

Slavery in the Cultural Imagination

*Debates, Silences, and Dissent
in the Neerlandophone Space*

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11. Making an Embodied Absence Present: Tourism and the Cultural Imaginary of Slavery and Colonial Heritage in the Netherlands

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Abstract: Heritage tourism products are ubiquitous in all major European cities and often serve to forge a cultural imaginary of nationhood, identity, and belonging. In such a cultural imaginary, the stories of slavery and colonialism tend to be marginalised, even overlooked. Thus, whilst contemporary Dutch society for instance has a sizeable physical presence of people of African descent, their stories, heritage, and narratives are often absent from the national imaginary of belonging. By conceptualising this paradox as *the embodied absence of the past* – the physical presence yet narrative absence of the shared history, heritage, and role of people of African descent in European societies – this chapter explores how tourism in its practices and performances makes this embodied absence of the past visible. The TripAdvisor reviews of the Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours (BHAT) are examined through content analysis. The findings show that BHAT performs civic, cultural, and political activist goals in which tour guides act as important mediators in keeping the memory of slavery heritage alive. BHAT provides an eye-opening transformative experience that renders visible the embodied absence of the past by (re)inserting the ‘Black presence’ into the cultural imaginary of Dutch slavery and colonial heritage through the tour narratives.

Keywords: Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours; cultural imaginary; collective memory; embodied absence; tour guides; slavery heritage tourism

I cannot stress enough the importance of Jennifer's work, and of the rewards that attending the tour provides; both in terms of educating oneself on the history of one of the world's most infamous cities, as well as serving to commemorate those who played a vital part in it [*sic*] constructing it. I strongly encourage everyone to attend the Black Heritage Amsterdam Tour.
James A. (Review on TripAdvisor in April, 2017)

Introduction

Tourism is a ubiquitous part of contemporary society, with cultural tourism in general and heritage tourism in particular considered as one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry. Thus, from Amsterdam to Zaragoza, Petra to Lombok, historical and heritage tourism products abound in all major European cities and other cities around the world. The prevalence of historical and heritage tourism stems, more broadly, from the way in which tourism is perceived as a worldmaking force (Hollinshead et al. 2009) that shapes the cultural imaginary of people, places, and events – both past and present.

However, tourism's worldmaking potential is a double-edged sword. It has the potential to make visible ignored aspects of the world, but can also be used to reinforce caricatured imaginaries that actively erase other people, times, and places. In a recent study, Ormond and Vietti (2021) show that the 'tools of tourism' – guided tours, guidebooks, and tourism maps – offer profound pedagogical possibilities of civic learning of societal diversity. They argue that as 'one of the only contemporary sites outside of the education industry where explicitly designated, non-vocational learning about other times, places, and peoples takes place' (Werry 2008, 17), tourism faces an inherent paradox. On the one hand tourism can provide new perspectives, whilst on the other, it can perpetuate clichés. Thus, guided tours are seen as having the potential to challenge established dominant narratives of the past whilst providing new narratives that facilitate learning.

Narratives of the past – both old and new – are tied up with the cultural memory of places and people. Marschall (2012) argues that the tourism–memory nexus has been a neglected field of study and calls for a better understanding of this intersection. This is particularly important when it comes to sensitive aspects of the past, such as slavery, colonialism, and the holocaust. This is because the sites, traces, and artefacts of a sensitive collective past (memory) are commodified as heritage products to attract tourists. This raises certain questions about how tourists engage with such

heritage tourism products and the extent to which tourism practices and performances related to such sensitive pasts are able to challenge the existing collective memory and introduce new memory and engagement.

Using the case of the Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours (BHAT), this chapter examines how BHAT as both a tourism practice and performance undertakes the socio-cultural and political work of rendering visible and present aspects of the Dutch cultural imaginary of slavery and colonial heritage that are absent. In particular, this chapter focuses on a detailed analysis of reviews of BHAT left by tourists on the TripAdvisor platform in order to understand how they perceive both the tour and their experience thereof vis-à-vis the collective memory of slavery and colonial heritage in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Tourism, Cultural Memory of Heritage, and the Embodied Absence of the Past

Heritage tourism is one of the oldest forms of travel. Indeed, it is known that travel to historical sites of cultural importance was common practice amongst the ancient Egyptians and Romans (Timothy and Boyd 2006). In contemporary times, the growth of cultural and heritage tourism is closely aligned with the increasing production of cultural and artistic experiences offered for touristic consumption. Even sites associated with difficult historical events such as slavery, war, and mass death have seen increased visits in proportion to the increase in (inter)national memorialisation and commemoration practices through monuments, memorials, and exhibitions.

