



MASTER  
THESIS

## CONSULTATIONS OF THE MUSES

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Cover Figure: Three Muses Painting by Roberta Smith

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## Introduction

There are many types of museums. The characterization of a museum type is related to the type of objects that are displayed in its exhibitions or held in their collections. Based on the museum collection there are for example, archeological, art, history, ethnographic, military, maritime, science, and technological museums, in which each and every institution undertakes a mission to communicate to the public certain knowledge based on its particular realm of expertise. Due to the museum's image of an enduring institution there is a common belief that the knowledge produced by a museum is of high importance and prestige. So based on their content, museums are considered to be part of a larger educational system. As educational institutions museums also contribute to shaping knowledge about their domains of expertise, like an art or an ethnographical museum can contribute to developing the body of knowledge about a certain culture. One could, in turn, say that museums also have a role in constructing and circulating cultural identities.

As the International Council of Museums (ICOM)<sup>1</sup> suggests in its definition, the main role of museums is that of an institution that promotes the education and the study of various subjects. The high quality of prestigious knowledge that people tend to attribute to museums, is associated with the institutions' close relationship to the State or government, in which many researchers have referred to<sup>2</sup>. This relationship attributes a level of authoritative air to the museum institution, on a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> ICOM (International Council of Museums) is an organization created in 1946 by and for museum professionals. As stated by the organization's internet site, it is "a unique network of almost 30,000 members and museum professionals who represent the global museum community. A diplomatic forum made up of experts from 137 countries and territories to respond to the challenges museums face worldwide." It is a "consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. 117 National Committees and 31 International Committees dedicated to various museum specialties, a leading force in ethical matters." It is also "one of the founding members of the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS). It is a public Interest organization. (From ICOM official website, <http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-organisation/icom-in-brief.html>, accessed 14 December 2011)

ICOM's definition of the museum goes as follows: "A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment." (ICOM 2007)

<sup>2</sup> Like Tony Bennett analyzed in his book "The Birth of the Museum".(Bennett 1995)

Tony Bennett argues that some of the issues regarding museums concern “respects in which the public museum exemplified the development of a new ‘governmental’ relation to culture in which works of high culture were treated as instruments that could be enlisted in new ways for new tasks of social management” (Bennett 1995:6). With this we uncover another role attributed to museum, that of an institution which serves as a governmental instrument in order to ‘control’, as Foucault might have said, the social body (Foucault 1976:220).

The modern museum though appears to be more dialectical as Constance Perin suggests:

“They (museums) are reconsidering it (relationships with their audiences) in every dimension-intellectual, cultural, educational, political and aesthetic. Museum professionals are themselves rethinking disciplinary canons and exhibition methods, while citizens, critics, anthropologists, and historians are becoming more involved in the choice and interpretation of exhibition topics” (Perin 1992:182).

So, from this framework, it becomes obvious that the political role of the museum is not as strong or evident as it once appeared to be, but nevertheless it is still present.

The concept of a museum nowadays is not that of a distant authoritative institution who addresses specific audiences for educational purposes; a modern museum is an open institution which everyone can visit. Its role is not just educational, as ICOM suggests, but also involves research and entertainment functions. In order to fulfill this assortment of roles, museums today are more dialectical in terms of deciding the choice of the subject of an exhibition and in terms of collaborating with several partners in order to create as well as present an exhibition. There are many factors, including a wide range of individuals and departments, which take part, to various degrees, in the process of constructing an exhibition with the main purpose of making an exhibition which communicates both educational and diversion appeal to its public audience.

One of the museums basic functions still remains intact though. The museum is still a place where knowledge is constructed and transmitted to a public audience, and its deep connections to the state to which it belongs remain. In order to explore how bodies of knowledge are constructed in a museum, I chose to observe the ethnographic exhibition on Northwest Coast American Indians in the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden.

The core question guiding my research is as follows with my sub-questions indicated with a bulleted list: *How are the various views and agendas of the people, who are involved*

*in the construction of an exhibition in an Ethnographic museum, negotiated, or not, in the exhibition making procedure and what are the results?*

- *How do the individuals of the museum interact and work together for a common purpose, for example the development of the Northwest Coast America Indians exhibition, and how are their decisions made?*
- *How do numerous individuals and groups of various views and agendas consider the process of constructing the exhibition and what do they think about their role in it?*
- *Are they aware of the influence that their different perspectives have on the procedure?*

Starting from the first stage of the conception of an idea or the subject of an exhibition, to the period of team formulating on the parameters of an exhibition, to the very criteria that help guide the process of creating the exhibition. These levels of development involve countless decisions concerning which objects chosen are to be displayed and how, as well as the course of gathering background information on the exhibition and its eventual formulation into the exhibition's larger narrative context. With this in mind I conducted a research on how all these varied elements come together and result in the establishment of a museum exhibition.

