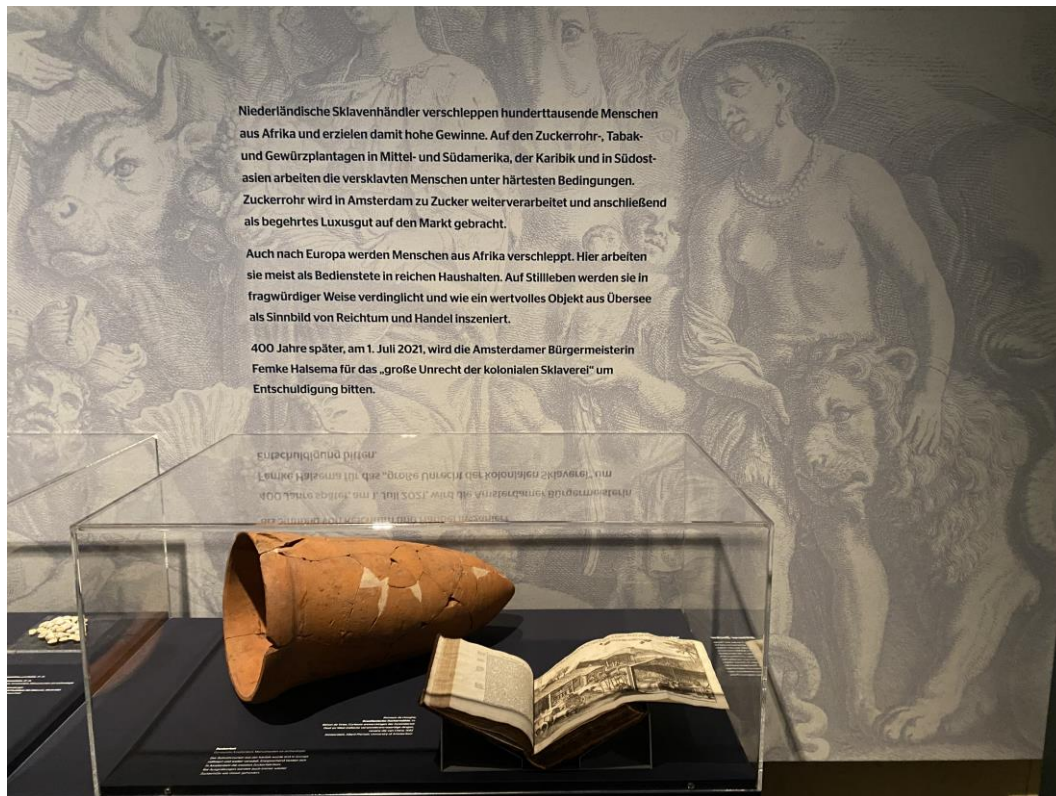


Fig. 7: Exhibition cabinet, exhibition “Augenlust” on the subject of “The Human being as a commodity: Slavery, sugar cane as a ‘bloody’ raw material.”