Whilst heritage tourism continues to bloom, the very concept of heritage remains contested. One of the most basic conceptualisations is to see heritage as the contemporary use of the past (Ashworth 2003; Graham et al. 2000; Lowenthal 2011). This broad approach to conceptualising heritage underscores both the tangible and intangible features of the past, where the past refers to the historical events that shape the socio-cultural and even natural landscapes of society. Traditionally, the understanding of heritage was bound up with the identification of grand, monumental, and old sites – artefacts and buildings that were considered aesthetically pleasing. Through discursive, technical, and management practices, these elements of the past were deemed valuable enough to be preserved and passed on to future generations. This is what Smith (2006) calls the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD), in which usually the state sanctions what is to be regarded as heritage and worthy of preservation. It is through such AHD that

a sense of nationhood, identity, and belonging to an 'imagined community' is forged (Anderson 1984). Within AHD, how identities become constructed from heritage sites is taken as a given. However, recent studies have shown that heritage is not simply the contemporary use of the past, but rather is produced in a continuous process of becoming that is open to contestations and new avenues of interpretive possibilities (Watson et al. 2012).

The process of heritage creation, recreation, and indeed, destruction (Ashworth et al. 2007), is used as an instrument of (re)constructing and promoting cultural memory, cultural imaginaries, and the identities of individuals and communities. In this way what comes to be seen as heritage is what forms the basis of collective memory – i.e., what gets selected for remembrance and how aspects of the past are memorialised and commemorated in terms of collective memory. Collective memory, according to Schwartz (1991), is 'a metaphor that formulates society's retention and loss of information about its past in the familiar terms of individual remembering and forgetting' (302). An important aspect of collective memory is that it is mutually constituted at the individual and group level. It is through social institutions that individuals get to learn which aspects of the past are considered worth remembering and which are mundane. In this way commemorative events – both formal and informal – play an important role in the construction and contestation of collective memory. Thus, cultural (re)productions – often sanctioned by national authorities, as part of commemorative events – offer a view to the shared representation of the past in the present. However, such representations can be contested through other forms of cultural (re)production developed by marginalised individuals and groups. Foote and Azaryahu (2007) assert that 'the cultural production of [collective] memory refers to both the medium of presentation and the process through which the representation of the past assumes its particular form, often an involving engagement of the senses, emotions, imagination, and intellect of visitors' (126–27). It is in this process that tourism, as a cultural production and product, offers an avenue for new interpretive possibilities through its practices and performances. Heritage tourism therefore often shapes the heritage (re)creation process in producing, contesting, (re)negotiating, and promoting local place identities, meanings, and collective memory, even when related to difficult pasts (Ashworth and Graham 2005).

The transatlantic slave trade represents one such difficult past, the entangled histories, memories, and heritages of which are intricately interwoven in the socio-cultural fabric of nations and contemporary society in general. In the four centuries from the sixteenth through to the nineteenth century,

an estimated 12,000,000 Africans (Eltis and Richardson 2010) were enslaved and shipped to the New World of North and South America to provide labour on plantations and mines – with some also shipped to Europe. For more than 200 years since its abolition, through collective silence and amnesia that rendered public discourse on the subject absent and almost non-existent (Rice 2004), the transatlantic slave trade remained outside the historiography of many of the nation states that were directly involved in it. It has only been since the 1990s that public commemoration and memorialisation have become more commonplace in what Pierre Nora (1989) calls ‘sites of memory’. The rapid increase in the public memory of the transatlantic slave trade through commemoration and memorialisation was in part galvanised with the launch of the UNESCO Slave Route Project (SRP) in 1994, as well as the ‘guerrilla memorialisation’ (Rice 2004, 2010) practices of activists and marginalised groups who, in asserting their silenced identities, thrust the issue of the transatlantic slave trade into public consciousness and discourses across the Atlantic world.