### **Fieldwork**

With the purpose of better understanding the museum world and answering my aforementioned research questions, I began my fieldwork as an intern at the National Museum of Ethnology (Volkenkunde) in Leiden in January 2012 for a period of two months. My supervising advisor was Dr. Pieter Hovens, curator of the North America Department. During my time at the institution, I worked in the Research Department of the museum. I came in contact with the museum staff and participated in tasks related to the production process of the Northwest Coast Indians exhibition. My tasks involved the formulation of a list with objects which were going to be loaned from other European museums and the information gathering for panel texts that were to be used in one of the exhibition's galleries. These responsibilities served as examples of how artifacts and information are gathered in service of an upcoming exhibition.



In the process of conducting my research as a museum intern, I assembled information on several factors related to the exhibition-making process: the different departments that are involved in this process within the museum as well as, the external partners, the funding of the exhibition, the original idea behind the exhibition, and the collaboration with the source communities, which is a very important and integral practice for the Volkenkunde museum.

I was also able to personally observe how the departments collaborate with each other in order to put together an exhibition, particularly how positive, constructive dialogue significantly contributes to the experience of constructing an exhibition in order to achieve the best possible result. All the departments appear to be very conscious of the aims of any exhibition in the Volkenkunde Museum, and all of the involved individuals are focused in working together to succeed in their common purpose.

From my time at the museum and from the interviews that I have already conducted I uncovered two very interesting aspects regarding the museum as an institution. The first one has to do with the museums co-operation with source communities, which constitutes a very important characteristic of the Volkenkunde Museum, and the second concerns how the economic recession has and continues to affect, the museum and its efforts at exhibition-making. I found these two subjects of particular note, since they proved to be of great importance to the exhibition-making process and decided to incorporate them within the scope of my research.

### **On Methodology**

Throughout the period in which I conducted my fieldwork, I employed the methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviews to collect my data. In order to demonstrate how these methods were used, I divided my fieldwork in two periods of study. The first period refers to the time I served as a member of the museum staff as an intern, and the second period refers to the time in which I visited the museum in order to continue my staff interviews.

In the first period of my research, I used the method of participant observation. My position as an intern gave me the opportunity to participate in some aspects of the exhibition making process, but mainly it gave me the opening to observe the “actual life”(Malinowski 2007:56) of the museum world, the way the members interact and cooperate with each other in order to produce an exhibition. Participant observation helped me to see how people

perform, as Erving Goffman would suggest, when they were not specifically asked to do or say something, in their natural environment of their workplace (Goffman 1959). These observations helped me to analyze the gap between how things were supposed to be done and how things were actually done. The method of semi-structured interviews was also used during that period and helped me overcome the limitations of the language barrier. During this period, semi-structured interviews conducted mostly with my supervising curator, gave me an insight of how the museum works and helped me formulate my interview questions in a more efficient way in order to collect data.

In the second period of my research I employed the method of semi-structured interviews. By that time, I had a clear view of how the museum worked and my interview questions were more conducive for addressing my research questions. During this second period, my interviews were focused more on people from other departments in order to gain a more holistic view on my subject by not basing the conclusions of my data on limited sources. By interviewing more people my collected data became more objective, because different views were included. These also served as a method of verifying the data that I already had collected and compose a more accurate research on my subject.

Another benefit of these semi-structured interviews was that they could provide me with data about the past situation in the museum. Moreover, interviews with additional people from the museum staff also gave me the advantage of contacting people that had worked on museum exhibitions in the recent past. This presented me with the opportunity to include their reflection on their role in the exhibition itself, thus enriching my data with the interviewees 'reflexive progression'<sup>3</sup>, and thereby grasp their opinions about their role during the development of the exhibition.

Overall, I conducted eighteen interviews with people coming from different departments of the museum. These interviews were accomplished with the use of a notebook and a recorder whenever permitted. After performing the interviews, I transcribed them with the aim to better analyze them during the course of my thesis research. The analysis of these interviews was done by following the events on the making process of the Northwest Coast exhibition and by cross-referencing related literature on museology and anthropology.

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<sup>3</sup> *"Reflexive progression is the complex discursive activity whereby the respondent, on the encouragement of the interviewer, refines thoughts and observations as the interview unfolds. The presupposition here is that reflexive progression is almost a necessary process, because initial statements or first often obfuscate more complex realities."* (Hiller and DiLuzio, 2003:16)

Another aspect of the analysis of the interviews is derived from a comparison of the data from the interviews with data from personal observations made, while I was working in the museum and during my visits afterwards, which included unofficial talks with the museum staff and their behavior.

