

'A Tori'

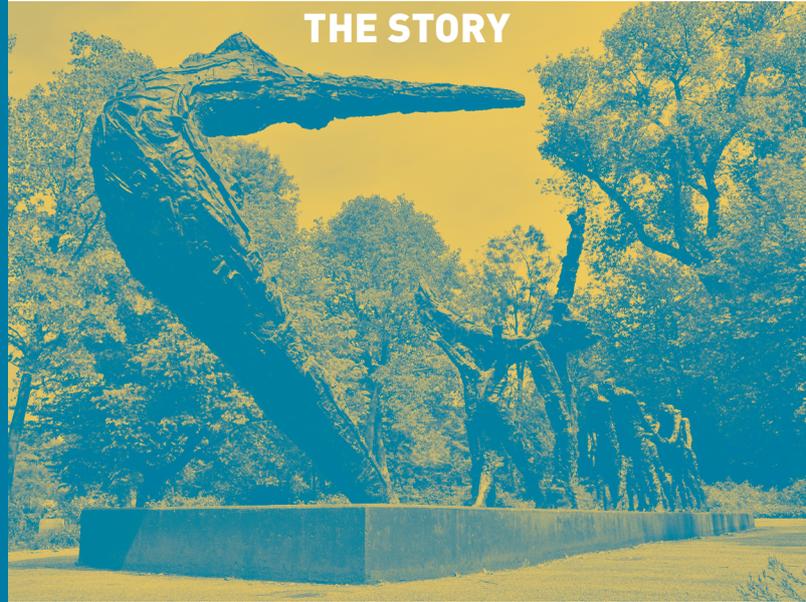
THE STORY



MANUAL OF THE
KETI KOTI TABLE

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KETIKOTI TABLE**

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The Ketu Kotu Table logo

The logo of the Ketu Kotu Table is inspired by the traditional *Sankofa symbol*. This is a traditional symbol in West-Africa, the region from which millions were enslaved and transported to the America's. In the West- African Akan language – which has also influenced Surinamese languages - san-ko-fa means something like: "Return (to the source), go and retrieve (learn) it." This has been symbolized by a bird that turns its head and picks an egg from its back, reflecting on his past and contributing to the future (generations).

This symbol is in use by several organizations in the African diaspora, encouraging the reflection upon the past as part of working towards a shared future. Since the Ketu Kotu Table invites participants to reflection and dialogue about this shared history of slavery and its aftermath, we have chosen to connect two different birds. Together they form a hospitable table, with their wings referring to their closed and open shackles and their freedom. They're picking up not just their own but also each other's eggs: through dialogue about our pasts and present we are working towards a better future for ourselves and next generations, by increasing our empathy and understanding of ourselves and each other.



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FOREWORD

15 years ago I joined for the first time a Seder table hosted by my Jewish partner Machiel Keestra: an evening in which Jews all over the world celebrate and commemorate the liberation of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt, some thousands of years ago according to a fixed set of rituals, with texts and symbolic acts and a lot of discussions. This Seder table, along with the Ramadan festival during which Dutch Muslims break their period of fasting, the Afro-American Kwanzaa festival during which African-Americans celebrate their 'family, community and culture', and the communal dialogue tables that were held after the political murder of *Theo van Gogh* in Amsterdam in 2004, inspired me to develop the Ketu Koti Table.

It is meant as a ritual to commemorate the Dutch slavery history, the consequences for all - both black and white - descendants of those involved in that history and to celebrate together the freedom which many - not all! - of us now enjoy.

For me personally, this history is relevant as well.

Both of my parents are from Surinamese-Dutch descent, with my maternal grandmother being born into slavery. Even though the stories of that period were mostly too painful to be told, I've been aware of that all-too-near past quite well. Over the years, though, I felt an increasing need to pause and reflect on that history as it became also more evident for me that this past still makes itself felt in much of what happens in the Dutch society as a whole and in the African-Dutch community more in particular.



Keti Koti: the 'chains are broken', slavery is over

Only quite late, on the 1st of July, 1863, King William III officially signed the law that abolished slavery in all regions of the Netherlands. Since then, the 1st of July has become a national holiday in Suriname but is also celebrated by many African-Dutch citizens elsewhere. Indeed, also in the Netherlands more and more attention is paid to our shared history of slavery and in several major cities commemorations and celebrations are organized around that day.

In addition to this, I felt the increasing need for myself and those around me to engage in a conversation in which we ask ourselves what this freedom that we have acquired actually means for us.

The Keti Koti Table

This led me to the development of the Keti Koti Table. Not much later did I find out that, as in many cultures, the Afro-Surinamese culture does also know a ritualized meal: the Kra Tafra. This table is performed to dispose the 'kra' or soul favourably and to strengthen the soul. As such, the Keti Koti Table fits well with this Afro-Surinamese tradition.

During the Keti Koti Table we celebrate freedom as well as commemorate the struggle against slavery. Like elsewhere, the African-Dutch enslaved people have from the outset demonstrated active resistance against their predicament. For example, some fled into the Surinamese jungle where they have set up their own communities there to live in freedom. From these bases, they waged guerrilla attacks to undermine the system of slavery. (Descendants of these enslaved people, Maroons, still live in villages in the interior of Suriname.) The other enslaved individual sought to employ their freedom as soon as slavery was abolished in July 1863, even though the government forced them for another 10 years into so-called 'state contract labor'.

Next to commemorating this struggle for freedom, the Keti Koti Table offers also a context for reflecting upon questions about identity and meaning. For during slavery, the enslaved were forced to abandon their identity and were stripped of their human dignity. Regaining their freedom after the abolishment of slavery also entailed a novel relation to their identity, the meaning of the past, and so on.