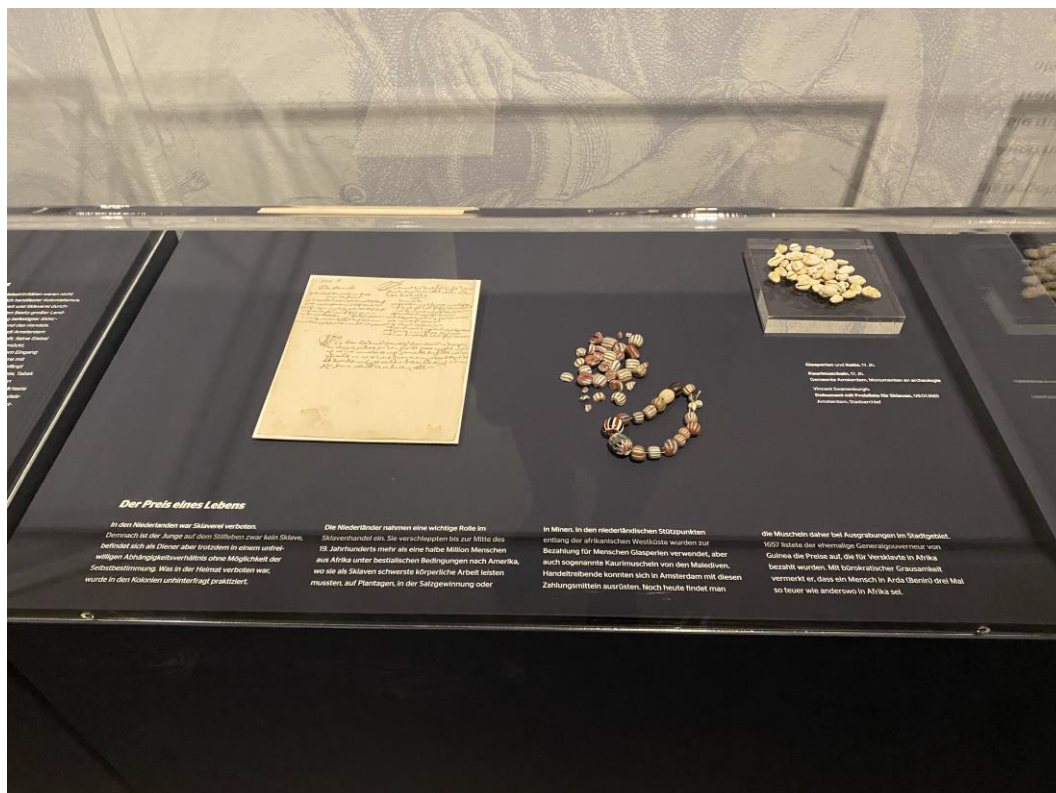


Fig. 8: Exhibition cabinet, exhibition “Augenlust” on the subject of “The Human being as a commodity: The price of a life.” Source on the price of enslaved people and Kauri shells (Kauei snails) as a means of payment in the early modern slave trade.

In addition, the fact that these fifteen topics which are still being negotiated today, strongly shaped or configured seventeenth-century society, including globalization and colonialism, race and gender, poverty and wealth, allow the exhibition to invite visitors on a voyage of discovery and exploration of the world in miniature. The aim of the exhibition was to demonstrate that a still life painting is not necessarily harmless, but also depicts dangerous forms of dependency or those which today might be categorized as objectionable in some ways. Paintings may appear innocent at first glance, but what they show is not.

In recent years, some museums have deemed the previous, almost inflationary, use of the term “Golden Age” as too one-sided. At the end of 2019, for example, the curator of the Amsterdam City Museum, Tom van der Molen, decided to ban the term “Golden Age” from his museum altogether. The museum wants to be “polymorphous and inclusive,” and the so-called “Golden Age” witnessed not only prosperity, peace and opulence, but also poverty, slavery, forced labor and human trafficking.⁵¹ “Golden Age” is therefore a misnomer.⁵² Our exhibition took on the task of explaining that the cabinets should be interpreted in a straightforward manner, and perhaps even with pride. Visitors were presented with a text which asked them to act as a servant (both male and female) to the artist in numerous still lifes, incorporating luxury objects associated with the still lifes themselves. Visitors are shown that the slave trade was widespread at the time of the decline of the Roman Empire, and that it by no means ended with the Romans but, on the contrary, that a flourishing slave trade existed throughout the Middle Ages, especially in the Christian Mediterranean regions. In the late Middle Ages, enslaved people were working at European courts or in well-off families as servants, or in the menageries as animal keepers. Just like people with dwarfism or “wolf people” – sufferers of hypertrichosis – enslaved people were highly sought after in the courts from the end of the fifteenth century onwards as curiosities, and were often depicted in art. In some seventeenth-century paintings their sumptuous clothing and their close contact with the family who owned them, especially with the children, testify to the close, long-standing relationships between the individuals. Many African pages had originally arrived at the courts as children, but as adults they were abruptly excluded from the closest circle of the family, as they could no longer take on the role of cute “accessories,” constant companions or entertainers. The closeness and familiarity suggested in the picture is therefore not an automatic given within the background of the asymmetrical dependence of this relationship.