A supplementary method used for collecting data was from texts related to my research subject. This literature study started before the commencement of my research and after the completion of my fieldwork. Text research included literature from academic and non-academic texts and also several internet sources. Its purpose was initially for me, as a researcher, to gain a better understanding of the field that I was going to explore in terms of, how it is defined and what theoretical debates exist on the specific subject. It also helped me to formulate my research strategies better by establishing a more effective participant observation template like knowing what to look for and where I should focus my observations. Additionally, it contributed to the formulation of more effective questions in order to collect the desired data and better processing of my data to make connections with texts related to my thesis subject. During my internship in the museum, I found it difficult to conduct my literature research in the museum's library due to a general renovation of the museum. At the conclusion of my internship this obstacle was no longer a problem and I was able to collect the necessary texts.

With the sources of information used at the first period of my research, the data collected could be considered as biased as they mostly came from two informants. Furthermore my basic informant, the curator of the North America research department in the Volkenkunde museum in Leiden, was also part of my research subject. I had to be very careful with the information that I was receiving and estimate if and on what level it were influenced by the personal views of my informant. I chose to overcome this problem by conducting more interviews with the museum staff and with individuals who also held important roles in the process of the exhibition making of the Northwest Coast American Indians. By following this method, I was able to collect data in an arguably more objective manner in the course of my research.

All things considered, I was able to conduct my research with methods that I had decided upon before the start of my fieldwork, without facing any unsurmountable obstacles.

## **On Ethics**

The greatest difficulty faced during my research lies within the realm of ethics. Before starting my research, I was aware of the American Anthropological Association's code of ethics on how an anthropological research should be conducted, by showing your utmost respect to your informants and your subjects of study. The AAA ethical code states that researchers "must do everything in their power to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work" and also that they "must determine in advance whether their hosts/providers of information wish to remain anonymous or receive recognition, and make every effort to comply with those wishes" (AAA 1998). Based on these guidelines, I had developed some strategies to overcome ethical dilemmas that might emerge along the way. But as good planning as might be, not all situations are entirely predictable; one cannot seemingly operate in the field of anthropological studies in the absence of ethical dilemmas.

My greatest difficulty lay in the fact that I was shown a great degree of trust by some of my informants and was given information that was not to be used in my research. The problem with this was that the information added necessary depth to my collected data and therefore my research, itself. Consequently, I found myself in a very difficult position with no clear guidelines on how to proceed. As I previously stated I had developed certain strategies to overcome ethical dilemmas, but strategies are rather easily developed when the individuals with whom you will come in contact with are complete strangers. The real problem begins when you get to know your informants, on a personal level, because then you put yourself in a real problematic situation beyond the parameters of a hypothetical case study.

Out of admiration and respect to my informants, I was, in part, disheartened that I could not agree to their requests for nondisclosure. For me, acting in accordance with their requests would have meant a grave change to my research subject which I could not permit. At that point in my research, I contacted my thesis supervisor and expressed this ethical dilemma, I fervently wanted to continue my research on my initial subject as it represented a very exciting and interesting topic to me, but I also wanted to respect my informants. After consulting with my thesis supervisor, I decided that the way to overcome my dilemma was to conduct additional interviews with more people from the museum in order to broaden the amount of my data and to maintain-as much as possible-the anonymity of my informants.

This choice actually proved a very efficient solution because not only did I manage to collect more data on my initial research subject, but also managed to collect the same

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entrusted information from informants that did not have a problem with me using them as data for my research.

Most of the information in this research project comes from the interviews I conducted with the museum's staff members. Due to requests of anonymity from some informants, as stated above, I decided to apply this request to all the interviewees. I will avoid referring to their names -in most instances- and will address them using their work position within the museum. The use of sentences within brackets without reference also indicates that these are quotes from the interviews conducted.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Trying to depict the relationship between the museum and the State during the nineteenth and the twentieth century, Tony Bennett argues that the state has a significant role in "nationing history and simultaneously historicizing the nation" (Bennett 1995:141). In an attempt to demonstrate this, he quotes Nikos Poulantzas claim that:

"The State realizes a movement of individualization and unification; constitutes the people-nation in the further sense of representing its historical orientation; and assigns a goal to it, marking out what becomes a path. In this oriented historicity without a fixed limit, the State represents an eternity that it produces by self-generation. It organizes the forward course of the nation and thus tends to monopolize the national tradition by making it the moment of becoming designated by itself, and by storing up the memory of the people-nation" (Poulantzas *apud* Bennett, 1995:141).

Museums, as well as heritage sites, says Bennett, are part of the States procedure of constructing "the nation's past and projections of its future destiny" (Bennett 1995:142). So the museums role in shaping a nation's identity becomes evident through its relationship with the State.

