



**RICHERS**

RENEWAL, INNOVATION AND CHANGE:  
HERITAGE AND EUROPEAN SOCIETY



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# Co-creation papers



**RICHERS**

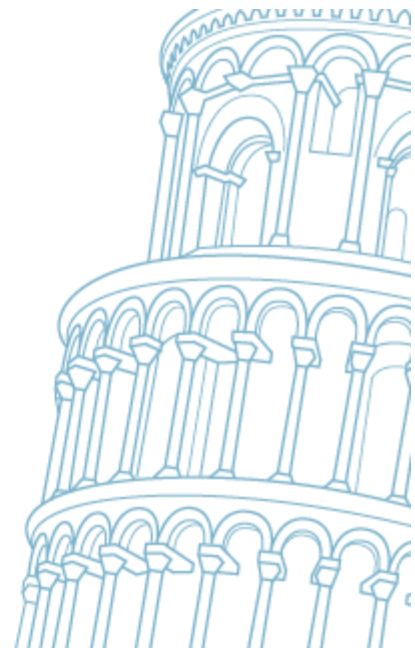
RENEWAL, INNOVATION AND CHANGE:  
HERITAGE AND EUROPEAN SOCIETY

CULTURAL HERITAGE:  
RECALIBRATING RELATIONSHIPS

**RICHERS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

PISA, 4-5 DECEMBER 2014

MUSEUM OF GRAPHICS, PALAZZO LANFRANCHI



This document includes the papers linked to the co-creation activities presented during the RICHERS International Conference, held in Pisa (4-5 December 2014).

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## 1.1 The power of diversity for co-creation: a case study in progress, by Janine Prins

[**Van Dijk** moderated the afternoon session of the conference and introduced Waag's video-presentation, telling the most significant moments of the Dutch co-creation sessions.

**Prins** talked about the motivation for the co-creative approach advocated with young adults with a multicultural background and the recruitment of participants for the sessions.

**Boschman** presented the co-creation process and methodology used in the experimental activities carried out in the Netherlands.

Presentations made by van Dijk, Prins and Boschman at the conference are based on the article "The power of diversity for co-creation: a case study in progress" by Janine Prins (Editors' note)]

The RICHERS project is organised around the concept of "cultural heritage" and in the Dutch case to be discussed here, media lab *Waag Society* works with the *National Museums of World Cultures* on recalibrating relationships between young generations and the museum, by applying **co-creation** techniques<sup>1</sup>.

One may expect that in such a context "**diversity**" would be interpreted as *cultural* diversity, since these museums are built around *ethnographic* collections. This would equally be in line with the UNESCO declaration on cultural diversity that claims cultural heritage as being «the wellspring of creativity» (article 7). I fully underwrite the vision that a multicultural population can be seen as a powerhouse (among other things for innovation and creativity due to cross-fertilization of perspectives) instead of some kind of social problem.<sup>2</sup>

However, for *our recruiting* we did not limit "diversity" to *cultural* diversity; we defined it in a wider sense, including about 25 young adults in their twenties from various educational, geographical, class, cultural and professional backgrounds. At least, that was the idea, based on the intention to cancel out as many biases as we could, in order to be as **inclusive** and diverse as possible. The basic idea behind this approach is that all sorts of diversity are useful not only to engage with a variety of users but in general when searching for **new solutions**.

We did tip the balance in favour of people with mixed cultural backgrounds though, as a counterweight against dominant monocultural policies, staff and audiences. Therefore, no single "community" or network was being invited; instead a core group of four fairly different young research assistants and myself set out to find various networked individuals<sup>3</sup>. Despite our efforts and intentions we turned out to have been **biased** in our recruiting towards higher educated people

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<sup>1</sup> The term "co-creation" is somewhat slippery as it can refer to many different practices, definitions and synonyms such as "participatory" or "collaborative". As social scientist, I would (for the time being) describe the co-creative method as applied by Waag Society in this case: as grounded theory meets action, research meets elicitation techniques, influenced by design thinking (yet another slippery concept). All terms used need careful consideration in the RICHERS taxonomy.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, globally operating companies work with transnational teams specifically for this multiplicity of perspectives – something I experienced during an executive MBA.

<sup>3</sup> After our own "snowballing" some of the found participants recruited from their own connections too. The idea was to have three consecutive sessions with an ever-growing core group, but in reality only a handful people could fit three entire Saturdays in their busy schedules.

working in the so-called creative industries or cultural sector and nearly all were born and raised in The Netherlands. But luckily not all...

The importance of international diversity hit us hard when one participant (from Russian descent, being educated in Spain, UK and The Netherlands) confronted us with an **ethnocentric** bias. All day we had been working under the assumption that young generations refuse to spend spare time (and money) on institutional culture such as museum visits. That generalisation turned out to be a national or possibly West European issue, seen from Eastern European perspective, as we were told that young people in Russia and Poland at least love to spend spare time in museums and on other institutional cultural activities. This was said to be encouraged in two ways: free entrance for young people and full integration of arts and culture in school programmes.