⁵¹ Tom van der Molen, “The Problem of the ‘Golden Age,’” Curator’s project, CODART features, <https://www.codart.nl/feature/curators-project/the-problem-of-the-golden-age/> [accessed 20.10.2023]; Brigit Katz, “Why the Amsterdam Museum Will No Longer Use the Term ‘Dutch Golden Age,’” *Smithsonian Magazine* (16.09.2019), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/amsterdam-museum-will-no-longer-use-term-dutch-golden-age-180973140/> [accessed 20.10.2023], quoting Tom van der Molen: “The Golden Age occupies an important place in Western historiography that is strongly linked to national pride. But positive associations with the term such as prosperity, peace, opulence and innocence do not cover the charge of historical reality in this period. The term ignores the many negative sides of the 17th century such as poverty, war, forced labour and human trafficking.” See also <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/13/end-of-golden-age-amsterdam-museum-bans-term-from-exhibits> [accessed 03.07.2024].

⁵² Tom van der Molen, “The Problem of the ‘Golden Age,’” <https://www.codart.nl/feature/curators-project/the-problem-of-the-golden-age/> [accessed 20.10.2023].

Following the rise of colonialism, the number of households with Black servants substantially increased⁵³, especially in Amsterdam. It is difficult to reconstruct the living situations of Black servants, as the cultural archives of the victims of slavery are far less often able to provide information than those of the perpetrators – and they have begun to be consulted only recently. It is important to make even a few traces visible. It is true that the slave depicted in various paintings lived in the house of a wealthy bourgeois family and not on a plantation, but even here he was an unfree human being, exposed to violence without protection. Where did the person depicted in these paintings see his own place in relation to the exuberant luxury objects?

The exhibition focuses on the situation in Amsterdam. In addition to the unfree Black people living as servants in wealthy households, there were also a number of free or liberated Black people living in Amsterdam, primarily in the Jodenbreestraat area, close to Rembrandt's famous house and the Sephardic synagogue – where many Jews also worked as merchants. However, far too little is known about their living conditions, and though sources such as marriage and baptismal registers have become more freely available in recent years, they have rarely been consulted in this context.⁵⁴

In numerous portraits or, as in our exhibition in the still lifes, the “pageboys” appear in orientalized clothing.⁵⁵ To what extent the artists portrayed a stereotype, or rather an individual person, is also a research question that is not easy to answer.⁵⁶ The depictions often evoke sensuality – by means of clothing or dark, luminous skin color – with the sitters gazing sometimes with childlike admiration and sometimes full of desire at the male or female white person who is the focus of the picture, whom they present with fruits, flowers or large, “exotic” shells. The distinction of skin color and the juxtaposition very dark to strikingly light

⁵³ Katja Wolf, “‘Und ihre siegreichen Reize steigert im Kontrast ein Mohr.’ Weiße Damen und schwarze Pagen in der Bildnismalerei,” in *Weiße Blicke. Geschlechtermythen des Kolonialismus*, ed. Karl Hölz, Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff and Herbert Uerlings (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2004): 19–36; Elmer Kolfin, *Van de slavenzweep en de muze. Twee eeuwen verbeelding van slavernij in Suriname* (Leiden: KITLV, 1997); Elmer Kolfin, “Zwarte modellen in de Nederlandse kunst tussen 1580 en 1800. Feit en fictie,” in *Black is beautiful. Rubens tot Dumas*, ed. Esther Schreuder and Elmer Kolfin (Zwolle: Waanders BV, 2008): 70–88; Elmer Kolfin, “Becoming Human. The Iconography of Black Slavery in French, British and Dutch Book Illustrations, c. 1600–1800,” in *The Slave in European Art. From Renaissance Trophy to Abolitionist Emblem*, ed. Elizabeth McGrath and J.M. Massing (London: University of London Press, 2012): 253–97; Diane Wolfthal, *Household Servants and Slaves. A Visual History 1300–1700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022). Wolfthal's recent book is central to my research, but draws few connections between forced labor, slavery and prostitution.

⁵⁴ Mark Ponte, “Tussen slavernij en vrijheid in Amsterdam,” in *De Slavernij in Oost en West. Het Amsterdam-onderzoek*, ed. Pepijn Brandon, Guno Jones, Nancy Jouwe and Matthias van Rossum (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2020): 248–56; Mark Ponte, “Al de swarten die hier ter stede comen. Een Afro-Atlantische gemeenschap in zeventiende-eeuws,” *The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 15, no. 4 (2019): 33–62.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth McGrath, “Caryatids, Page Boys, and African Letters. Themes of Slavery in European Art,” in *The Slave in European Art. From Renaissance Trophy to Abolitionist Emblem*, ed. Elizabeth McGrath and J.M. Massing (London: University of London Press, 2012): 3–39.