But museum exhibitions do not focus exclusively on presenting one nation's past; there are exhibitions that are focused on other cultural groups. This would lead one to the conclusion that these exhibitions are means for a wide audience to be acquainted with other cultures, which is partly true on a superficial obvious level. Ivan Karp though points out that:

"Exhibitions represent identity, either directly, through assertion, or indirectly, by implication. When cultural "others" are implicated, exhibitions tell us who we are and, perhaps more significant, who we are not. Exhibitions are privileged arenas for presenting images of self and "other"" (Karp 1991:15).

In other words museums construct and reinforce identities both for the cultural communities being presented and the visitors who view these presentations. Consequently, museum

exhibitions contribute to the formulation or better the definition of identities, a subject that both Anthropology and Sociology have extensively studied.

This sociopolitical role of the museum relates to Foucault's assertion that the State and other institutions seek to control people. The social system is a machine that aims to serve greater interest of power by creating a submissive social body through "indefinitely progressive forms of training" (Foucault 1976:221) in order to reassure "civil peace" (Foucault 1976:220) in the "vision of a perfect society" (Foucault 1976:220). So the museum viewed as an institution related to the State, constructs and imposes to the social body the idea of a nation's identity. It is training the people to adapt the same idea of what a nation's identity is and therefore creates a form of order within the social body.

But the strong relationship between the museum and the State is not always evident; museum initially appears to be a neutral institution that promotes studying and knowledge but as Ivan Karp suggests:

"Museums and their exhibitions are morally neutral in principle, but in practice always make moral statements;...The alleged innate neutrality of museums and exhibitions, however, is the very quality that enables them to become instruments of power as well as instruments of education and experience."(Karp 1991:14)

One of the approaches to the relationship between the museum and its audiences is based on the construction of meaning as Eilean's Hooper-Greenhill mentions (Hooper-Greenhill 1994). The ability of each individual to comprehend and understand his surrounding environment is examined under the context of a museum's exhibition. Hooper-Greenhill explains how each person during the *modus operandi* of interpreting the objects that he or she sees in the museum brings in his or her different communicational environment, different experiences and different views (Hooper-Greenhill 1994:14).

In another perspective of meaning construction, approached by linguistics we learn that:

"...meaning does not reside in linguistic units but is constructed in the minds of the language users. For the listener this means that he takes linguistic units as prompts and constructs from them a meaningful conceptual representation. In fact, this principle of meaning construction is not confined to language. Every transformation of a sensory stimulus into a mental representation is an instance of meaning construction, which is rooted in the interaction of human beings with their environment. The world around us is not meaningful *per se* but rather acquires meaning through the human mind." (Radden 2007:1).

So it is a practice that every single person is engaged to throughout his life ‘...it pervades every aspect of our lives’ (Radden 2007:2). Radden characterizes meaning construction as “a dynamic process in which fine-tuning between the interlocutors plays an essential role” (Radden 2007:4). In the relationship between museums and visitors, there also appears to be two interlocutors, the museum and the visitor where the construction of meaning takes place, here in this specific procedure the ‘fine-tuning’ between them is dependent partly on the visitor and partly on the ‘exhibition makers’. Ivan Karp characterizes them ‘From one point of view the most powerful agents...who have the power to mediate among parties who will not come into face-to-face contact’ (Karp 1991:15) with the people whose culture is displayed in the exhibition. The museum institution has employed many researchers throughout the years and there are many aspects of this relationship that take place within and outside the museum.

Museums today are more dialectical in terms of deciding the subject of an exhibition and its presentation. As mentioned before there are many factors, people and departments, that are involved in the process of constructing the exhibition with the main purpose to make the exhibition as much educating, appealing and communicative as possible to the audience.

One of the main problems that museum exhibitions have to deal with nowadays is the question of an exhibition’s appropriateness. For example, in an ethnographic exhibition questions rise on whether the objects or artifacts are presented in an appropriate way. Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp present the example of the *Maori* exhibition held by the *Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1984* (Karp 1991), to show that museum exhibitions have political and social roles and with these roles, tensions may rise. In this particular exhibition, “Tensions rose especially over the ethnological and historical background provided in the exhibition catalogue, which Maori elders considered pure nonsense.” (Lavine and Karp 1991:2) Another more intense example comes from the exhibition *Into the heart of Africa* held by the *Royal Ontario Museum in 1989* where the objects were presented as a response to statements of imperial authorities and missionaries, without any kind of textual comment (Clifford 1997:206). What was intended to be an innovative and critical presentation on colonial collecting in Africa did not come across as such. Enid Schildkrout speculates at the start of his review of the exhibition “How could an exhibition have gone so wrong? How could an exhibition offend so many people from different sides of the political spectrum?” (Schildkrout 1991:16) This exhibition caused a lot of debate and criticism on how it was ironic and racist towards the indigenous people represented (Ottenberg 1991:80). The climate surrounding the exhibition became highly political when the Coalition for the Truth About

Africa (CFTA) association started protesting against the exhibition and the resulting friction, cost the curator responsible for the exhibition her job (Ottenberg 1991:81).