We have compiled an eighteen-minute video in observational style<sup>4</sup> that shows a glimpse of the kind of discussions, tools and techniques that have been used – resulting in several potential alternatives to current museum practices.

By the time the video is open to publication.<sup>5</sup> You will see a lot of **doing** during the talking. Various thoughts and ideas are made literal; illustrated in matter. The idea behind this is that “thinking by doing” can open up more avenues of your own conscious verbal thoughts and it includes people who are less verbally or intellectually oriented. Having to make something together in a small group also pushes participants towards some sort of compromise. At the end of the day they need to listen to each other and find some solution for encountered issues.

In my opinion, the conversation between one museum curator with two youngsters inside a section of the museum would not have taken place, had they not been pushed to deliver some result. Interestingly enough they all share values, but in the current practice a miscommunication takes place. I would argue that the co-creation process in itself has already set some recalibration in motion between the institution and young generation. After all: eye-openers have been recorded on both “sides”. We do need to ask ourselves to what extent this result could have been achieved through talking only.

The end of the current video-in-progress is where we are at now; **halfway** the entire process of design thinking methods<sup>6</sup>. The next step will be from idea to pilot: to develop a real intervention with and for the museum, implement and evaluate it. So far an intended future audience has not only been involved in expressing their views, frustrations, needs and desires but also been given the opportunity to engage in a serious respectful dialogue with museum staff. Another step will be to extrapolate (un)conscious patterns from the explicit dialogues and translate these into alternative or additional museum practices, if desired, informed by contemporary media lab expertise.

To get the most out of the co-creation sessions, the following “golden rules” have been developed by the Waag Society team:

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<sup>4</sup> This means that there is no explanatory voice over; the viewer is presented with various moments from real life experiences – in this case only 18 minutes selected out of 24 hrs of rushes recorded during three co-creation sessions - which have been presented in chronological order. NB: This video montage does not do justice to the overall co-creation process with its various ups and downs. That will be reported upon in a more extensive detailed manner in the final report – probably in multimedia form (text-led, with moving image illustrations).

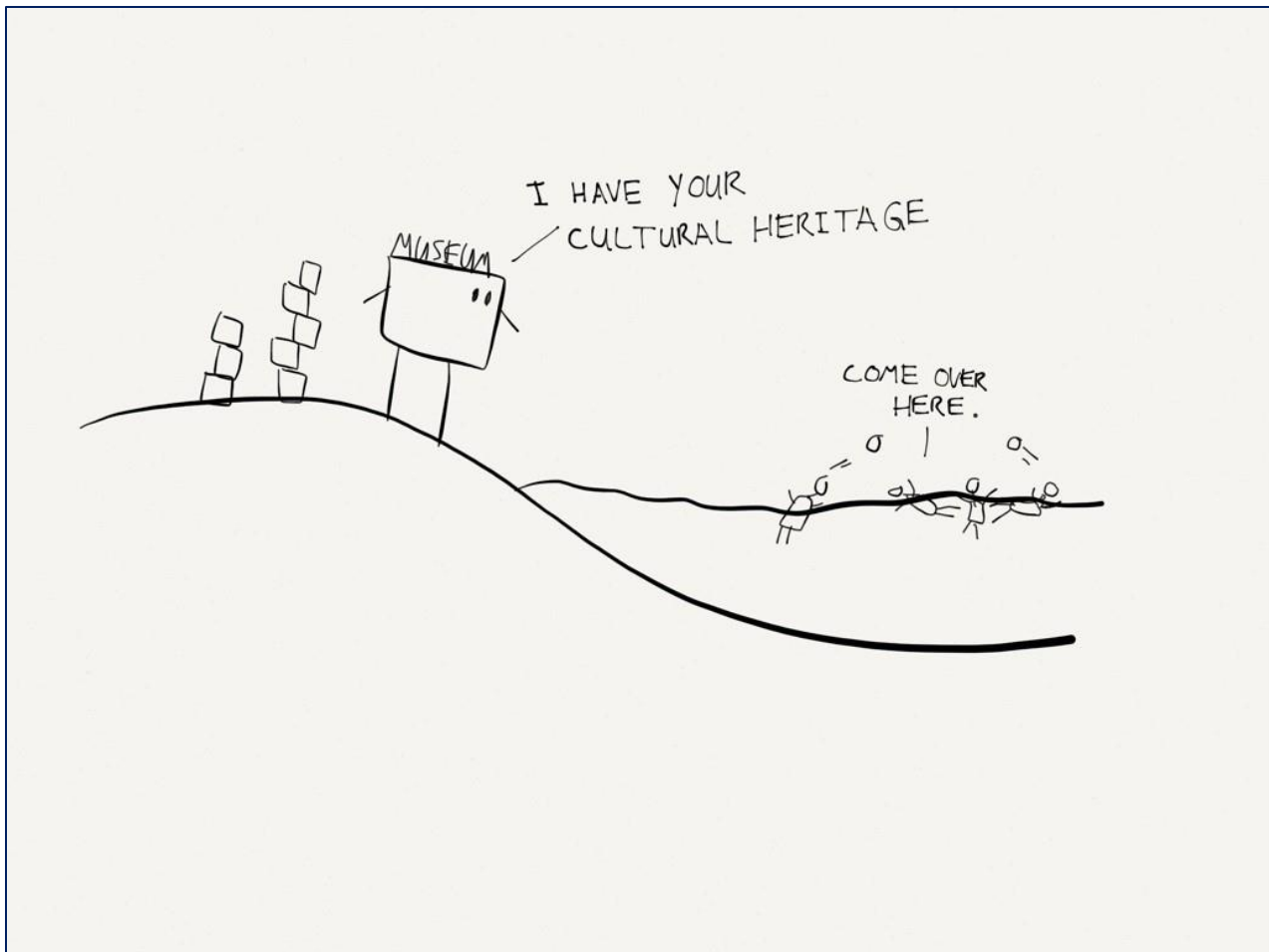
<sup>5</sup> At the moment of writing a final edit is not yet available, as the process is still in progress.