Fortunately, we have observed during the last decade an increasing interest to the history of slavery, its abolition and its aftermath in the Netherlands and elsewhere. Being part of this, we have been able to conduct Keti Koti Tables in the Netherlands, Germany and the United States with over 10.000 participants and in collaboration with more than hundred museums, governments, libraries, educational institutes and other organizations. These collaborations and the experiences of those participants provided us with many ideas for enriching and adjusting the rituals, texts and reflections. Moreover, they have encouraged us to employ the Keti Koti Table also for dialogues about sensitive topics not directly related to the slavery past.

The ritualized and guided Keti Koti Table dialogue has proven to establish a safe and personal environment which is valuable in other contexts as well, facilitating the exchange of personal experiences and insights between individuals.

We felt therefore that it is time for a new and expanded edition of the Keti Koti Table manual, to incorporate at least a few new suggestions. In addition, this is its first translation in English, which will make it available for new and international audiences. Indeed, we hope that it will inspire and motivate them in their own commemorations of shared histories of slavery and emancipation, and in their reflection upon identity and freedom, increasing mutual empathy and understanding.

Mercedes Zandwijken

Amsterdam, September 2018

INTRODUCTION

Structure of the Keti Koti Table manual

The next sections describe the shape that the Keti Koti Table has received over the years. However, as is always the case with such rituals and perhaps especially with those from 'invented traditions', the Keti Koti Table will always be developed further and adjusted to the specific – local and historical – context in which it is carried out. Therefore, any group of people that organizes and participates in a Keti Koti Table is invited to add new features or otherwise modify it. Indeed, we invite participants explicitly to develop their own suggestions about the symbols and rituals that may take place at the table, about the songs that are sung, about the questions that connect the Keti Koti Table to local context, and so on. Importantly, organizers must also plan very clearly together when the meal will be served. Depending upon the number of courses, these may be inserted between the symbolic acts. For example, we often start with the first course only after Symbolic act 4 and have at times facilitated the dialogue (Symbolic act 7) while participants enjoyed the main course. However, since each Keti Koti Table is subject to its own conditions, this manual contains various suggestions and explanations as we have discussed with participants during the many Keti Koti Tables which we have celebrated over the years. We do hope that the manual can inspire organizers to develop and plan their table according to their needs.

Aim of the Keti Koti Table

A Keti Koti Table is a meeting during which we reflect on slavery's past and its consequences for the present by performing various symbolic acts before, during and after a meal. All of this is meant to increase awareness of our own actions and our own feelings in relation to the history of slavery and its consequences. Importantly, this

past does not only concern the descendants of former enslaved persons but also concerns the descendants of those who (directly or indirectly!) benefitted from the slavery. Since slavery has been an important part of the history of many parts of the world for 3 to 4 centuries, including Europe, Africa and the Americas, its material and cultural implications are hard to fathom. The famous cultural scholar Edward Said spoke in that context of a “cultural archive” that remains influential even after the abolition of slavery and anthropologist Gloria Wekker recently showed in her book *‘White Innocence’. Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Duke UP, 2016) how this also applies to Dutch post-colonial culture. Consequently, everyone should ask her/himself what this history and its implications mean for one’s personal identity and actions. The ultimate goal of the Keti Koti Table and its rituals is obviously the celebration of freedom, the commemoration of the brave struggle of our ancestors against the system of oppression and slavery: in so doing, we might gain something positive from the strength of those courageous people who have opposed and still oppose this form of oppression and dehumanization. Moreover, we can also draw inspiration from the countless individuals who have struggled together, collaborated, developed friendships and cherished loving relationships across the divides created by slavery, segregation, and discrimination.

Participants of the Keti Koti Table

Keti Koti is a festival for anyone who feels somehow interested in or connected to the history of slavery. The Keti Koti Table is explicitly meant to be diverse and inclusive, bringing together people with different backgrounds and bringing them into conversation with each other on personal and sensitive issues. We hope that this will help particularly the youth, our future generation, to explore how to give meaning to the past, to our current situation and particular to the future.

NECESSITIES

As mentioned, the Keti Koti Table is joined by a diverse and inclusive group of participants. The Keti Koti Table is structured via a series of symbolic acts or rituals and facilitated dialogue, all arranged around a reconstructive meal which creates a safe environment for the participants, allowing the participants to share their thoughts and experiences with the sensitive issues at stake.

Indeed, as recounted in the introduction, many cultures and religions know such festivals which are centered around a meal like the Jewish *Seder* and the Muslim *Iftar table*, the African-American *Kwanzaa festival*, the potlach feast of Native Americans, and so on. Yet with such festivals being celebrated across the world, differences naturally emerge. For example, there are literally hundreds of different Haggadah’s (the manual used at the Jewish seder table) written over the centuries, each of which is adjusted to specific traditions and customs, topics and so on. Aware of such differentiations within traditions, the necessities that we mention below reflect particularly the Afro-Dutch or Surinamese context and may not be optimal for other local, historical and social contexts.

We therefore explicitly encourage hosts and participants in other contexts to consider alternatives that perhaps better fit their context and integrate those in the outline provided here. (*Indeed, we kindly request to be informed about such alternatives as we might include them in later versions or share them online.*)

For the meal

The meal should preferably consist of food that has likely been eaten by former enslaved people. This will differ from place to place, obviously. Usually, this food is relatively simple, as the enslaved people would have to do with the left-overs of their owners or other cheap ingredients. Slavery history in the US has led to so-called ‘Soul Food’, combining African elements with those from the West Indies and from – primarily the south of – the US. Such Soul Food is often served as a New Year’s meal in black communities and consists of a black eye peas and rice dish (also called hoppin’ John), cornbread, bacon or fish and some kind of greens (collard, turnip, or cabbage). We list here an example of food that we provide in the Afro-Dutch or Surinamese context.