Constance Perin indicates that the museums are reconsidering their rules and methods and there are many different people who take part in this process (Perin 1992:182). Museum exhibitions are evaluated and criticized by the audience, and, as we saw above, from the culture groups they choose to exhibit. We could say that there is a dialectical approach in order to establish an appropriate and balanced exhibition, and since dialogue is, by definition, a democratic and open process one could assume that political and social frictions are avoided or eliminated, but that is not true, especially in ethnographic exhibitions, as Lavine and Karp point out:

“They (cultural groups) challenge exhibitions that overlap with their concerns, demand real power within existing institutions, and establish alternative institutions. Inevitably, even those curators who respond to these concerns find themselves in difficult territory, fearful of the passion of the debates and often insufficiently aware of the unconscious assumptions that underlie their own exhibitions. Their efforts, moreover, are compromised by the complex interactions of competing parties and interests that exist in any museum.”(Lavine and Karp 1991:2)

As James Clifford indicates, museums transform into contact zones. They become spaces where negotiations over culture and representations of cultural identity, between the museums and the cultural groups or source communities are taking place. Clifford views museums as meeting places, as he says borrowing the term from Marie Louise Pratt “contact zones” were plenty of issues rise on identity, on power and reciprocity, on political and social positions, on neutrality and on funding (Clifford 1997). All these issues are connected to an exhibition and in a greater scope the museum itself.

So no matter how close and open to the society and public audience the museum may appear to be nowadays its past role has not changed. Its role may be also educational and it may focus on research and entertainment as the ICOM outlines, but these additional roles do not diminish nor dissolve its sociopolitical role, which is the probable cause of much tension in the museum exhibition-making process and its products.

### **I. Meaning Construction in a Museum Exhibition**

The museum educates the public, through the construction and display, of its exhibitions. So in museums, knowledge is being formed, therefore museums are institutions where meanings are constructed and are communicated to the public. As Hooper-Greenhill specifies, “In



museums meaning is constructed from objects and from the sites themselves.” (Hooper-Greenhill 1994:12)

But then what is the definition of ‘meaning construction’? Anne E. Kane (Kane 1996) uses Weber to explain:

“Weber claims that the basis of meaning and its construction is the human compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and to take up a position in it (1978:499). Subjective meaning is a person’s understanding of the world and the significance he gives to his experience in that world. Personal interpretation of experience and attitudes about action is derived from collectively structured symbolic systems providing “images of the world.”” (Kane 1996:163)

From the quote, it can be concluded that meaning construction is primarily an individual activity in which each individual attempts to understand and identify his environment. This process or this individual ‘interpretation’ is derived from ‘collectively structured symbolic systems’, so that each person interprets what he or she sees based on personal and social experiences. And how are these ‘collectively structured symbolic systems’ are constructed? Again Kane explains through Durkheim this time “...meaning and symbolic structures are collectively constructed through social interaction, often in ritualistic events (Durkheim 1965).” (Kane 1996:163) Also Kane points out that “Durkheim tells us that symbolic construction or reproduction is not dependent on the reasons why the group is assembled, but on the fact that it is assembled and “that sentiments are felt in common and expressed in common acts”(p431). In other words, all sorts of collective events play a role in the process of meaning construction.” (Kane 1996:169)

Thus, if meaning and symbolic structures are being constructed through social interaction, then a museum exhibition is definitely an event where both of these types of constructions take place, and these types of constructions occur on two levels. The first level of meaning construction is between the people who participate in the procedure of making an exhibition, and the second level of construction occurs between the people who visit the exhibition and the objects that are being displayed.

Hooper-Greenhill explains:

“In other words, in making meaning within museums, members of different interpretive communities will use their specialist knowledge, their categories of understanding, their modes of classification, their familiar concepts in order to render intelligible what they see. And people are likely to see only that which they can go some way towards making intelligible. Without appropriate strategies of intelligibility, the collections appear (and indeed are) meaningless” (Hooper-Greenhill 1994:14).

Therefore, the people who are involved in museum exhibitions, both creators and visitors, come from different interpretive backgrounds which creates different agendas. Hooper-Greenhill also explains that this has the effect that:

“The meaning that an individual constructs is also political, in the sense that both personal and social meanings come about as a result of life changes, social experience, knowledge and ideas, attitudes and values. Running through the personal, social and the political are effects of class, gender and ethnicity. From this perspective it is easy to understand how deeply museums are embedded in the politics of culture.”(Hooper-Greenhill 1994:12)

This explains why the uproar in the 1989 exhibition *Into the heart of Africa* mentioned above occurred. It also explains why people from the Lubicon group boycotted the 1988 exhibition *The Spirit Sings* which will be further discussed in the following section.