<sup>6</sup> For an elaboration on the specific method and sources used by the facilitators of Waag Society, see:

[http://www.leidenanthropologyblog.nl/articles/Designing-dialogues-for-an-ethnographic-museum\(05/03/2015\)](http://www.leidenanthropologyblog.nl/articles/Designing-dialogues-for-an-ethnographic-museum(05/03/2015))

- Have a clear research goal per sessions;
- Avoid consultation and focus on empowerment and co-creation;
- Create a safe spot during the sessions;
- Guarantee equality between the participants;
- Build a long term relationship between the participants and the museum;
- Pay attention to the role of the institute: stay neutral and don't be in constant control during the sessions.

During the co-creation sessions we also experienced that “language” and tone of voice are an important issue for the young people involved; they feel museums need to be truthful and shouldn't be “disguising” thoughts or decisions as this leads to exclusion of certain people. Besides that, the focus of museums seems to be very much on getting visitors in, whereas the co-creation participants expect the museum coming to their lives, instead of the other way around. Hence the following drawing by Douwe-Sjoerd Boschman:



After finishing the entire process we will attempt to answer questions substantiated by this case, such as:

- What seems to be the added value of the co-creative approach (for whom, under what circumstances)?
- What lessons to be learned for future instances (conditions)?
- How effective can it be (is it really changing existing practices; impact)?

**Dick van Dijk** is Creative Director at Waag Society. Van Dijk has particular responsibilities for creating interactive concepts, strategizing (and realising) user involvement and monitoring the development of Waag's prototypes and products. He is interested and experienced in the crossover between virtual and physical interactions, in creating a narrative space, a place for imagination.

**Janine Prins** is researcher in residence at Waag Society. Prins is filmmaker and teaches Visual Anthropology at Leiden University. She has a personal and professional affinity and experience with the subject of cultural diversity.

**Douwe-Sjoerd Boschman** works as concept developer for Waag Society. In addition Boschman is a freelance concept designer for interactive media and writer of the illustrated album series called *Mijn naam is Haas*. In 2007 he graduated at HKU University of the Arts Utrecht.

## 1.2 In search of identity, by Ilias Zian and Emma Waslander

### Abstract:

Ilias and Emma want to think about new ways of letting the museum and its objects tell their stories and show their identity. Their presentation aimed to analyse the ethnological museum settings in contemporary society. Through the eyes of a youngster, they discussed themes such as truth, responsibility, questioning, renewal, storytelling and identity. They concluded exploring new possibilities of presentation and representation, to find connections to a younger audience.

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The European Consortium RICHERS, the Waag Society and the National Museum of World Cultures asked us, young museum professionals, to think about the museum of the XXI Century and an effective way to engage the younger audience.

During three co-creation sessions, we got together with other young professionals to talk about museums, their cultural collections and their actual value. We were expected to think of a concrete plan for involving young people in the activities of the ethnographical museum.

We found it a very hard assignment...Who are these young people we are talking about? How old are they? Where do they live? What is their background?

Maybe we had to find something that connects all young people. What do young people all over the world share with each other?

They all search for identity. It starts when you are around 13 years old and begin thinking, who am I? What is my position in this world? What are my expectations?

During the second co-creation session we visited the ethnographical museum in Leiden. Here the exhibitions are divided on a geographical base, while nowadays the world is intercontinental. So maybe the museum should connect the objects instead of dividing cultures.

As we walked through the exposition, we concluded that this museum and ethnographical museums in general badly express the culture they claim to represent. Their collections are largely composed of objects gathered around the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when they were taken away as trophies or objects for study dating from the colonial times.

During our visit, we could not find any indication on how objects made their way to Holland. We think these institutions should contribute to the making of cultural identity and historical awareness

of the youngsters. In times of social change, museums must reflect on themselves. All parts of society must be included in their focus.

Museum collections should represent a rich blend of generations, cultures, religions, sciences and opinions, thus presenting an image of society in the past, the present and the future. This would encourage people to keep an open minded and curious attitude.