ENTREE

Peanutsoup – a soup of which the main ingredients are crushed peanuts, salt meat and ‘tom tom’ (balls of cooked plantains). In a Jewish context we have substituted the ‘tom tom’ for matzoh balls.

MAIN DISH

Heri heri – an African colorful yet simple meal consisting of various tubers (roots), plantain, vegetables and spicy codfish that is comparable to what enslaved people would eat.

DESSERT

Bojo – a Surinamese cake made from grated cassava and coconut, raisins, eggs and sugar.

DRINKS

Both cold and hot, alcoholic or not. In the Afro-Surinamese tradition two syrups are always on offer at festive occasions, namely *ginger beer* and *orgeat* (syrup from almonds).

Materials for the symbolic acts

BITTER WOOD

In the Afro-Dutch or Surinamese context we have used Kwasi Bita (bitter wood) from a shrub-like plant that contains quinine and is used as medicine.

COCONUT OIL

A liquid with which the pain and stain from the past can be rubbed away: we have used coconut oil as coconut trees grow in Surinam and coconut oil is widely used in cooking and for the care of the body and hair in the Afro-Dutch community.

SUGAR CANE

A sweet taste of freedom: sugar cane was one of the most important crops and export products of Surinam during the period of Dutch slavery.

21 BALLOONS

The sound of freedom: the abolition of slavery on July 1, 1863 was inaugurated with 21 cannon ball shots. We invoke this by using either 21 colorful balloons and pins to pop those or, alternatively, 21 fire crackers.

Texts for the symbolic acts

To collectively evoke the slave past, this manual contains some examples of:

- An ancestral prayer – enslaved people in Surinam often carried along African religious traditions which were secretly performed.
- Some texts to explain features of slavery and its history.

- Songs related to slavery and its history, for choral singing or to sing along.

Although examples of these texts can be found in this manual, we are well aware that there are many other meaningful texts and songs imaginable that could be added. Indeed, local contexts probably provide perfect substitutes of what is presented here. For example, the Ketu Ketu Table was as early as 2013 modified as a 'Mesa Tula' for a commemoration festival in Amsterdam of the Tula uprising in Curaçao in 1795, now including songs, stories and food from the Antilles. Indeed, we have employed the Ketu Ketu Table meanwhile also in other contexts where discrimination, stereotyping, and identity are at stake. The host of a Ketu Ketu Table might even invite participants to take a text or song of their own choice to the Ketu Ketu Table.

FACILITATED DIALOGUE

During the Ketu Ketu Table experiences and ideas about sensitive and personal topics are shared. Although the history of slavery and its aftermath are its occasion, its aim is explicitly *not* to have a conversation about historical and political subjects, on the contrary. As such topics very often give rise to heated and polarizing debates, our facilitated dialogue aims to share with each other a variety of *personal* experiences and insights.

Such a personal exchange presents an important step to increasing mutual empathy and understanding, and eventually a more inclusive society. For this, it is important that we create optimal conditions for all participants to safely express themselves. Since most participants will not know each other and are perhaps not used to this kind of dialogue, it has been proven useful to facilitate it in a very structured manner. There are various dialogue methods available and it may be good to apply another structure, depending upon context and group composition.

The dialogue structure presented on the next two pages is rather detailed and requires ca. 20 minutes for each separate round of dialogue. It guarantees that all participants equally contribute and that adequate attention is paid to each contribution. In addition, this structure enhances our ability to listen attentively and patiently to each other and to understand what the other is saying.

After all: dialogue requires probably more the art of listening and understanding than the art of speaking!



Structure of the Keti Koti Table dialogue

- 1 Forming couples:** the group of participants will form mixed dialogue couples, preferably consisting of two persons from different – mixed – perspectives, unfamiliar with each other. Two dialogue partners are sitting in chairs facing one another and will take turns talking about a topic or question that the facilitator will provide – keeping this topic in mind during the dialogue.
- 2 Topic Presentation:** the dialogue facilitator will provide the topic to be discussed and keep the time. The topic (or topics) must be prepared carefully, in order to avoid unclarity for the participants and to ensure that the topic will be personally relevant for them. Some potential questions can be found in this Keti Koti Table manual.
- 3 Silence for 1 minute:** after the topic has been presented by the facilitator, all participants will have 1 minute of silence to think about the topic and their response.
- 4 First speaker for 3 minutes:** when the facilitator gives a signal, the first person of the dialogue couple will have 3 minutes to openly present her/ his experiences and thoughts to the other person. The listener will remain silent and not interrupt or comment on what he/she hears.
- 5 Silence for 1 minute:** after this first person's dialogue contribution, there is again 1 minute silence: for the speaker to think about what she/he has said and not said and for the listener to think about what he/she has heard.
- 6 Listener speaks for 2 minutes:** after this minute of silence and upon a signal by the facilitator, the person who has listened will now have 2 minutes time to convey to the first speaker what he/she has heard and what has touched him/her most about it.
- 7 Second speaker for 3 minutes:** changing turns, now the person who started listening will give his/her response to the dialogue topic in 3 minutes, with the first speaker remaining silent while listening.
- 8 Silence for 1 minute:** after this second person's dialogue contribution, again 1 minute of silence will be timed by the facilitator.
- 9 Listener speaks for 2 minutes:** the person who has now been listening will have 2 minutes time to convey to the speaker what she/he has heard and what has touched her/him most about it.
- 10 Shared reflection for 5 minutes:** the dialogue couple will now have 5 minutes time to together reflect upon the similarities and differences in their responses to the topic. While doing so, they should keep the goal of inclusive dialogue in mind and work towards a shared lesson from their dialogue.
- 11 Plenary discussion:** it can be valuable for all participants if the dialogue session – or even each round of dialogue separately – is closed by a brief plenary discussion of it. The facilitator can invite some participants to report on what they have learned from their dialogue partners, what struck them most. In some cases, the facilitator may decide to formulate a new dialogue topic, inspired by what she/he has heard during this plenary discussion.
- 12 Goodbye - and possibly change of dialogue couples:** after both partners having had a turn as speaker and as listener they can say goodbye to each other. Depending upon the available time, dialogue couples can now change for another round of facilitated dialogue about another topic provided by the facilitator, for example by one row of facing participants moving one position to the right.