In the Netherlands, aspects of slavery heritage were long ‘silenced’ in the Dutch canon of history and not expressed in the cultural imaginary of nationhood – notwithstanding a significant population of people of African and Afro-Surinamese descent (Balkenhol 2011; Cain 2015; Oostindie 2005; van Stipriaan 2007; Vliet 2020). Thus, whilst contemporary Dutch society has a sizeable physical presence of people of African descent, their stories, heritage, and narratives are often absent from the national cultural imaginary of belonging and the history of slavery. I conceptualise this paradox as the *embodied absence of the past* – the physical presence yet narrative absence of the shared history, heritage, and role of people of African descent in the Netherlands and in European societies writ large. I define the embodied absence of the past as

the awareness of the physical presence yet narrative absence of the shared history, heritage and role of African-descent people in European societies. This collective amnesia, I argue, is challenged and activated through tourism encounters of slavery and colonial traces which trigger an evocation and reconstruction of personal and collective memories. (Adu-Ampong 2023, 103590)

This embodied absence of the past is made visible through tourism practices and performances that create and hold space for dissenting, challenging, contesting, and co-creating new narratives within the Dutch cultural imaginary. Slavery heritage tourism narratives in particular stimulate

plural public memories of the past which resonate as powerful presences in people's lived experience precisely because of the absence of such narratives. Absence here refers to that which is missing in relation to the things and people that are present. Presence and absence are therefore simultaneously produced and the authority of that which is present depends on the 'otherness' of that which is absent (Frers 2013; Meier et al. 2013). Absences are therefore experienced in various social practices and performances that are both extraordinary and mundane within the tourism settings of slavery heritage sites. Slavery heritage tourism as a form of guerrilla memorialisation therefore enables marginalised groups to assert and reinsert their heritage into collective social memory by offering new narratives and perspectives on the past.

In making the embodied absence of the past present, the common tools of tourism – guided tours, guidebooks, and tourism maps – are utilised (Ormond and Vietti 2021). Via these tools, the marginalised history of slavery can be reinserted back into the public consciousness. Amongst other things, slavery heritage tourism practices and performances often seek to stimulate cultural exchange and racial dialogue at slavery-related heritage sites. These objectives are achieved by bringing together people from different racial backgrounds, revealing cultural and historical assumptions and distortions whilst making clear the distinction between dominant and marginalised narratives pertaining to particular sites. These slavery heritage sites, open as they are to misunderstandings and contestations, are considered sensitive because of their potential to evoke strong emotions such as anger, sorrow, and/or anguish (Teye and Timothy 2004; Yankholmes and McKercher 2015). Such sites, however, offer the potential for transformative cultural experiences precisely because the tourism practices and performances they enable incorporate physical and emotional dimensions (Bagnall 2003; Crouch 2012). Hence, the physical and emotional dimensions of tourism practices and performances are co-constituted. The physical dimension, for instance, entails being together with people from different backgrounds, walking and talking together as you follow a tour, and interacting in ways that have the potential to create a momentary bonding or group feeling. Thus, the practice of following a tour in which you often stop to listen to a tour guide or to look at visual clues and traces provides moments of emotional engagement with the content of the tour as well as with other participants. Tour guides also play a key role in (un)intentionally generating these emotional dimensions, not only through the narratives they present, but also in the manner in which they are delivered. Thus, emotions such as shame, anger, sorrow, and even delight at learning about aspects of the

past take form in the context of the particularities of the practice and performance of tourism.

Visits to slavery heritage sites are therefore embodied performances of remembrance and commemoration through which a sense of place, belonging, and identity is (re)negotiated, (re)constructed, and (re)contested. It is in this performative moment of the slavery heritage tourism encounter that 'people remember, forget, commemorate and make sense of the present' (Smith 2012, 214). My use of the conceptual notion of the embodied absence of the past, which already denotes the corporeal presence (and absence) of memory, shows the ways in which the transformation of slavery heritage traces as sites of tourism creates absence-presence and present-absence of the memories and experiences transcribed into individual and collective bodies in terms of meaning, identity, and belonging. In this embodied absence of the past and the disruption of the dominant narrative that results, new and unexpected meanings emerge that unsettle familiar expected narratives, cultural resonances, and political meanings of the past and its effects on the present.