Though Hooper-Greenhill refers mostly to the visitors of the museum and the construction of meaning that occurs in their aspect, we cannot help but make the assumption that these processes of meaning construction also occur between the people that are involved in the process of making an exhibition, hence the two levels of meaning construction that I overviewed above, between the members of the museum staff that put together the exhibition and between the visitors and the exhibits. This research project will focus on the meaning construction occurring in the process of making an exhibition. There will be particular emphasis on how the different views and agendas of the individuals involved are negotiated throughout the process, the type of criteria that govern that procedure and ultimately how all these aspects are incorporated in the exhibition. For this multi-faceted purpose, the exhibition making of the Northwest Coast Indians will be used as a main case study.

Moreover since an exhibition consists of a paradigm of what the museums views, ideas, mindsets, standpoints are regarding the representation of indigenous people, I can also explore how open and exactly how detached from the State and a museum can be in 2012.

### **Consultation of the muses**

The title of this thesis originates from the etymology of the word museum. The word museum is the Latin rendition of the ancient Greek word *Μουσείον* (Museion), which means ‘shrine of the muses’. Muses in Greek mythology were the goddesses of literature, art and science. According to the most popular version of the myth, muses were the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, and each of them was a personification on practices of art, literature and science in Ancient Greece. The nine muses and the practices they protected accordingly were, Clio (History), Urania (Astronomy), Calliope (Epic poetry), Euterpe (Song and Elegiac

poetry, Polyhymnia (Hymns), Erato (Love poetry), Thalia (Comedy), Melpomene (Tragedy) and Terpsichore (Dance). More interestingly, there is another version of the myth that notes that the nine muses succeeded the old three muses. According to this version of the myth, the first muses were the daughters of Uranus and Gaia, also goddesses for arts and study. They were, Melete (Study), Mneme (Memory) and Aoide (Song) known as the Heliconiades muses.

According to the etymology of the word museum, the museum is a space where it pays respect to the personifications of study, memory, song, history, astronomy, poetry, narration of stories and dance. Judging from the definition of the museum provided by ICOM where the institution of the museum “conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM 2007), it is evident that study, memory, and enjoyment are still elements of the institution in a conceptual manner. Based on this information I attempt a parallel, and give the title *Consultations of the muses*.

The title *Consultations of the muses* refers to the dialogues and collaborations that take place within the museum in order to produce an exhibition. Through this title, I want to show the dialectical and open *modus operandi* of the contemporary museum in which consultations are a regular practice. So with this perspective, an exhibition is the result of consultations between three muses Melete(study) which represents a museum’s research department, Mneme (memory) which represents the source communities and Terpsichory (the name includes the Greek word *τέρψιση* (terpsi) which means enjoyment) which represents a museum’s communication-marketing department.

So in order to make a museum exhibition, the muses first have to consult.

## **Thesis**

In the following chapters, I will attempt to provide my main research question with an answer. In the first part of the thesis, I will introduce my main case study, the Northwest Coast exhibition. I will provide a general overview of the indigenous community which is the subject of the exhibition. I will explore the way the Northwest Coast Indians are presented in museum exhibitions in the past and present in terms of what kind of issues are evident in these representations of their culture, and what kind of impact the exhibitions have on the native sociopolitical situation. This will be demonstrated with a chronological sequence of their representation, referencing three different exhibitions which were respectively on display during the years of 1965, 1988, and 2011. Then I will present how these indigenous

people have been previously represented by the Volkenkunde Museum. This chapter will conclude with a first mention of the Northwest Coast Indians exhibition-making process and whether, or not, the issues which appeared in past exhibitions reappear in this case study.

In analyzing the interlocutors participating in the Northwest Coast Indians exhibition meaning construction, in the second part of the thesis, I will begin with the introduction of source communities in the museum world. Recognizing the important role of source communities' in the museum and in the exhibition-making process, I will explore the ways in which the Volkenkunde Museum works with source communities and review on what criteria these dynamics are based. I will also approach the role of the source community as a member of the meaning construction process of an exhibition.

In the third part of the thesis, I will identify all the members participating in the exhibition- making process by analyzing their responsibilities and their role in the construction of an exhibition. Then, I will continue by analyzing my main case study under the scope of the role and personal agenda of each member of the exhibition-making process. At the conclusion of this part I will examine how detached and independent the museum is from the State in the year 2012.

After having presented the main-case study and the general context within which it is placed, and also having identified all the interlocutors that participate in the exhibition's, meaning construction I will address my research question. Within the context of the above thesis structure, I begin with the introduction of my main case-study.

## **Part One: Indians of the Northwest Coast Exhibition**

The main subject of my research project is the construction of an ethnographic exhibition; the questions related to such a subject, regard the way a museum exhibition is put together. In order to begin my research, I needed to find an exhibition which was still in its early stages of development.