Schema of Keti Koti Table dialogue structure

Preparation

- 1 Forming couples
- 2 Topic presentation and dialogue question
- 3 Silence - *for 1 minute*

Dialogue part I

- 4 First speaker - *for 3 minutes*
- 5 Silence - *for 1 minute*
- 6 Listener speaks - *for 2 minutes*

Dialogue part II

- 7 Second speaker - *for 3 minutes*
- 8 Silence - *for 1 minute*
- 9 Listener speaks - *for 2 minutes*

Conclusion round of dialogue

- 10 Shared reflection - *for 5 minutes*
- 11 Plenary discussion
- 12 Goodbye - and possibly change of dialogue couples

If possible

Next round of dialogue

Repeat from step 2 with next dialogue question

DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

The Keti Koti Table offers a safe and personal context for a dialogue about experiences, emotions and insights regarding our shared slavery past and its aftermath that participants have gathered personally. As mentioned earlier, local context always plays an important role in the preparations and the table can be adjusted accordingly.

Factors like the composition of the group of participants, the location, and the moment of the year can be relevant for this. Because of the nature of the dialogue, the questions must each time be determined by the dialogue facilitator, often in consultation with collaboration partners. The questions must be clear and unambiguous and allow all participants to share personal experiences and insights. We often present questions that invite participants to reflect upon the past, present and future regarding a particular topic ensuring that the three different questions are thematically related.

On the next two pages we offer some triplets of related questions we have successfully used during previous Keti Koti Tables.

Identity and our shared history of slavery

- 1 How do you personally carry along remnants of the history of slavery and its aftermath?
- 2 When did you for the first time become aware of the color of your skin or your cultural or ethnic background – and what does/ did that discovery mean to you?
- 3 What feelings or ideas are evoked in you whenever you talk to someone about slavery and liberation?

Emotions and family histories

- 1 Share with your dialogue partner a story from your own – perhaps distant – family history that you’ve once heard from a family member, and which has remained ever since with you because it touched you emotionally when you heard it.
- 2 Share a remark about yourself that your father or mother once made during your childhood – perhaps on a particular occasion – and that you have never forgotten.
- 3 To what cause did you dedicate yourself, or even fought for, with your whole heart?

Exclusion and civil courage

- 1 Who would have been the unexpected guest at the time? For which unexpected guest or excluded person/group would you now be happy to set a place at the table?
- 2 Have you ever experienced how someone else stood up for you when you felt excluded or discriminated against? How did that make you feel?
- 3 Have you ever been confronted with discriminating or racist behavior – against yourself or someone else – and did you perhaps not have the courage to declare yourself against it? How did that make you feel?

Similarities and differences

- 1 What makes you different, special, and perhaps also vulnerable? Have you ever felt unfree to be who you are because of this?
- 2 Can you recall an experience when you realized how people differ from each other, with these differences providing an enrichment? Or, in contrast, an experience when you realized that these differences can lead to misunderstanding and friction?
- 3 Have you ever personally felt hurt by the tone of the debate about racism – and why (not)? How would you rather hear that tone change?

Our conversation about this shared history

- 1 What are the implications of this shared history of slavery for my relation to you, and how does that manifest itself?
- 2 Have you ever caught yourself at a prejudice that is rooted in this history and its aftermath? What feeling and insight did that eventually yield – and what feeling and response did it provoke in the person implicated in the event?
- 3 What meaning does a conversation - like this Keti Koti Table dialogue – with a stranger about such a sensitive topic have for you? Which insight derived from the conversation would you like to pass on to the next generation – to your (grand)children, for example?



MANUAL

RECEPTION

The host and/or hostess welcomes the participants at the Keti Koti Table and briefly presents the structure of the event, which includes announcing when the courses of the meal will be served. The first symbolic is then announced, as this opens the event as a whole.

Symbolic act 1

An ancestral prayer

During the Keti Koti Table, we commemorate and reflect upon the history of slavery and its aftermath. For this, we have been inspired by various traditions. For example, we are using these small variants of the traditional Surinamese 'koprobeki' - brass basin - on the picture on the next page for the *bitter wood* and *coconut oil* for Symbolic acts 3 and 4. As mentioned above, the Keti Koti Table is meant to commemorate and reflect upon the history of slavery and its consequences in a setting that includes different groups and generations alike. It is only fitting that we start by looking back. Indeed, in African cultures as in many communities in the African diaspora, ancestors play an important role. Ancestors are honored and are assumed to guard and guide posterity. During slavery, the enslaved were forbidden to perform such rites and prayers related to their ancestors. In this Keti Koti Table we pay tribute to the ancestors also because they suffered under the yoke of slavery, while some of them succeeded in fiercely resisting this inhumane system. In addition, we also remember those who joined in the struggle against slavery and helped to obtain freedom and persons who inspire us today in the struggle for and celebration of freedom.