*There is a need to connect, there is too much of the exotic, the ceremonial and the ritual!*<sup>7</sup>

We'd like to open up a different way of museum thinking. We deem museums are responsible for their objects, for themselves, but most of all for the society they find themselves in.

They must be critical, transparent and honest. We believe there must be a way these institutions can search for their identity.

And change should be carried out by the whole museum organisation.

### **Situation in the Netherlands**

Western museums as we know them now are a 19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon. The industrials in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with their private curiosities' collections, gave way to hundreds of museums in Holland to follow.<sup>8</sup>

But what does a museum of the 21<sup>st</sup> century mean in the Netherlands? Much has changed in the last 300 years, but what exactly?

Let's take a closer look at the ethnographical museums. These museums present cultural objects of use that belonged or belong to a culture.

Around the year 2007, it was planned to build a national museum that would portray the history of every Dutch day life in accordance with the 50 windows of the Dutch *canon*. The 50 windows portray the most important moments in Dutch history. But only one of these windows is called "the multi-coloured Netherlands".

There were times when politicians thought we had lost our historic roots and this new museum would enlarge our historic knowledge and would bring the Dutch people closer together. But the museum was never realised. Historians feared of a nationalistic project and other museums thought it wasn't really necessary. We think this also has to do with the fact that Holland doesn't really have a national history.<sup>9</sup>

Why can't the museums give a representation of how society is built? For instance collecting stories of migration, past and present. We live in times of globalisation, where people from various cultures stay together. That is our national history. We hope that in twenty to thirty years, no one will have to discuss this topic anymore. We don't have a multicultural society, we are one society, which is, per definition, multicultural.

What does a collective memory mean in a multicultural society? It has to do with location, time, class and education.

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<sup>7</sup> Symposium Tropenmuseum For a Change, (2009) George Abungu

<sup>8</sup> <https://decorrespondent.nl/1752/Hoe-ziet-het-museum-van-de-toekomst-eruit-58374888-d355354c> (05/03/2015)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.volkskrant.nl/dossier-musea-en-galerieen/nationaal-historisch-museum-al-omstreden-voor-het-was-opgericht~a2443004/> (05/03/2015)

From 1999, the Dutch government has paid more attention to cultural diversity in its presentations, its relationship with the public, its programming and in selecting the personnel. Now it seems like this is not a relevant topic anymore. Actually, it is still important.<sup>10</sup>

### **Problems**

Most museums don't talk about society, but mostly about themselves.

Structures inside the museums are a problem. They don't reflect upon society and aren't transparent enough. Language used in exhibitions is often incomplete, incorrect or not to be understood.

We live in times of crisis, which lead to financial problems and struggles. Nevertheless, sometimes we forget the richness is within our collections. New media platforms get more and more attention from certain target groups; the museum should see itself as a deployable strategy.

Museums offer authenticity. A real feeling people are looking for in times were the digital takes overhand. Museums can profit from the digital development, if exploited in the right way.

Objects have many different stories to tell; maybe it's time to let the objects speak of their multiple layers.

### **Developments in the past years**

So how do we get the museum to go and search for its identity? The main goal of an ethnographical museum is to make people learn about other cultures from its cultural objects.

But how do we tackle the othering? We must learn to represent cultures in an equal way.

All objects have stories, which can bond people and open up conversations. We have to get to know each other through these objects.

As Nina Simon from the Santa Cruz Museum of Art says: «I'd like to see object behave more like dogs. When you're walking your dog and a total stranger comes up to you and starts a conversation, you talk through the dog. Objects must be a start of conversation».<sup>11</sup>

Orhan Pamuk, winner of the Nobel prize for literature, made a Modest Manifest for Museums. He says that museums (just like novels) can also speak for individuals.

He outlined his thoughts in order with 11 points; we chose 5 to share with you:

1. Large national museums such as the Louvre and the Hermitage took shape and turned into essential tourist destinations alongside the opening of royal and imperial palaces to the public.

These institutions, now national symbols, present the story of the nation – history, in a word – as being far more important than the stories of individuals. This is unfortunate, because the stories of individuals are much better suited to displaying the depths of our humanity.

2. We don't need more museums that try to construct the historical narratives of a society, community, team, nation, state, tribe, company or species. We all know that the ordinary, everyday stories of individuals are richer, more humane and much more joyful.

3. The measure of a museum's success should not be its ability to represent a state, a nation or company or a particular history. It should be its capacity to reveal the humanity of individuals.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.codeculturelediversiteit.nl](http://www.codeculturelediversiteit.nl) (05/03/2015)

<sup>11</sup> [www.youtube.nl](http://www.youtube.nl) (05/03/2015)



4. It is imperative that museums become smaller, more individualistic and cheaper. This is the only way that they will ever tell stories on a human scale. Big museums with their wide doors call upon us to forget our humanity and embrace the state and its human masses. This is why millions outside the Western world are afraid of going to museums.