⁵⁶ Birgit Ulrike Münch, “Die Schattenseiten des Luxus, oder: Der Mensch als Ding,” in *Augenlust? Niederländische Stillleben im Detail*, ed. Alexandra Käss, Birgit Ulrike Münch and Torsten Valk (Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2022): 125–35.

skin tones, is not noticeable in this work, but the pageboy has deliberately been included in the dark background behind the elaborate arrangement on the table.⁵⁷

The debate about how to acknowledge and discuss slavery is currently a central issue in the Netherlands. Much has been achieved in recent years, including through large-scale exhibitions, the erection of monuments to the victims of colonialism, and public apologies by the state. In the process, it is becoming increasingly clear how long stereotypes and colonially-influenced images have gone unchallenged, and how rooted they still are in everyday culture in the twenty-first century.⁵⁸ For instance, the helper of St. Nicholas (Sinterklaas) has been Black-faced Zwarte Piet since the late colonial age in the nineteenth century. He is famous as a permanent fixture of the Dutch St. Nicholas festival (Sinterklaas). There has been a heated public debate for more than ten years about whether the racist connotation of Piet, who has to punish the bad children, should be abolished. In addition to “Blackfacing,” white people made-up as Black, the performers of Swarte Piet wear the orientaling ceremonial clothing of a servant, thereby evoking references to the depiction of the pageboy in still lifes as well as the problematic colonial past.

Between the mid-sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, over 520,000 people – 5% of Africa’s 10 million inhabitants – were kidnapped, tortured, forced to work or killed by people from Dutch ships, trade and merchant companies alone⁵⁹. With the war against the Habsburgs, the Spanish-Portuguese colonial empire was also a point of attack for the Dutch provinces; economic networks had to be configured more globally, as the way into many ports was now blocked following the entry into war. The trading companies, especially the VOC, the Dutch East India Company founded in 1621, and the WIC, the West India Company, ensured that by the middle of the seventeenth century, half of the world’s trade was controlled in Dutch ports. With the Dutch East Indies – modern-day Indonesia – they secured a monopoly in the spice trade, for example with the extremely precious nutmeg, which was grown and distributed by thousands of slaves from Bengal.

The ship as a much-cited symbol of the trading power of the Netherlands symbolizes the transport of precious fruits, porcelain and fabrics, but also stands for the numerous ships that sailed to West Africa, bought people and held them in captivity for months until the ship was filled and set sail. The ship stood for inhumane confinement, because just like the spices and food, the human cargo was arranged economically. Many slaves, who often spoke different languages and could therefore not communicate with one another, died during the crossing of illnesses, exhaustion or because they were executed after attempted revolts as cautionary examples. More than 300 are said to have been tried on Dutch ships alone. The number of

⁵⁷ Katja Wolf, “Weiße Damen und schwarze Pagen”: 19–36.

⁵⁸ See: Karwan Fatah-Black and Matthias Van Rossum, “Slavery in a ‘Slave Free Enclave’? Historical Links Between the Dutch Republic, Empire and Slavery, 1580s–1860s,” *WERKSTATTGESCHICHTE* 66–67 (2014): 55–73.

⁵⁹ Iris Därmann, *Undienlichkeit. Gewaltgeschichte und politische Philosophie* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2020): 130–56.

those who put an end to their suffering by going on hunger strike or committing suicide, for example by jumping into the sea, was also large.

Thus, there is inevitably blood present in the making of a splendid still life. Against this background, the expensive and opulent clothing of the persons we interpret to be maids or pages within the still lifes seems almost cynical, especially when we consider that the consumption of the most fascinating goods from all over the world could never have been possible without this human commodity, enslaved, half-naked and humiliated for the luxury of others in the colonies.

In Suriname, one of the former Dutch colonies, the abolition of slavery on 1 July 1863 is celebrated as Ketikoti, “broken chains.” Starting in 2021, when mayor Femke Halsema of Amsterdam apologized for the city’s role in the slave trade, there has been widespread discussion about whether Ketikoti should also become a public holiday in the Netherlands.