Ancestral prayer and libation ritual

According to the Afro-Surinamese 'Winti' culture, this can be done in the form of an ancestral prayer in combination with a simple libation ritual, sprinkling some water on the floor. Making such a connection to forebears differs from culture to culture and invented traditions figure here as well. A libation or Tambiko ritual is included in the Kwanzaa festival and a form of ancestral prayer is also included in the Maafa (a Kiswahili word that is being used to refer to the Great Disaster of the transatlantic slavery system or what others call the 'African Holocaust') commemoration ceremony, that some African-American communities celebrate.

The prayer on page 28 and 29 is meant as an example: it is in Surinamese Sranang Tongo and is generally performed by a single person.

Symbolic act 2

Cover for the unexpected guest

We cover each table a place for an unexpected guest, invoking the hospitality that was common among the enslaved people. It is good to remember that this hospitality in part has historical roots. Think for example of the many forced relocations of the enslaved as well as the subsequent migrations from Suriname to the Netherlands or from the South to the North. Those migrations after the abolition are directly related to the history of colonialism and slavery, as is expressed in the phrase: "They are here, Because we were there ...". Obviously, migration and seeking refuge is still continuing and raises the question what our individual and societal attitude is towards unexpected guests today, living in the relatively safe and wealthy environments that are partly rooted in the same histories.

Possible new symbolic act

The tree of forgetting and the dehumanization of the enslaved

The enslaved Africans were deprived of their human dignity and autonomy. This was sometimes carried out in an almost ceremonial way. In a place called Quida, for example, they had to walk several times around the 'Tree of Forgetting' in order to stepwise lose or forget their name and identity. The local king, however, had again planted a 'Tree of Return' and of those who would walk around that tree their soul would return after their death. The result of slavery and transportation has resulted in that the roots of the enslaved and their family names have been lost over time. A symbolic act that could be done to commemorate the circular course mentioned here is to walk 3 times with each other around the table, trying to identify with those enslaved who had to make that walk centuries ago.

Ancestor Prayer Sranang Tongo

Mi teki fesi' man wroko fu ala baka pikin fu srafu fu taki Yu tangi fu di Yu ben dyi wi Gransuma na krakti fu den ben kan feti fu puru den blaka buba na ini katibo tesi.

Fu di den Gran kabra fu wi granwan e tenapu tu dyi wi tide te dungru makti wani fromu wi, noso dangra wi na ala sey.

Grontapu fu tide lay nanga degedensi, bruya de na grontapu pe bari fu libisma tron dipi soktu.

So wi tenapu nanga wi ala dya tide ini na nen fu Anana Keduaman -Keduanpon nanga ala den bakaman fu nengre kondre fu tranga wi YeYe fu kan teki hebi wortu nanga afrontu.

Fri wi Yeye fu tyari wi skin kon tap' na pasi fu fri wi fu fosten hebi, fu bribi no sa de wan skrekitori moro, so meki Kra nanga Dyodyo kan kruderi fu tya wi na let' fasi fu wi sa si na baka fu na pasi pe wi blakabuba kan nyan prey makandra, bika na psa w'e psa ... Na so wi taki.

Efu grontapu poti ston na wi pasi ... No frede
Anana Keduaman Keduanpon e watyi den dundun
Efu libisma dyi wi por'nen ... No degedege
Anana Keduaman Keduanpon e watyi den dundun
Te den denki den fruku wi ... No bada
Na soso fyofyo den e kweki
Dan d'o wani kari yu wis' man
Ma den frigiti
tak' Anana Keduaman Keduanpon b' e watyi den.

Ancestor Prayer English translation

God our creator, I speak on behalf of all the descendants of the slaves to thank you for the strength you gave our ancestors to escape from the pain of slavery.

And I hope that our ancestor spirits can protect us day by day against the evil that threatens us from darkness and that sows suspicion between us.

The world today has many problems, and man sighs a cry of despair.

We are all here today in the name of the most high God, our creator, with the support of all the forces of our African origin in order to strengthen our soul so that we can withstand any wrongdoing.

Give us the spiritual freedom to find the right path so that we can free ourselves from ingrained habits and so that faith will no longer be deterring us. Help us to lead our soul and our spirit in the right way to understand each other better, to enjoy each other's presence more and to move forward together, because life is short. I have said and so be it.

If the world is hard on us, do not be afraid.

Our Supreme keeps an eye on them;

When people speak evil, do not get angry,

For the Supreme keeps an eye on them.

If they think they can damn us, do not bother.

These are just fleas they produce,

they are ruining their own self.

Perhaps you will be suspected of mischief,

But they have forgotten that the Supreme kept an eye on them.

Symbolic act 3

Bitter wood and lament

In memory of the bitter times in the past we chew a piece Kwasi Bita or another bitter substance that is related to slavery or plantation produce. Meanwhile, a song of mourning (and of hope) is sung in memory of the ancestors who suffered the atrocities of slavery and for all those who still live in slavery today.

Precious Lord, take my hand

(Thomas Dorsey, 1932)

**Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light:**

Refrain

Take my hand, precious Lord, Lead me home.