5. The resources that are channelled into monumental, symbolic museums should be diverted into smaller museums that tell the stories of individuals. These resources should also be used to encourage and support people in turning their own small homes and stories into “exhibition” spaces.<sup>12</sup>

Orhan Pamuk tells us that we should try to find a smaller and more personal way of telling stories and that people don't have time for the big “Experiences”. As Barricio says: «People are hasty, they want to follow an introduction and a clear line in the exposition, where they will deepen by own interest».<sup>13</sup> This can be made possible presenting a wide universal theme where everyone can relate and reflect his/her own stories upon.

### **Recommendations**

So we talked about representation, new generation, Dutch situation, problems and developments accruing in the field.

We see many people are talking about redefining museums. For example, this years the festival IDFA has shown three documentaries about museums: *The New Museum*, *National Gallery* and *The New Rijksmuseum*. These documentaries are all asking the same question: what is the purpose of museums? That proves this is an important topic in our changing society.

When we think about the ethnographical museum of the 21<sup>th</sup> century, we think about change. Cultural institutions must reformulate themselves. They should adapt to the now, otherwise they won't have a reason for existence.

Civic engagement occurs when museum and community intersect—in subtle and overt ways, over time and as an accepted and natural way of doing business. This way the museum becomes a centre where people gather to meet and converse, a place that celebrates the richness of individual and collective experience and a participant in collaborative problem solving. It becomes an active, visible player in civic life, a safe haven and a trusted incubator of change. These are among the possibilities inherent in each museum's own definition and expression of community.

Initiating community co-produced exhibitions, by letting visitors visit the depots and let them tell their own stories by curating an exhibition.

Using collection as background to start conversation and discussion. Use topics to start intercultural dialogue. Not only within, but also outside the museum walls.

By working interdisciplinary within art forms, a wider understanding will arrive.

Objects can talk with the public, if presented in the right way. It's about the personal stories that objects invite you to tell. And through these personal stories we come closer together, we understand ourselves better and we make a tiny step forward in finding our identity.

The museum should find its true and modern self and show its courage to change. To adapt to a new understanding of itself and to take the risk to be transparent and truthful. The courage to take

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<sup>12</sup> Visit to the Museum of Innocence, Istanbul 2014

<sup>13</sup> Barricio, A., *The Barbarians, An Essay on the Mutation of Culture*, Rizzoli International, 2014

a look from the now to the past, not the other way around. To use our stories, for connecting and understanding. To share personal tellings.

**Ilias Zian** and **Emma Waslander** both graduated from Cultural Heritage studies in 2011 and 2013 respectively. Since then Emma works as freelancer in the education department at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Ilias Zian is heritage specialist and cultural advisor, his focus lies on education, communication and diversity. As part of the RICHERS project Zian works as a researcher at the National Museum of World cultures.

### **1.3 Decolonising the Museum, by Hodan Warsame, Simone Zeefuik and Tirza Balk**

#### **Abstract:**

Tirza, Hodan and Simone presented another prominent topic in the context of an Ethnographic Museum: decolonisation. Their presentation aimed to provide tools to both identify the elements of colonialism that ethnographic museums continue to reinforce (e.g. cultural erasure, appropriation and dehumanisation) and to re-imagine the ethnographic museum as a space for postcolonial healing.

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#### ***The colonial logic within ethnographic museums, Hodan Warsame***

European ethnographic museums displaying the material cultures of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas are inextricably linked to the formation of European empires. As such, ethnographic museums were crucial parts of the making of modern Western Europe, as a violent colonising force that fundamentally changed the world culturally, economically and physically.

Their collections were stolen from colonised peoples and the displays of these spoils of colonisation and imperialism were meant not only to show the wealth of whatever empire stole them, but also to represent the people they were stolen from. In that way, these museums were crucially a place where the relationship between White Western Europeans and the rest of the non-White non-European world was forged in the minds of the countless people that visited these museums. It was a relationship based on the idea that modern western Europe is the centre of the world (making the rest the periphery), the maker of history, and White Western Europe's man the pinnacle of human social and genetic evolution. Justifying what Walter D. Mignolo<sup>14</sup> calls the need to "civilise" the inhabitants of the planet that were still considered to be out of history, the barbarians and the primitives.

All this makes the ethnographic museum a site for knowledge production about White, Western Europe and who and what the Other is. It does this in specific ways.

Through research and exhibitions they fix the others in time, labelling and classifying the others according to White supremacist and patriarchal standards, thereby making the museum professional and the visitor the ones who "know" them, can define them and therefore dominate them. Unless they make a conscious and continuous participatory effort to decolonise, ethnographic museums will continue to give a false account of history which erases, minimises and misrepresents the violence of colonisation and imperialism, historically and in contemporary society.