In the seventeenth century, however, there was little sense of injustice among all colonial powers. The Dutch colonial masters, who were active all over the world, saw no problem in the exploitative treatment of the people within these territories.⁶⁰ On the contrary, the Dutch staged themselves metaphorically as masters of the world, who were allowed to take the treasures of the earth for themselves. On the tympanum of the Amsterdam *stadhuis*, dating to 1655, all the continents celebrate the successes of the trading power and pay homage as a matter of course to the city of Amsterdam, to which they deliver goods from all over the world and lay them at its feet. The fact that people had to perform hard labor so that raw materials and goods could flow into the trading metropolis was seen as self-evident and just. A blind eye was turned to the injustice of the slave trade and its gruesome practices, at least in public debate. The poet Willem van Focquenbroch, who is still popular today, recounted his life as a high-ranking administrator at Fort Elmina in present-day Ghana. We hear nothing about the slave trade, but much about the idea of the foreign land, first as a place of longing, but soon we also hear his complaints about loneliness away from home. The cover of his report, which also contains letters (*Africaense Thalia*), refers to European history with a reference to the battle for Troy, while also depicting indigenous people dancing. European culture is thus brought together with African culture as old Europe self-confidently inscribes itself in its new possessions and appropriates them. It is the destiny of Europeans, Focquenbroch’s report suggests, to seize this land and its treasures. Self-glorification, disparagement of the other and concealment of criminal actions made it possible to continue the system of injustice without feeling guilt. Plantation owners had drawings and paintings made of their overseas properties, as did for instance Amsterdam’s city secretary Jonas Witsen, who commissioned his friend, the painter Dirk Valkenburg, to travel to Suriname for several years to document his properties there. Valkenburg was contractually forbidden to give any pictorial material into third hands. Most of the drawings show the mills, or almost romanticized water views of the sugar plantations. One painting shows a gathering of female and male slaves – a rare image of its

⁶⁰ Dienne Hondius, “Black Africans in Seventeenth Century Amsterdam,” *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, Center for Renaissance and Reformation Studies 31, no. 2 (2008): 85–103.

kind. If it depicts an authentic celebration, which is not definite, it should be noted that Witsen had abolished free Saturdays, and the slaves were granted only one day off per year. The sparse dwellings of the slaves are absent from most of the pictures, which focus instead on the view of the beautiful landscape, while violence and death seem far away.

The exhibition shows objects that memorably visualize the purchase of the “human commodity,” and at the same time are designed in their complexity in such a way that visitors can clearly assign the material culture.

Textual sources help to identify the prices paid for enslaved people.⁶¹ For instance, on January 9, 1661, the Amsterdam notary Vincent Swanenburgh signed a document in which Hendrick Mathijs, Governor General in Guinea, listed prices for slaves in Africa in 1657. In Ardra (Benin), the list indicates, slaves were three times as expensive as in other parts of Africa. Most importantly, the source indicates that payment was not made by money but by trade goods: 40 pounds of coral or 120 pounds of Schleswig textile had to be spent for a slave. Alternatively, one could pay with “bougis,” also known as cowrie shells.⁶² The cowrie shell – more accurately a form of snail – was the first and most widespread trade currency and a popular means of payment, especially in Africa. The cowries, which came primarily from the Maldives, were brought from there to the European market and then used to pay for slaves in West Africa. The most important European trading point for cowries was Amsterdam, where archaeological excavations still find these shells in the city area today. As the list shown in the exhibition makes clear, a price for a slave was set at just 100 pounds of “bougis” – a means of payment that symbolized the path to slavery for thousands. A list of objects in Dutch still lifes whose production involved slave labor and harsh exploitation in the colonies would be staggeringly long. It would include tobacco, spices and sugar, a commodity that is taken for granted today, but was particularly sought after in the seventeenth century. The sweetener of choice in pre-modern Europe was honey, because sugar cane does not grow here. For this reason, sugar, obtained through slave labor, had to be imported from the Americas, and was extremely expensive to produce.⁶³ In contrast, sugar is often depicted as an exquisite sweet in still lifes.