**When my way grows drear,
Precious Lord, linger near,
When my life is almost gone,
Hear my cry, hear my call,
Hold my hand lest I fall:**

Refrain

**When the darkness appears
And the night draws near,
And the day is past and gone,
At the river I stand,
Guide my feet, hold my hand:**

Refrain



Possible new symbolic act **Saltwater, tears and the ocean**

On the table are small bowls with salted water. Salt has always been a valuable and important substance but the salt water here symbolizes the tears of slavery and the seawater that separated the enslaved from their country of origin. This forced trans-Atlantic journey, the “middle passage” of the triangular trade routes between Europe, Africa and the Americas, is represented in this *United National Slavery Memorial*. This ‘Ark of Return’ encourages us to acknowledge this tragedy, to consider its legacy and not to forget this history.

Participants of the Ketu Koti Table do this by now tasting a little salt water to put themselves in the shoes of the enslaved and to become aware of their own freedom to taste, or not. Then they throw drops of salt water over their shoulders: over their left shoulder while thinking about the past and making a wish for their ancestors, over their right shoulder while making a wish for future generations.

Lament

**A boro gron, a boro gron,
watra lon na mi ai.
Fad'ang mi hatti
tap'a boro gron.**

The ground is pierced
By the tears I wept.
They first fell upon my heart,
Than they pierced the ground.



Faya Siton

**Faya siton, no bron mi so, no bon mi so
Faya siton no bron mi so, no bon mi so
Agen masra Jantjii e kir sma pikin
Agen masra Jantjii e kir sma pikin, e kiri sma pikin**

Flint, burn me not so,
burn me not so
Again, master Johnny has killed
a human being

Symbolic act 4

Rubbing away the pain

With coconut oil – or an alternative suitable liquid - we can mutually rub the wrists of our neighbour(s) on the table, thus rubbing away the burning pain that was inflicted to (or by!) our ancestors at the moment when the enslaved were branded by the slave owners and the poignant pain of the handcuffs the enslaved had to wear. We do not only rub away the pain from the past but also symbolically hope to rub away the afterpains that are present in our lives and society nowadays. The Surinamese song *Faya Siton* refers to this branding of the enslaved, although some interpret it as having additional meanings. We can rub each other's wrists in silence, or by singing a song like this together:

The song 'Go down, Moses' is widely known in the US and beyond, referring to the story of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt that is told in the bible and is at the focus of the Jewish Seder table which is one of the sources of inspiration for this Keti Koti Table.

Go down, Moses

**When Israel was in Egypt's land:
Let my people go,
Oppress'd so hard they could not stand,
Let my People go.**

Refrain:

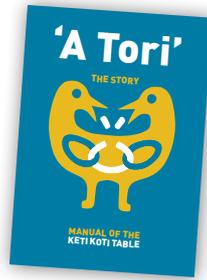
**Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh,
Let my people go.**

Symbolic act 5

Passing on the story

Each participant gives his or her Ketu Ketu Table manual, *A Tori*, to his or her neighbor. This act symbolizes the passing of this new tradition to hold the Ketu Ketu Table and thus to jointly commemorate and celebrate the abolition of slavery.

Given the relative recent date of the abolition of slavery (somewhat over 150 years ago in many countries) it is only natural that new traditions must be invented to incorporate such recent and important events. In addition, new and old traditions can be modified to better fit local contexts. Passing on the manual refers to the active and creative engagement that each individual might have with such traditions.



Symbolic act 6

Questions and answers

A child might ask why this Ketu Ketu Table is held. An adult (or perhaps this can be done as a group) answers and tells briefly the story of (the transatlantic) slavery. Importantly, the child should also learn from this story why it is important to remember the pain of the past and celebrate freedom. Obviously, depending upon the composition of the group, it is good to pause and reflect upon the parallels and differences in stories related to slavery and the fights against it: as much as there are differences in the 'larger' histories of slavery, so are there many exceptional 'micro' histories that are important to share with each other.

The history of slavery

The transatlantic slave trade lasted about 400 years, during which - according to UNESCO - more than 15 million slaves were deported. Associations of merchants, governments or individuals from several European powerful and rich countries, particularly from Portugal, Spain, Great Britain, France and the Netherlands, were developing and exploiting what is called the 'triangular trade route'. They sent ships filled with goods like weapons to Africa, where the goods were used to buy enslaved Africans. The enslaved victims were transported in the ships, inhumanely treated as 'cargo', and suffering many deaths along the journey across the Atlantic ocean to the Americas. Most enslaved persons would then be sold to - mostly European - plantation owners or others in South American or Caribbean countries. A small part of the enslaved would end up in North America on the plantations there. Tobacco, sugar, coffee, cotton and other plantation produce would finally be shipped to Europe, as the third stage of the triangular trade route during which the merchant. Only gradually has slavery been abolished by the countries involved in the transatlantic slave trade during the 18th and 19th centuries, while many other countries have done so only in the 20th centuries.

The Dutch played an important role in the transatlantic slave trade in different roles, like shippers, salesmen and plantation owners. (More about this can be read in the pioneering historical account in the book 'We Slaves of Suriname' by the Surinamese writer and WW II resistance fighter Anton de Kom, published in 1934.) During this Ketu Ketu Table we commemorate the 250 year period that our ancestors suffered under the system of slavery in the Dutch colonies. We remember the heavy voyage from Africa to the America's and the many hardships that our ancestors had to endure. We commemorate the degrading situations in which our

African ancestors found themselves. It is also important to recognize that many others during that time did benefit from or make use of the products of the plantations where the enslaved worked, such as the plantation owners and traders in spices, tobacco, cotton, coffee and cocoa, but also their customers in the Netherlands and elsewhere. To what extent did they know of these degrading situations, were they able to know about this or did they have the responsibility to inform themselves about the situation of the enslaved? In other words: what is the responsibility of all of those - directly and indirectly - involved in slavery? And how does this apply today, for us around this Keti Koti Table: what do we know and should we do about the slavery that still exists today?