The opportunity appeared in the form of an upcoming exhibition on the Northwest Coast Indians, which during the period where I conducted my fieldwork (January-March 2012) was and still is under development, in the Volkenkunde museum in Leiden. The North America Department will be hosting the aforementioned exhibition this coming October. This exhibition will be combined with the opening of the refurbished exhibition room of North America, which is currently under construction due to a general renovation of the entire Volkenkunde Museum.

As part of my fieldwork for my project, I began an internship in the museum with the North America department. My aim was to gather as much data as possible on the exhibition-making process. The Northwest Coast exhibition would serve as a main case-study for my research. Before I begin any discussion of my analysis on this case-study, I will now provide some information to help contextualize the subject of my study.

### **The Northwest Coast Indians**

Traditionally, Native Americans, in general, and Northwest Coast Indians in, particular, have been very popular subjects of research for ethnographers and anthropologists alike. In William C. Sturtevant's *Handbook of North American Indians* (2008), information on the Northwest Coast Indians is included in Volume 7 (Northwest Coast 1990). In the introduction of the said Volume, Wayne Suttles provides a description of the term "Northwest Coast of America". The specific term even though it is not geographically accurate has been applied for referencing the area of the Pacific Coast of the American continent north of California, with the exception of the Western Arctic territory, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Suttles 1990:1). According to these established parameters, the correct term to employ when referencing the area would be the "North Pacific Coast". Nevertheless, the term "Northwest Coast of America" continues to be in use, since it has been firmly established as a result of anthropological work conducted in the specific area (Suttles 1990:1).

Anthropological research concerning the Northwest Coast can be divided in two periods, the pre-Boasian and the post-Boasian (Suttles and Jonaitis 1990). Evidently, Franz Boas's contribution to the study of the Northwest Coast is acknowledged. Apart from his work on behalf of the field of ethnology, he also asserted that ethnologists should seek to "reconstruct the history of limited areas like the Northwest Coast" (Suttles and Jonaitis 1990:77) rather than "speculating about the whole human history" (Suttles and Jonaitis 1990:77). His mode of anthropological research has been sustained by many subsequent researchers of the region in question.

The period of pre-Boasian research begins with the work of Horatio Hale, a philologist and ethnologist who participated in the 1841 United States Exploring Expedition, under Charles Wilkes. Hale is speculated to have assisted Boas in directing some of his early research and to have also influenced him in developing his theoretical orientation (Suttles and Jonaitis 1990:73). Along with Hale's work, there are several other anthropological research efforts undertaken during this period typically taking the form of geographical and geological surveys on the region (Dawson 1880; Krause 1885; Emmons 1903) (Suttles and Jonaitis 1990).

During the Boasian period (1886-1945) other ethnographic works were produced, this time from American Indian researchers. The works of George Hunt, Henry Tate, Alex Tomas, Louis Shotridge and William Beynon are placed in this research period. Indeed Beynon after working on his own for many years, gathered a great deal of Tsimshian mythology and ethnography. Beynon send parts of his material to researchers including Boas and Durker. (Suttles and Jonaitis 1990:79)

Suttles's book on Northwest Coast is reminiscent of the structure of old ethnographies on the region. It begins with chapters on the region's environment, languages and human biology. It then sifts to the history of research, and of contact as well as analyzes, the Northwest Coast culture by linguistic groups. Much of the information found in this Volume is taken from other ethnographies already referred to on this section of the paper. So, in addition to the work of Franz Boas, information is supplied by the ethnographic works of Pliny Earle Goddard (1924), Philip Durker (1955) and Tom McFeat (1967), among others.

In order to offer here a description of the area and its cultural groups, I plan to follow the thematic structure of description outlined above.

## Land

The geographical region of the Northwest Coast extends from the Yakutat Bay in southeast Alaska, to the Trinidad Bay located on the coast of present northern California (Durker 1955:1).

Another description of the area comes from Franz Boas, one of the most famous anthropologists who had conducted twelve field trips to the Northwest Coast studying numerous groups of the Pacific Northwest Coast with a particular focus on the Kwakwiltl, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Boas describes the region as:

“a mountainous coast intersected by innumerable sounds and fiords and studded with islands, large and small...access to the inland is difficult on account of the rugged hills and the density of woods. A few fiords cut deep into the mainland, and the valleys which open into them give access to the heart of the high ranges which separate the coast from the highlands of the interior and those of the coast.” (Boas 1966:7)

Another detail about the geographical character of the terrain of the Northwest Coast, which also affects the climate of the area, is the Japanese Current. In his book, *Indians of the Northwest Coast* Philip Drucker remarks that:

“the Japanese Current moderates the climate so that extreme and prolonged cold does not occur even in the higher latitudes. The same ocean stream releases vast amounts of water vapor that is blown onshore by the prevailing winds, condenses on rising over the coastal mountains and hills, and produces the characteristic heavy rainfall of the area.” (Durker 1955:4)

Durker adds that the climate prevailing in this territory has a direct effect on the land's flora and fauna. Consequently, there is a “dense specialized vegetation, consisting mainly of thick stands of conifers-Douglas fir, various spruces, red cedar, yellow cedar, yew...redwood” (Durker 1955:4), with a variety of trees such as maple, oak and alder (Durker 1955:4).