Since sugar cane spoils quickly after harvesting, and so had to be pressed in mills on site. The juice obtained was boiled before it could be further refined. It was then transported to Europe in the form of cones (sugar loaves), thereby adding to the expense within the trade networks and the importance of Amsterdam as a nexus within the European import of the product. Sugar was initially only available in pharmacies and was considered a medicine and luxury good. The Dutch were extremely successful in the Brazilian sugar trade in the seventeenth century, importing it from their possessions in America. Some Amsterdammers came to great

⁶¹ See here and in the following: Münch, “Die Schattenseiten des Luxus, oder: Der Mensch als Ding”: 32–33; for the premodern concept of possession and consuming subjects, see: Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects – Women, Shopping, and Business in the 18th Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

⁶² www.amsterdam.nl/stads-archieff/themasites/amsterdam-slavernij/1661-bougis/ [accessed 20.10.2023].

⁶³ Erik Odegard, “Suiker en slavernij in Nederlands-Brazilië,” in *De slavernij in Oost en West. Het Amsterdam-onderzoek*, ed. Pepijn Brandon et al. (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2020): 149–56.

wealth through trade in the “white gold,” such as Oopjen Coppit, whom Rembrandt portrayed in life-size in precious robes in 1634 with her husband, Marten Soolmans, manager of the sugar refinery “t’Vagevuur” (Purgatory). What is cynical about this is not only that sugar cane was cultivated with slave labor, but that the slave traders in turn were often paid with promises of the coveted commodity of sugar, which had yet to be earned in the future. Business deals with promises of goods fueled a perfidious cycle and the exquisite sweet of the still lifes continued to have an ugly existence beneath its beautiful veneer.

V.2 Banning the “Golden Age” and Returning Identities: Recent Approaches in Dutch and Flemish Museums

Johan Maurits was the governor of Dutch Brazil for eight years from 1636 to 1644, and during this time he significantly boosted the sugar trade there through low prices and slave labor. After his return to the Netherlands, the *Braziliaan* expanded his extremely wealthy townhouse in The Hague, today the famous museum *Mauritshuis*. In 2019, the museum took a critical look at its colonial history and the one-sided positive image of the cultured Johan Maurits, who was well versed in Brazilian botany and culture. Since then, the press has also ironically referred to the *Mauritshuis* as the “Sugar Palace.”⁶⁴

In the course of this, a bust of Johan Maurits was removed from the museum’s foyer and was re-contextualised in relation to various objects on the upper floor. In the course of the subsequent exhibition, “Shifting Image – In Search of Johan Maurits” in 2019, a project was initiated that deals for the first time exclusively with Johan Maurits’s time as governor in Brazil and his role in the transatlantic slave trade.⁶⁵ Various publications are expected as results in the coming years.⁶⁶

As part of its drive to expand its coverage of history, the Amsterdam Museum curated an exhibition entitled “Dutch Masters Revisited,” in which portraits of a key group of thirteen Amsterdam citizens of color from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a mix of historically famous and unknown, were recreated in photographs. The historical citizens were represented by public figures, such as the former Dutch national football player Ruud Gullit. Judikje Kiers, the director of the museum, told the daily newspaper *Het Parool*, “These are important steps in a long process, but we are not there yet. We will continue to work with people in the city to uncover underexposed stories and perspectives of our shared history.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Lena van der Linde, *Bewogen beeld. Op zoek naar Johan Maurits / Shifting Image. In Search of Johan Maurits* (The Hague: Mauritshuis, 2019).

⁶⁵ The project, located at the *Mauritshuis*, is led by Dr Erik Odegard in close cooperation with Leiden University.

⁶⁶ Initial research results can be found in Carolina Monteiro and Erik Odegard, “Slavery at the Court of the ‘Humanist Prince.’ Reexamining Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen and His Role in Slavery, Slave Trade and Slave-Smuggling in Dutch Brazil,” *Journal of Early American History* 10, no. 1 (2020): 3–32.

⁶⁷ See Manuel Charr, “Dutch Museum Drops the Term ‘Golden Age,’” *Museum next*, 23.09.2019, <https://www.museumnext.com/article/dutch-museum-drops-the-term-golden-age/> [accessed 20.10.2023].