Inherent in the system of slavery is that any kind of respect for the enslaved individuals is missing. The enslaved were the property of their masters and they had branded them as animals or objects. Respect for family ties between the enslaved did also not exist during the period of slavery. Families were torn apart, children sold separately from their parents. But many enslaved in Suriname, and elsewhere, have actively opposed the system of slavery. Many enslaved rebelled and fled in the jungles of Suriname, where they founded communities that could live in freedom.

We could be proud of these courageous Maroons and to all others who rejected this system of slavery. Similarly, respect is in order for the Surinamese people of every origin who, despite the suppression of their African culture have retained this and have further developed it under those conditions.

Enslaved people fight for their freedom and rights

There have been several small and large slave revolts in the Caribbean. Men and women protested in various ways against the injustice and horror of their position.

Haiti

Inspired by the French Revolution in 1789, during which Liberty, Equality and Brotherhood were considered of paramount importance, in 1791 enslaved in the French colony of Haiti revolted under the leadership of *Toussaint L'Ouverture*. This major slave uprising lasted until 1804 and eventually led to the abolition of slavery and emancipation of Haiti. The French government, however, forced large compensation payments until 1947, which largely explains why Haiti is still a poor country.

Curacao

This example of Haiti and the political upheavals in Europe around that time did motivate a former enslaved, *Tula*, to start an uprising on the island of Curacao. Two thousand slaves joined this rebellion, which would be the largest one in the Netherlands Antilles. Although the rebellion was brutally beaten down and the leaders were executed brutally, slave owners were forced to adapt their regime somewhat. Annually, on August 17 the Tula uprising is commemorated in the former Netherlands Antilles and the Netherlands. This Keti Koti Table manual has also been modified to serve during such Tula commemoration ceremonies.

Possible new symbolic act

Wash hands with rose water

Instead of rubbing away the pain with coconut oil, one can also wash this pain and afterpains away with another substance like rose water. Indeed, in African and Surinamese cultures people take on some occasions a 'Wasi': a ritual cleansing, during which rose water is used. By doing so, 'evil spirits', or negative memories and thoughts are washed away.

Symbolic act 7

Speaking freely: every opinion counts

During the period of slavery our ancestors were oppressed in many ways. There were masters and basja who had to be obeyed. The opinion of our ancestors did not count. We are now free and we may stand up for our own opinion. We speak frankly, because we live in freedom, a freedom which we cherish. Together with the commemoration of our shared slavery past and the abolition of slavery we celebrate the freedom of expression for all. This freedom of expression entails that we are sometimes confronted with experiences and ideas that we don't share or that are even painful to hear. With freedom comes the obligation to engage in dialogue and to respect each other both during our speaking and our listening.

Knowing how sensitive this matter is, during the meal let us speak freely about the impact of slavery on our own lives and in our relationships with others: do you feel the impact of this shared past of slavery in your personal life or that of others? We might also think of the role stereotypes and discrimination plays in our interactions with each other. Some people plainly deny that this is the case for them and boast that they are 'color blind'. However, as kind as this may be intended, such a judgment actually implies the denial of the

existence of such stereotypes and discrimination and might therefore not be helpful to fight those in ourselves and others.

Let us around this table share our personal views on the impact of the slavery past and try to understand the views of others. It may be useful to realize that the four different opinions on the consequences of the history of slavery below do often dominate discussions about it, while there may be many more:

- 1 ***We should stop to focus on old grudges. We are after all ourselves responsible for our actions and for our societal positions.*** *People who constantly focus on the past are actually shirking their responsibility by referring to others in the past.*
- 2 ***The effects of slavery are still noticeable today.*** *As a descendant of enslaved I am still suffering from deprivation that is rooted in the backward position my ancestors had.*
- 3 *As a white person from Dutch – or other colonial or slave-owning – descent, I carry the lead that my parents have had over underprivileged persons with me. **Indeed, perhaps I still benefit from the wealth or advantages my ancestors have amassed during the colonial period.***
- 4 ***I do not recognize myself in the above positions.*** *My opinion is therefore different, as well:...*

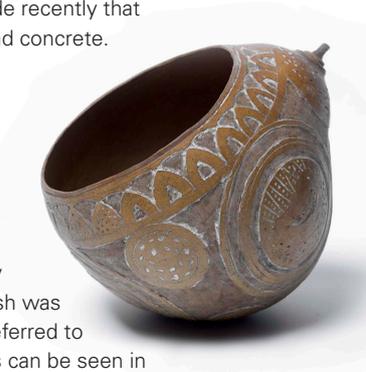
Symbolic act 8

Sugar cane and freedom songs

Sugar cane was an important produce of plantations in Suriname, on islands in the Caribic, in Brasil and elsewhere. This sweet cane symbolizes the sweet freedom we are enjoying ourselves nowadays. While we savor the sweet freedom and celebrate the liberation, we tell each other what we ourselves are doing with our freedom and what choices we make in life. We can ask our children how they want to employ their freedom and invite our table companions to share with us what freedom means to them at a personal level. We can ask them about their future plans or intentions and we ask them how we - and others - can help them realize these plans. We can also invite each other to tell about an important decision he or she has made recently that made the freedom almost tangible and concrete.