Yet such disruptions also create powerful effects in terms of possibilities for new narratives to emerge with different spatial resonances. The evidence of these can be seen in the comments that visitors leave, either in visitor comments books at slavery heritage sites and/or in digital spaces such as TripAdvisor. Such comments contribute to the (re)construction of new narratives, as has been shown recently by Buckley-Zistel and Williams (2022) in their study of how TripAdvisor comments create new transnational moral spaces of remembrance at emotionally sensitive (dark) tourism sites.

Case Study and Methodology

Ongoing evolution in information communication technologies has given rise to a diverse range of online social network sites that influence how tourists research, plan, and reflect upon their travel experiences (Ayeh et al. 2013; Xiang and Gretzel 2010; Zarezadeh et al. 2019). The emergence of Web 2.0 and the explosion in user-generated content (UGC) have made online travel reviews an accessible and popular avenue for people to share their travel experiences online, via websites such as Expedia, TripAdvisor, Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, X (formerly Twitter), and Booking.com (Ayeh et al. 2013). TripAdvisor is the best-known online review platform in the allied travel, tourism, leisure, and hospitality sectors. Because of the perceived credibility of reviews on TripAdvisor, the extensive number of

reviews, its vast user base, and high traffic, TripAdvisor is used by millions of travellers, compared to lesser visited sites such as Booking.com or Expedia, which have limited reviews and user bases (Ayeh et al. 2013; Gursoy et al. 2021; SimilarWeb 2024). Consequently, this chapter is based on data derived from the TripAdvisor site for BHAT.

BHAT exemplifies the tourism–memory nexus and tourism’s transformative potential in wider societal debates on the commemoration and memorialisation of slavery heritage. BHAT was established in 2013 as a guided walking- and boat-based sightseeing tour that explores Amsterdam to make visible the ‘hidden histories’ of the African Diaspora, slavery, and colonial history of the Netherlands from the seventeenth century onwards, as seen in the national landmarks, architecture, canal houses, and museums. BHAT is underpinned by two published guidebooks: *Amsterdam Slavery Heritage Guide* (Hondius et al. 2019a) and *Netherlands Slavery Heritage Guide* (Hondius et al. 2019b). BHAT expressly undertakes the cultural and political work of counter-mapping dissonant heritage (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) and empowering marginalised and absent voices by firmly fixing tourist gazes on the visual traces of slavery heritage in the cityscape of Amsterdam. In this way, the tour keeps the memory of slavery and colonial history alive as a platform of dialogue and explorations of the past and its contemporary implications in everyday social life. Thus, TripAdvisor reviews from travellers who have experienced the tour offer a valuable insight into the extent to which the goal of BHAT is achieved in terms of generating a counter-narrative to the Dutch imaginary of the past.

In May 2021, all 147 reviews written in English were scraped off the BHAT TripAdvisor webpage. At the time of data scraping, there were eight reviews written in Dutch, but these were excluded from the collated data for analysis. This was to prevent issues of (mis)translation and to ensure a consistent language basis for the analysis. The 147 English reviews were put into an Excel file, which was uploaded into the ATLAS.ti 9 qualitative data analysis software (version 9.0.23.0) for further analysis. The analysis of the data followed a systematic process after a broad understanding of the data was developed through an initial scanning. The analysis involved three processes: open coding; axial coding; and selective coding, in order to categorise and find themes and patterns in the reviews. Once coded, a thematic analysis approach was adopted in order to build up broad (sub) themes of commonalities rather than individual differences in reviews. The broad themes that emerged provide the basis for deriving meaning, salience, and connections in the TripAdvisor reviews as they related to the research question.

Findings and Discussion

In analysing the reviews, the initial open coding of all reviews line by line yielded 484 unique codes. This process allowed the data to be organised and classified into meaningful categories. These categories were analysed and further reduced into thirteen code categories that were considered as subthemes. In this process, the number of categories was further reduced by combining those that were similar and/or dissimilar into more extensive and inclusive categories. The final stage involved a selective thematic coding, thus further reducing the categories into the final four themes: hospitality and boat aesthetics; tour guides as mediators; transformative experience of absence made present; and recommendations. In this chapter, the two themes of ‘tour guides as mediators’ and ‘transformative experience of absence made present’ will be the main focus of the analysis and discussion.