In contrast, the Rijksmuseum, the Netherlands' most high-profile museum, has continued to use the term "Golden Age." The institution's director, Taco Dibbits, argued in 2019: "The name refers to a period in history of great prosperity. That does not alter the fact that we acknowledge the dark side of this. The Rijksmuseum approaches history from different perspectives. For example, we are opening an exhibition on slavery next year."⁶⁸ This exhibition was held between May and September of 2022,⁶⁹ and took "ten true stories" as its focus.⁷⁰ The selection stands thus in striking contrast to the ten to twelve million Africans estimated to have been abducted from Africa between 1500 and 1850, or the 500,000 Africans taken to the colonies in Latin America and the Caribbean by the Dutch between 1600 and the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands on 1 July 1863. Ten stories of enslaved people, but also of slaveholders, men and women. The exhibition traces their footsteps, and further asks what their lives were like. Are there clues as to how they characterized their situation? As a follow-up to the exhibition, material culture related to slavery is now continuously recorded in a database entitled "Rijksmuseum & Slavery: 1650–1960," which currently includes over seventy objects.⁷¹

VI. Conclusion

This project starts from the premise that a) thinking and knowledge about asymmetrical dependency are profoundly shaped by non-written, visual artefacts, and b) these visualizations are central to expanding and making visible the hitherto marginalized victims' archive in the field of prostitution within the large corpus of extant images. In many instances, as my case studies show, the images of this subject area have so far been insufficiently analyzed. It is therefore important to start from the distinctiveness of the pictorial medium, which follows its own inner logic and language of meaning. A central approach is to research the ways by which silenced archives of victims can be accessed, and which methods can be used to accomplish this.

The few case studies that I discussed brought to light very different thematizations of the subject: word-image-relations, iconographies and iconologies of prostitution versus slavery and labor, visual fiction versus written sources of fiction and non-fiction, as well as interdependencies between the phenomena in the colonies and in Amsterdam, and the question of interweaving or mentioning the respective other space of knowledge. This becomes apparent, for example, when it is reported that the prostitutes in the colonies could not be mentioned in the diaries of colonizers, as the family at home should not be allowed to

⁶⁸ See Tom Christiaens, *Low Countries*, 13.09.2019, <https://www.the-low-countries.com/article/dutch-museum-bans-term-golden-age/> [accessed 03.07.2024].

⁶⁹ *Slavery*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Curators of the Exhibition were: Valika Smeulders, Head of the Department of History; Eveline Sint Nicolaas, Senior Curator of History; Maria Holtrop, Curator of History; Stephanie Archangel, Junior Curator of History. May 18, 2021–August 29, 2021.

⁷⁰ Sint Nicolaas et al., eds., *Slavery. The Story of João, Wally, Oopjen, Paulus, van Bengalen, Surapati, Sapali, Tula, Dirk, Lohkay* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum / Atlas Contact, 2021).

⁷¹ <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/20160--rijksmuseum/collections/rijksmuseum-slavery-1650-1960?ii=0&p=0> [accessed 20.10.2023].

read about them. Alternatively, situations in the colonies are often directly compared with those of Amsterdam brothel in other reports meant for WHAT PUBLIC.

Only after a thorough categorization of the different image media and comparison of these with text genres will it be possible to fully analyze the research field of female asymmetrical dependency in the field of prostitution and related contexts. It can already be re-stated that the image corpus is very extensive in the individual fields and can illuminate crucial blind spots, especially in those areas where the textual sources are silent. There is a need to examine whether the concept of literary or pictorial fiction can be an effective tool across the board, but this seems to be the case, especially in regard to often ignored background scenes or those of purely illustrative character.

The exhibition “Augenlust,” curated in 2022, demonstrated that even in a seemingly “innocent” pictorial subject such as still lifes, both overt and covert allusions to asymmetrical dependencies can be found in very different areas. In particular, it addressed the areas of “slavery” and “female labor” very intensively due to the subject matter, and demonstrated that the artists made deliberate use of the opposites (luxury exploitation; global seafaring, constructed as masculine – local domestic activity, constructed as feminine) within the still life.

The present paper ends with a look at the paradigm shift in museum and exhibition curating that has taken place in recent years: hitherto marginalized persons (for example, formerly enslaved people, maids, etc.) are being analyzed more closely, and the question of interaction with the artist and the voluntariness of sitting in portraits is being reflected upon. The focus has turned intensively to concepts: Picture titles that are problematic must be re-considered, and exhibition or collection titles such as “Golden Age,” need be contextualized as much as persons central to the age in question, in order to elicit the contrasting dimensions of both luxury and exploitation.

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