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<sup>14</sup> W.D. Mignolo, *Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity: Fred Wilson's "Mining the Museum"*, in Fred Wilson: A Critical Reader, edited by Doro Globus (June, 2011), pp. 71-85, Ridinghouse, London, England

This knowledge production serves a purpose. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith<sup>15</sup> tells us that knowledge produced by research institutions and museums is meant for cultural and economic gains for White peoples. This was the case when these institutions were first developed and remains the case now. Although ethnographers are making a belated effort to include the experiences and voices of marginalised non-White communities whose material cultures they display, museum professionals often will still not recognise the colonial, racist and patriarchal ideologies that underpin their work. A decolonial approach recognises the continuity of this colonial logic in ethnographic museums and the wider society.

### ***Colonial Storytelling within the Tropenmuseum, Tirza Balk***

This colonial mentality that continues to structure how we make sense of ourselves and our surroundings is present in the ethnographic museum of today, not only in that the institution is itself a product of colonialism, but also in that it goes on to tell the very same stories, the very same narratives, that have been used over the centuries to justify the violence that Europe has been and is perpetuating overseas. It does so in virtually all areas of the museum-making process: marketing, language, workshops and activities and the arrangement of space.

So what then are those stories the visitor is told upon entering the museum? What is it that they are taught implicitly (and not-so-implicitly)?

*1. Non-western cultures, peoples and land are mystical, exotic entities to be discovered and explored. They exist only insofar as white western people validate them through colonial endeavour.*

This colonial myth is effectively repeated by placing the visitor in the role of adventurous explorer, much like an early coloniser: «Each of the exhibits is like a journey through a mysterious, exotic territory» (Amsterdam.Info: Tropenmuseum); «Take the Silk Route along Asian art!» (Hermitage Museum, Amsterdam); «Join the expedition in our cool safari bus!» (National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden).

Oftentimes these “territories” are assigned a “magical” quality, e.g. “Magical Africa” in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam. Note that this exhibition exclusively features objects from the Ivory Coast, reducing 56 African countries to a single signifier (twice).

*2. Non-western cultures are there for you to make your own whenever and however you may please. The rituals, symbols and spirituality of Asian, African, Indigenous and Latin peoples can be grabbed, without consent, for the self-discovery and creativity of white western people.*

Dutch children are invited to “join the tribe”, “travel the world in just one single day” and “collect for yourself all the magical powers” in a workshop (Museum of Ethnography, Leiden). Apart from the conflation of unspecified “tribalness” with Hindu symbolism, the “tribalness” given here is something recreational that can be entered and exited at any desirable point; when in reality, today’s neo-colonial context dictates that what they see as tribal life includes a constant struggle for the basic right to exist on this Earth. The very real political, social and cultural implications that come with such an existence are in no way part of the package.

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<sup>15</sup> Chappell, S. V., & Chappell, D. (2011). A Museum in a Book: Teaching Culture through Decolonizing, Arts-based Methodologies. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 12(LAI 1). Retrieved 2-12-2014 from <http://www.ijea.org/v12lai1/>.

The workshop teaches children that non-western people's symbols and practices that are deeply invested with spiritual meaning (i.e. the gestures and the multiple arms of the Hindu deity) are costumes to put on for fun, disrespecting and erasing the peoples who created them.

Workshops such as "Make your own Dreamcatcher!" at the Amsterdam Museum Night are especially problematic given the popular commodification of elements from Native American cultures at music festivals and in fashion and the fact that such elements have been stolen and co-opted ever since the moment Columbus and his partners in crime arrived in the Americas.

The Digital Hairdresser in the Tropenmuseum's Africa section lets you «attain your new Afro look» by «picking your favorite African hairstyle». After «giving your face some extra colour», you send your picture to your friends via a standardised email that reads «Greetings from Africa». The depersonification of African women and complete disregard of the politics involved in appropriating black hair has led many to leave the Tropenmuseum in absolute disgust.

On a magazine's cover, a white woman is wearing a kimono and face-paint associated in the West with Geisha from Japan. Her oil-paper umbrella was provided for the shoot by the Volkenkunde Museum's collection; a similar "look" is also for sale in the museum's gift shop.

Such cases must not be conflated with practices of "cultural sharing" or "exchange"; rather, they exemplify a specific type of appropriation typical of how colonial powers would look at the world. This worldview predicates that in order to understand the Other, we need ourselves to become the Other, consume the Other; and of course, not grant any agency to the Other. The museum needs to do better than that.

### ***Africa is a Corner, Simone Zeefuik***

Sean Jacob's brilliant website "Africa Is Country" is named after the West's generalisation of the continent. The Tropenmuseum reaffirms this by describing their exhibition on Africa as one that «[...] provides a dynamic image of the many faces of the African culture. » Culture, singular. Africa: 56 countries (of which two are "disputed") and the world's second-most populous and second-largest continent. Cultures? One.

But for Amsterdam's ethnographic museum it's less than a country... it's a corner. Which, if one ignores the size of the building, could have been somewhat less of a problem if:

1. The Tropenmuseum's choices of who and what should represent the African continent weren't so drenched with colonial stereotypes of the most homogenous kind;
2. Afrodiasporic heritages in and sub-Saharan African connections with other parts of the world would have properly made their appearances in those areas of the museum that highlight the people, identities and cultures in Asia, South America and Oceania.

