

Embodied morality: emotional tourism encounters and a sense of justice at contested heritage sites

EMORALISE

Emmanuel Akwasi **ADU-AMPONG**

Cultural Geography

Wageningen University & Research

Goedemorgen; Guten Morgen; Buenos días; Morgu; Maakye
ooo; Good morning. These are the common greetings in the
case study countries of my Vidi proposal.

My name is Emmanuel Akwasi Adu-Ampong, an Associate
Professor in Cultural Geography at Wageningen University &
Research.

This Vidi project – EMORALISE – consolidates my research agenda and addresses an urgent question – as captured in this emotionally charged protest image of King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima's visit to the Slave Lodge Museum in Cape Town, South Africa in 2023. The question is : how to reconcile with our shared difficult pasts and whether felt emotions in a tourism encounter can shape moral orientations toward justice.

Since January 2024 I have been co-founder and unpaid parttime tour guide of the Wageningen Walking Tour (Wageningen Decolonial Walking Tour). This was a direct outcome of my Veni project. I developed the concept of the embodied absence of the past to address the question of how tourism transforms the slavery past between Ghana, Suriname and the Netherlands.

In addressing this question through academic publications and public outreach including a documentary film screened multiple times across the case countries – including on national TV –, I was left with a curious puzzle: what happens to the frictions and tensions generated when the slavery and colonial past becomes packaged for touristic consumption engagement.

To solve this puzzle I developed a curiosity-driven ERC Starting Grant project around the notion of frictions of space which is now being carried out by 3 PhD candidates. Early insights clarified part of the puzzle but has raised important new questions about the role of emotions, morality and whether this can be measured.

This Vidi proposal is therefore a giant step-up of a new research line that is scientifically innovative.

The literature on emotions and affect in cultural geography and critical heritage studies for instance, tend to be mainly qualitative in approach.

I innovate by synthesising this with the convergent knowledge from (social and neuro) psychology to ask insightful questions that can be operationalised through quantitative research methods.

The overarching objective of EMORALISE is:

To examine the ways emotions come to matter in tourism encounters at contested heritage sites, for whom and for which moral attitudes toward reconciling with the past.

This is a puzzle present in high profile cases like that of the Mayor of Amsterdam – Femke Halsema – in her tourism encounter on a plantation in Suriname – when asked to put on a chain on her wrist. It is also in the daily experience for visitors at contested heritage sites.

...as well as those who come on the tours I lead in Wageningen.

The scientific puzzle here is about how emotions and moral orientations about contested pasts emerge in the relational tourism encounter and how visitors embody their justice-making intentions.

To this end, EMORALISE uses an ambitious mixed-method approach that is unique to the field. I combine my expertise in qualitative case studies with correlational and quasi-experimental quantitative methods.

The focus is on six cases across; a) Ghana-Suriname-Netherlands for slavery and colonial heritage sites and, b) Netherlands-Germany-Spain for holocaust and fascist sites.

EMORALISE will be a team project led by myself as PI; my long-term collaborator Maarten Jacobs with expertise in social psychology, emotions and quantitative research; 1 PhD candidate and 4 student assistants. MSc thesis students will also be recruited as part of the EMORALISE Research Lab through which I will support, train and mentor future researchers.

Scientifically, one of our key contribution is developing the concept of embodied moral emotions as an original framework for a rigorous test of the relationship between emotions, moral attitudes and justice-making actions.

At the societal level, we will translate academic knowledge through a tapestry project, documentary film and museum exhibitions as avenues for community and policy engagements. We will also provide practical knowledge support to institutions dealing with contested pasts.

In this way, we can ensure that the tourism encounter remain transformative and welcoming for all visitors, irrespective of whether they are emotionally able to respond back with Goedemorgen; Guten Morgen; Buenos días; Morgu; Maakye ooo or; Good morning.

Thank you.