In terms of an overview of the reviews, the table below shows that the majority of reviews were written by those who travelled with friends, followed by those who travelled solo. The majority of the reviews (78 reviews) were written between 2013 and 2016, with 2018 being the year with the most reviews (25 reviews). The top four months during which most reviews were written were June (20 reviews), March (19 reviews), July (14 reviews), and February (14 reviews). In terms of star rating of the tour experience, 141 of the reviews rated the tour with 5 stars; four reviews rated it with 4 stars; and one review each rated the tour with 2 stars and 1 star. Reviewers from eight countries shared their experience of BHAT, with the most written by visitors from the United States (63 reviews), followed by those based in the Netherlands (26 reviews) and those from the United Kingdom (12 reviews). A large proportion of the reviews were written by those who did not specify their country of origin, although the country of origin could be deduced from some of these reviews.

Table 1. Overview of TripAdvisor Reviews for Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours (2013–2020).

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
<i>Trip Type</i>		
Travelled with friends	69	46.93
Travelled as a couple	19	12.92
Travelled solo	28	19.04
Travelled on business	5	3.40

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Travelled with family	12	8.16
Unspecified	14	9.52
Country of origin		
United States	63	42.85
Netherlands	26	17.68
United Kingdom	12	8.16
Germany	3	2.04
China	1	0.68
France	1	0.68
Hungary	1	0.68
Tanzania	1	0.68
Unspecified	39	26.53
Rating		
1 star	1	0.68
2 stars	1	0.68
3 stars	0	0
4 stars	4	2.72
5 stars	141	95.91

Tour Guides as Mediators of Memory and Experience

Almost all the reviews noted the role of the tour guide in their experience. The knowledge of the tour guide and the knowledge acquired from the tour were important for visitors. Moreover, the connection between the tour guide's own personal biography in relation to the narrative told was very much valued, as noted by one of the reviews: 'Jennifer of Surinamese parents has extensive knowledge of the Dutch involvement in enslaved Africans and the wealth that is distributed throughout Amsterdam' (C 74: Unspecified, 5*, United Kingdom). In their role, tour guides actively render the past visible and alive, creating the embodied experience sought by visitors, who note how the tour guide '[...] really made the history of the enslaved come to life' (C 11: Unspecified, 5*, United States). Thus, tour guides, through their practices and performances, play a significant role in shaping and (re)constructing the cultural memory and imaginaries of individuals. Particularly in the contexts of (slavery) heritage, tour guides as receptacles of extensive knowledge are expected to convey information, offer explanations, develop narratives, and mediate the experiences of tourists. This is replete throughout the reviews and is exemplified in this quote:

Jennifer¹ is blessed with a historian's intellect, an artist's eye, a griot's storytelling skill and a poet's heart. She is a natural educator and an expert listener. Jennifer will show you Amsterdam as you have never seen it before and you will invariably tell your friends and family. Jennifer is simply captivating and infuses history with vibrancy, life, reverence for humanity and, love. (C 21: Female, 5*, the Netherlands)

However, the role of the tour guide as a meditator also has a downside, as a negative assessment of the guide tends to lead to a negative overall experience. A couple of the reviews pointed out issues with the tour guide that ultimately negatively influenced their experience. These issues related to tour guides arriving late to the start of tour, the use of notes, or a guide other than the one expected hosting the tour. One visitor in particular appears to have had the worst encounter with one of the tour guides, which ruined her experience, as shown in the long quote below:

We had the combination walk/boat tour. Our tour guide was very nice. She was prompt and began the tour on time. She was not the one we expected to do the tour, but OK. However having us meet at a monument (the WWII monument) and not knowing how it fits into the African experience in Amsterdam was strange. As it was obvious the monument had people of color on it. Not a good way to start an African Heritage tour. She covered local sites that were associated with the African experience in Amsterdam, but it felt like she was only hitting the surface. She was able to give some great facts on how Holland became wealthy off the backs of black people and how people still benefit from that wealth today. Would have been nice if the guide had completed the tour without notes. If she has been doing this tour for 2 years (her words), then there should really be no need for notes. In my opinion there needed to be a little more passion. Again if you have been doing this for 2 years your passion for the subject should come through. (C 70: Female, 2*, United States)