The introduction to *The Africa Wing* is a sign stating that the visitor is about to enter an area with artefacts collected in sub-Saharan Africa. Why the northern part of the continent isn't part of this particular corner of the museum isn't stated. Is this their way of co-signing the West's simplistic synonyms according to which Africa equals Black? If so, how seriously can we take an ethnographic museum whose studies fail to include the narratives, heritages and identities the Black and/or Afro-Arab people in northern Africa in both their Africa and their North Africa exhibit? We owe it to our

intellect and critical minds to not bore ourselves with explanations centred around “lack of space” and “the impossibilities of including everybody”.

According to the Tropenmuseum, Africa is best divided into five themes: status, religion, masks, shapes and contact. If “contact” was understood as it should have been, why is there no mention of the trans-Atlantic, pre-Columbian contacts that Africa had with the three continents mentioned above? Why did the museum choose not to give the Olmecs and the Malinese mansas the decolonial credit they deserve for their voyages? Perhaps the idea of Europe not being the white glue that once connected and is still keeping together our world is just too shocking.

The miseducation of the museum reaffirmed itself when the academically trained staff of ethnographers decided that when it comes to Africa, Islam is strictly a North-African affair. With their West Asia and North Africa exhibition the museum intended to: « [...] provide information with the goal to stimulate insights of and respect for the culture of Islamic countries. » If with “Islamic countries” we mean countries of which more than 70% of the population is Muslim, how does one fail to understand why Nigeria, Mauritania, Mali, Sudan, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea and Somalia can't be excluded from those conversations? Perhaps they think the poorly introduced picture-and-a-half of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké dangling in the Senegal strip of The Corner acquits them of claims of exclusion.

Back to *Africa In Five Themes*. If we must stick to the number 5, why not choose:

1. people, 2. cultures, 3. languages, 4. religion and 5. politics.

Or, if the academically trained staff would really like to live up to its full ethnographic potential, how about: 1. people and cultures, 2. population and migration, 3. languages and language families, 4. pre-colonial empires and post-colonial politics, 5. hairstyles, accessories and body modification.

If one could resist the colonial urge to portray Africa as a pile of grass skirts, face paint, masks, pictures of topless women, artefacts of men with large penises and undefined wildness, the possibilities of properly representing the continent would be infinite. Unfortunately, so is the privileged laziness that comes with the West's colonially dehumanising depictions of The Other.

**Tirza Balk** and **Hodan Warsame** are members of the intersectional feminist collective Redmond Amsterdam, which aims to offer an alternative, witty and decolonial response to hegemonic ideas of race, gender, class, sexuality and ability in popular culture. As part of the RICHERS project Warsame works as a researcher at the National Museum of World cultures.

**Simone Zeefuik** is an Amsterdam-based writer and organiser, whose work focuses on imagery, representation, anti-Black racism and the undocumented communities in Western Europe. She's the founder of literary platform *RE:Definition*, initiator of digital archive *#UndocumentedEU* plus co-initiator of *#UndocumentedNL* and *#DecolonizeTheMuseum*.

## 1.4 Impact at the Museum, by Laura van Broekhoven

[Laura Van Broekhoven presented the next steps that the museum will take from the co-creation sessions. (Editor's note)]

I would like to thank the organisers for a rich and interesting conference they put together. We've gone over a broad spectrum of cultural heritage (CH) today and topics related to value attribution and more conventional and progressive means of usage of digital technologies as a means for CH preservation, accessibility and production; we've also seen some interesting albeit troubling usages of databases through big data analysis. Although we might put forward, after the last session this certainly seems like a field that could do with some intervention and decolonisation too. I've been asked to say some words on how the co-creation sessions we developed with Waag and a large group of young students and professionals have impacted the museum and what are some of the next steps. Well... let me be pretty short about that: I do not know yet. Will it have impact? It will. Why and How? I will be able, I hope, to tell you next year.

### **National Museum of Worldcultures**

Allow me to introduce this institution I work at: less than half a year ago one of the largest museum mergers ever to take place in the Netherlands occurred, it involved three ethnographic museums. The National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Royal Tropenmuseum and the Afrikamuseum, founded respectively approximately 175, 125 and 80 years ago within the context of respectively Dutch commerce, Dutch colonialism and Dutch missionary practices. The National Museum of Worldcultures retains its three public locations, where together we have over 13000 objects from our collections on display, the highest number on display in any museum in the Netherlands. Notwithstanding this high number, it represents only a small fraction of the total collection of the museum, which totals around 370.000 3D objects and almost a million historical photographs, comprising the largest anthropological and colonial photo archive in the Netherlands. Indeed, the merger of the three museums created one of the largest and most significant ethnographic collections within Europe, rivalling and in several instances surpassing in size and quality many of the major collections in places like the United Kingdom, France and Germany.