The Calabash

During slavery, the enslaved did not have proper service at their disposal but had to help themselves with calabash to eat and drink from and when washing themselves. As a result, the calabash became a symbol of poverty and oppression. However, the calabash was often worked with decorations that referred to the African roots of the enslaved. This can be seen in this calabash, decorated with circles and a bird. It has been found near a large kankantri – or silk cotton tree – at the plantation ‘Clifford Kocqshoven’ in Surinam. It is probably put there in 1824 as an offering by enslaved persons. The silk cotton tree often figures in popular stories about the spider Anansi. After the abolition of slavery, the calabash has grown into a symbol of freedom and of awareness of freedom’s painful history.



Freedom songs

Resistance, Broken chains, Celebration of freedom

Opo! Strei!

Broko den keti, un allamala!

Opo! Strei!

Broko den keti, now!

Stand up! Fight!

Break the chains, all of us/you!

Stand up! Fight!

Break the chains, now!

Ten kon drai,

Den keti koti, brada, sisa!

Ten kon drai,

Den keti koti, fu tru!

Times have changed,

The chains are cut, brother, sister!

Times have changed,

The chains are cut, really true!

Komki kon,

Nyan un no n’nyan a krabasi moro.

Komki kon,

Nyan un no n’nyan a krabasi moro!

There are bowls now,

We don’t eat the food anymore from calabash!

Original texts provided by choral society Sinafir.

Symbolic act 9

Pops of freedom and songs of praise

Here children, our future generation, can play an active role if they are present. We pop 21 multicolored balloons or we pull 21 pop-strings, in order to chase away the pain and ghosts of the past with this noise. The popping sounds also reinvoke the twenty-one cannon shots that were fired to mark the abolition of slavery on July 1, 1863 in Suriname. Since then, Ketu Koti ('the chains are broken') is celebrated on that date. It should be recalled, however, that with these 21 shots the history of slavery was not over. On the contrary, as the brief history on page 44 testifies....

The healing power of singing during slavery and the civil rights movement

Enslaved persons were hardly allowed to exercise and spread their language and culture. Often, however, they were allowed to sing, for example during the slave labor. Many songs from the time of slavery contain texts of grief, charges against the injustice and violence, references to better or even heavenly times, comparisons with biblical or historical martyrdoms (for example in the 'Negro spirituals'), and so on. Many of these songs have penetrated popular culture as they strongly influenced blues and gospel music. Such songs were also sung by the different groups involved in the African-American civil rights movement, partly because (pastor) Martin Luther King realized the healing and inspirational power of singing together.

Examples include: *Strange Fruit* (Billie Holiday); *Oh Freedom, Precious Lord Take My Hand* (which was one of King's favorite songs), *The Times They Are A-changing* (Bob Dylan) and *We Shall Overcome*.



A song of praise can be sung by a soloist, a choir or by the participants of the Ketu Koti Table themselves. We include here the famous song *Amazing Grace* (John Newton, 1779):

Amazing Grace

- 1 Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.
- 2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.
- 3 Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.
- 4 The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.
- 5 Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.
- 6 The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine.
- 7 When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.



Twenty-one cannon shots

July 1, 1863, thirty years after the example of the British, twenty-one cannon shots sounded in Paramaribo and slavery in the Dutch kingdom was officially abolished. The Dutch government paid a compensation of 300 guilders per enslaved person to their owners in compensation for the lost property of the latter. Due to that compensation, slaveholders engaged in additional hunting for enslaved who had already acquired their freedom in order to 'earn' as much of this compensation money. Even then, suffering for the 'emancipated' enslaved persons has not yet ended. Not only had they not received any compensation for the slave labour they had carried out, they were even forced to stay another 10(ten!) years under State Supervision for a pittance for their former owner. Hence, some argue that slavery was not abolished in 1863 but really only in 1873.

CLOSURE

At certain moments during the Ketj Koti Table, the host and/or hostess might have invited some individual participants to share with the whole group some of the insights or discussions that they were involved in at their table. It can be illuminating to hear how differently individuals and groups have experienced the evening, even though the rituals, meal and dialogues were more or less identical.

Indeed, this may be one of the main lessons of the Ketj Koti dialogue table: even though we all share the history of slavery, we may have different experiences with and insights in that past. It is necessary and beneficial for all of us to recognize this and to listen to each other, if we want to learn from that dark history and its aftermath. Finally, it is valuable to share with each other some thoughts on how we want to continue commemorating the history of slavery and continue celebrating and fighting for each other's freedom!

COLOPHON

concept **Mercedes Zandwijken**
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photo credits

page 3 National Monument Slavery Past in the Oosterpark, Amsterdam.
Artist: Erwin de Vries, 2002, photo: Piet Hermans

page 6 Keti Koti Table in Muiderkerk, photo: Aphales Simonse

page 8 Keti Koti Table with Mercedes Zandwijken in Muiderkerk,
Amsterdam, photo: Peter Boer

page 16 Tula Slavery Freedom Statue, Willemstad, Curaçao
photo: Arjan Braaksma, Burobraak

page 24 Keti Koti Table in Hermitage Museum, Amsterdam.
photo: Rien Sieben

page 26 Copper collection Keti Koti Table, photo: Arjan Braaksma, Burobraak

page 31 Ark of return monument by Rodney Leon, New York
photo: Teterrev foundation

page 33 photo: Peter Boer

page 40 Surinamese Calabashjar (1823-24)
Tropenmuseum Amsterdam, object H-2552

page 44 Canon at Fort Zeelandia, Paramaribo, Suriname.
photo: Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed

page 44 Button '1873': Association 'Opo Kondre' (Nation Arise)
and Foundation 'Eer en Herstel' (Honour and Reparation)



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