As this quote exemplifies, visitors have certain expectations of tour guides, particularly in relation to the specific nature of a cultural tourism experience such as that offered by BHAT. Thus, any disconnect between expectation and reality can lead to huge disappointment, generating negative experiences. It has been argued that tour guides are of crucial importance in cultural tourism, as theirs is to the task of selecting, glossing and interpreting sights

1 Jennifer's name is used here with her explicit permission.

[...] [requiring] extensive expertise is regarded as a prerequisite by which to establish the guide's professional status as a mediator of culture [...] (Dahles 2002, 784). Thus, whilst tour guides tend to be primarily seen in terms of their cultural mediation role (Macdonald 2006), there is also a socio-political aspect to tour guiding (Dahles 2002) that needs to be acknowledged. These roles – both mediatory and political – are evident in the TripAdvisor reviews of BHAT and it is on this combination of roles that the visitors experience hinges. The political role is tied to how the use of guided tours and guidebooks actively engages in the heritage (re)creation process of contesting, (re)negotiating, and promoting new local place identities, meanings, and collective memory of the present traces of slavery in the cityscape.

Tour(ism) as a Transformative Eye-Opening Experience of Absence Made Present

Given that it is generally accepted that slavery did not take place in the Netherlands, existing slavery heritage tourism research has tended to focus on sites of departure of the enslaved in Africa (Teye and Timothy 2004; Yankholmes and McKercher 2015), sites of enslavement on the plantations of America (Buzinde and Santos 2009; Small 2013), and in the Caribbean (Best 2017; Jordan and Jolliffe 2013). Yet, the analysis of the reviews attests to the material traces of slavery heritage in the Netherlands. These traces, rendered invisible through the Authorised Heritage Discourse of the Netherlands as 'free soil' in relation to slavery, are made visible by BHAT. One reviewer illustrates: 'What makes this tour even more powerful is that the information that Ms. Tosh shares, is physically visible throughout the entire city of Amsterdam' (C 29: Male, 5*, Unspecified). Thus, the use of guided tours in slavery heritage tourism, in addition to educational work, performs both the cultural and political work (Adu-Ampong 2023) of making otherwise absent narratives present. The reviews repeatedly point out how the tour changed the attendees' perception by offering a new perspective on Amsterdam's (and consequently, the Netherlands') past. The tour is seen as eye-opening, making visible a history that has always been present, yet hidden. This is exemplified in this review:

The tour through Amsterdam was also very eye opening, because I visit Amsterdam often and never noticed the traces of slavery history Jennifer pointed out, even though the spots are so visible and out in the open. So it was very refreshing to see the city from a new perspective. (C 37: Unspecified, 5*, Netherlands)

BHAT powerfully makes visible the embodied absence of the past by opening the eyes of visitors to ‘so much “hidden” history right there in plain sight’ (C 39: Unspecified, 5*, United Kingdom). This generates a transformative experience for visitors who come to see and appreciate the heritage of ‘Black presence’, yet narrative absence being (re)created and (re)inserted into the cultural imaginary of the city. As noted by one reviewer: ‘[t]his is a great tour surrounding a topic which is often sadly missing in the stories surrounding Amsterdam’ (C 13: Unspecified, 5*, the Netherlands). Thus, in contrast to other tours, BHAT actively undertakes a ‘Black presence’ heritage (re)creation process, as exemplified in these two reviews:

Unlike many of the regular tours, what sets the Black Heritage Tour apart is that it really highlights not only the early history of black people, but also the colonial history of the city and country. They point out sites that you would normally pass by, but by looking through the tour lens we see things that make the city come alive and show that there has always been a ‘black presence’. (C 142: Unspecified, 5*, Unspecified)

She changed my perception on how to read art by taking us to the Rijks Museum in Amsterdam, where we spent time exploring the meanings behind popular and sacred artwork. We also went on a boat tour with Jennifer. She showed us houses, churches, hotels and other buildings which had a lot of history and markings of Black presence. She explained why they were so significant and important to Amsterdam. (C 62: Female, 5*, United Kingdom)

The material traces of slavery shown on the tour therefore provide a basis for new perspectives on the commemoration and memorialisation of slavery’s past in a city (and country) culturally imagined as ‘slavery-free’. This transformative experience is recounted in this review:

This tour was a game changer. I’ve lived in Amsterdam for 11 years but wow did I learn a lot about ways to look at the visual clues of the city. The tour pointed out and decoded signs of Black involvement in the establishment of the city and Dutch wealth and identity, issues which are politically, culturally, socially so important to engage with. (C 80: Unspecified, 5*, the Netherlands)

An outcome of the transformative experience of the tour is the call, in the form of recommendations, by reviewers for others to embark on the

tour. The findings from this study underline the relation between positive transformative experiences and the decision to recommend the tour, as exemplified in this review: 'We had an enjoyable and educational afternoon and walked away with a new perspective on Amsterdam. I enthusiastically recommend this tour' (C 7: Male, 5*, United States).

The emergence of Web 2.0 and increasing use of social media such as TripAdvisor has changed how tourism is marketed and managed (Ayeh et al. 2013; George et al. 2021). Thus, digital word-of-mouth recommendations affect potential future visitor intentions. Most of the reviews analysed in this study with a positive experience recommended the tour, with a number reiterating the commemorative worldmaking nature of BHAT relative to other tours in making the embodied absence of the past present, as seen in these reviews:

I definitely recommend this tour, because it provides you with a piece of Amsterdam history that isn't shared in the regular mainstream information sources. (C 37: Unspecified, 5*, the Netherlands)

Very interesting and fun too, for both Amsterdammers and tourists who want to know more about the city's past. (C 4: Female, 5*, the Netherlands)

I highly recommend it to both locals and tourist, especially to the families with children, who want to see this beautiful city with a unique eyes [*sic*]. This is definitely a must for visiting Holland. After all, what made Amsterdam, or the Netherlands famous today is its abundant historical heritage, [in] which the black and colonial heritage cannot be neglected. (C 34: Unspecified, 5*, China)

If anyone is intrigued, curious and seeking to enlighten themselves on aspects of Dutch History relating to its Golden Age, the colonies & the peoples that made the wealth possible. Look no further than this particular tour. (C 119: Unspecified, 5*, United Kingdom)

As highlighted in the quotes above, recommendations to take the tour were directed not only at international visitors, but also at local Amsterdam (Dutch) residents.

Conclusion

Tourism's ubiquitous status in contemporary society calls for more concerted efforts to study its effects on wider social processes beyond the economic

contribution it makes to the economy. Tourism, through its practices and performances, is a worldmaking force through which the past, present, and future are (re)negotiated, contested, and (re)created. Tourism has the transformative potential to keep heritage and memory alive, particularly difficult aspects of the past, such as slavery and its contemporary ramifications. In this chapter, the socio-cultural and political work of BHAT was explored by assessing the reviews of this tour on TripAdvisor. The goal was to understand how visitors perceived their experience of the tour, both in relation to the collective memory of slavery and to colonial heritage in Amsterdam. In particular, the analysis focussed on the ways in which BHAT highlights and renders visible the embodied absence of the past.

There are two major findings in this chapter in relation to making an embodied absence present. First, tour guides play a significant role as mediators of what is remembered and experienced. It is the embodied performance of tour guides that makes the history of slavery come alive and the material traces visible to visitors. This process is further enhanced when the tour guides' personal biographies are directly connected to the narrative told. Second, the findings show that visitors consider their experience to be eye-opening and transformative because the tour provides a new perspective on the visual cues and material traces of the city in relation to its slavery heritage. BHAT is seen as providing a depth of historical knowledge, connecting Amsterdam's history vis-a-vis its 'Black presence', which is missing from other general tours. The positive experience resulted in enthusiastic recommendations of the tour directed at local Dutch residents and international visitors alike.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that slavery heritage and the cultural imaginary associated with it is not necessarily a site or an artefact, but rather a cultural performance and/or process (Smith 2006). Thus, BHAT as a cultural performative experience that incorporates physical and emotional dimensions provides an avenue for keeping heritage and memory alive. Through its practices and performances, BHAT plays an important role in creating encounters in which new and unexpected narratives and meanings emerge, allowing individuals to feel and (re)think the familiar. It is through this process that tourism comes to (re)shape the cultural imaginary of slavery and the colonial heritage of the Netherlands by making an embodied absence present.

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