### **Stakeholder Networks**

We hold collections from all over the world, huge, often unique collections and on a daily basis peoples from all around the world (and from our immediate vicinities alike) present themselves to us looking for partnerships. Some of these collaborative projects go back until the 1990's, some are much more recent. The stakeholders are diverse, but I have, for the sake of argument, divided them up in Indigenous Peoples (such as the Wayana, Trio, Arua, Kanoe, Maori, Aboriginal, Inuit, Blackfoot we have set up projects with); Government and Institutions Agencies (such as National museums from Japan, Korea, Indonesia or Mexico) and Local Stakeholder Networks (such as Youths, Seniors, Schools, NewAge communities, Dutch Paranakan network or Dutch-Moroccan Network in the Netherlands).

### **Relationships/Partnerships**

We have noticed in every partnership the partners in the project are looking for different things: in some cases it is us that needs or wants to cooperate because we are looking for loans (as was the case with the Terracotta warriors from Xian) and sometimes people want access, as was the case with a Korea project which brought a delegation of 15 researchers from Korea to our museum to photograph our whole Korea collection, so they could make a database and catalogue it; sometimes

it is institutional partners like who want to cooperate on making databases, collaboratories and exhibits or it is indigenous partners such as the Maori or Kwakwaka'wakw who become partners in co-creating exhibits with us or Surinamese partners like the VIDS who want to study a long deemed vanished sacred manuscript with us. We enter in to this great diversity of partnerships wholeheartedly.

### **The How and the Why**

For we believe today this National Museum of World Cultures needs to assume a role as an instrument for change. Through our collections and presentations, we want to inspire global cultural competence and stimulate social cohesion and thus take on our social responsibility as a publicly funded heritage institution that has stewardship over an immense diversity of objects from all over the world, which testify a vast multitude of histories and stories that can be told with those objects.

Therefore, we think our praxis needs to revolve around facilitating co-creative knowledge production with stakeholders at the local and global level; today, we find ourselves exploring more and more tools that allow us to share curatorial authority with stakeholders. So that we can offer more multi-vocal, multi-methodological products to a great diversity of publics.

As such, we feel that if we truly want to become more of a network node for stakeholders, our praxis needs to revolve around co-producing knowledge both with institutional partners across the globe and local stakeholder networks amongst which diaspora and indigenous communities.

### **Co-creation sessions**

Could these sessions serve as a tool to enable co-creative knowledge production?

A collaborative space where real conversations on difficult colonial pasts and discriminatory colonial presents take place?

Could they be a means to recalibrate curatorial “mono-authority”?

These kind of projects have relevance both to us as they are relevant to our diverse publics and stakeholders such as post migrant citizens of the Netherlands, members of originating communities, often indigenous peoples, and to nation states and partner institutes across the globe. Because for CH managers such as museums and libraries, working with non-conventional stakeholders and partners offers inspiring and challenging possibilities for changing daily practice. It is because we do not “speak” the same professional or academic language and do not “use” the same analytical



*Figura 1: Co-creation works*

frameworks, that our own processes and practices are being challenged. Co-creative knowledge production on CH offers the possibilities to develop new tools, new museological vocabularies and grammar to interconnect with present-day stakeholders and enables us as a museum to take on our role as an institute that thanks to its multi-layered collections represents a special, unique value to communities of citizens, both in the cities that surround us and in faraway places where the collections originate from.

Several ideas in particular came up during the co-creation sessions that vary in their immediate applicability. Others included more immediately employable plans that consist out of different strategic steps that build on each other.

Three specific ideas come to mind:

1. A programming committee by and for young museum stakeholders that help the museum find more relevant ideas for programming, e.g. the Concertgebouw has developed a similar system that works well.
2. A multi-layered medium term and long term strategy to develop decolonised museum practices and vocabularies.
  - a. An intervention through the use of social media by a #decolonizethemuseum or #DTM.
  - b. In the BGL explorer app that is currently being developed by the museum we include a “trainyourbrain” route for the general audience.
  - c. Parallel to this we want to set up a DTM-trainjeblik trajectory for the National museum of Worldcultures staff.
3. A review of the Africa galleries in a co-creative spirit through a series of conversations with the curator, exhibition producer and co-creation participants.



Figura 2: Co-creation ideas

This aspect actually makes part of the former bigger framework of decolonising the museum.

In other, similar places I have argued that, perhaps, the future of ethnographic museums is not singular as it is often posited, but rather multiple and contingent. Despite the presumed unifying nature of the field of ethnographic collections the specific context, pedigrees, intellectual histories, local heritage frameworks or citizenship practices, colonial pasts and abuses, the needs for healing and repairs, homecomings and recovery within which these requests are posed and function across the globe make it hard to come up with any generalising claim for a single recipe that does justice to that multiplicity of contexts. Our hope is that we might build stronger, more sustainable relationships with these highly sharp critical thinkers that are the forgers of new futures that lie ahead of us. We hope we can transform some of our practice and instead of utilising alienating representations that unintentionally reproduce colonial constructs, we can transform ourselves to be part and parcel to the development of strategies that help us all to move forward by opening and forging original pathway that help us cope with this tangled, open-ended modernity we live in.

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