This was the geographical and environmental terrain inhabited by the groups of the Northwest Coast Indians. The landscape played a major role in the way that the cultures developed. In fact, in his book entitled, *Indians of the North Pacific Coast*, Tom McFeat explains how the particularity of the Northwest Coast terrain influenced the lives of its inhabitants. He mentions that there is a certain element of isolation which characterized their way of living. Indeed, McFeat explains that that, “The reason for isolation from some areas is obvious: The Pacific Ocean lies on one side, the coast ranges on the other” (McFeat 1967: viii). Although the area was somewhat geographically separating, Northwest Coast Indians

did not come to be totally isolated populations, as McFeat mentions, later in his book, they managed to develop skills in seamanship which allowed them to communicate not only with groups located close to them but also with more distant ones (McFeat 1967:viii).

### **Economy**

The economy of these groups was also greatly influenced by the make-up of their natural surroundings. Northwest Coast Indians were very good fishermen, especially in salmon, which was quite abundant in this area; and some groups also practiced whaling. The importance of fishing in the Northwest Coast is noted by Durcker as the “basis” (Durker 1955:35) of their economy, and McFeat details that:

“people of the North Pacific Coast, for their part, fished with great efficiency, drawing into their storage facilities quantities of salmon which most of them took twice a year; and they were also sea-hunters of note.”(McFeat 1967: x)

Another factor which enabled these groups to become so skilful in fishing, sea-hunting and more generally as seamen was also, as the authors mention, the abundance of cedar in the area which provided them with the raw material needed in order to construct their sea vessels.

In contrast hunting was not such a popular practice with these groups. Rather “it was of major importance to communities and small tribes living at some distance up the river valleys away from salt water” (Durker 1955:49). As far as cultivation is concerned, “they knew nothing about (it)” (McFeat 1967: x) but they did take advantage of the vegetation that grew around them even though that it was “comparatively few and unimportant in the native diet” (Durker 1955:53).

### **The People**

Northwest Coast inhabitants are often divided, by their researchers, into “nations” but they stress that the word “nation” is used not in the sense to indicate any kind of governmental structure but instead as:

“a geographical means of distinguishing the linguistically and culturally related tribes who, in the days of their independence, went by a common inclusive name and exercised mutually advantageous relations” (Wherry 1964:14).

Based on this above categorization of “nations”, the groups occupying Northwest Coast from the northern to the southern part of the aforementioned geographical area were:

- The Tlingit
- The Tsimshyan



- The Haida
- The Bella Coola
- The Kwakiutl
- The Nootka
- The Coast Salish
- The Quileute

### Material Culture & Art

As mentioned earlier in the description of the natural environment of the region, there were several trees which favored the development of wood crafting in the general area. To elaborate, “the natural environment favored development of the woodworking craft, for the towering forests of the Northwest contained a number of useful and readily workable woods.”(Durker 1955:61)

Wood was needed for the construction of houses, canoes, storage vessels, weapons, culinary utensils, tools, cradles but also for waving baskets, mats, belts, bags, huts. Wool was also utilized for weaving several types of textiles used in robes and blankets. Other materials employed were stones, horns and bones in order to make harpoons, arrows and tools.

Wood was also the favored material when it came to building several artifacts which were mainly used in ceremonies. Such artifacts included masks and the widely known totem-poles. Northwest Coast Indians are excellent carvers, and their mastery of technique is illustrated through the carvings of not only daily used objects but also and especially in the making of ceremonial masks and totem-poles.



**Figure 1: Kwakiutl totem-poles**

Totem-poles (fig.1) were often used as memorials and as house-portals. They usually displayed several creatures or objects which were “associated with one’s ancestral traditions, toward which one is taught to feel respect and reverence” (Durker 1955:189,190). They constitute a very distinct and important element of the Northwest culture and are always portrayed as Northwest Coast art. Even today, it is impossible to refer to the Northwest Coast Indians without

mentioning the totem-poles. They are thought to be essential parts of any kind of presentation related to them.

### **Social Organization**

Researchers point out that Northwest Coast “presents a picture of considerable diversity in social organization” (Durker 1955:107). Some of the groups practiced matrilineal structures while others patrilineal ones. But although there did not appear to be a cohesive social structure uniting these groups, there were some:

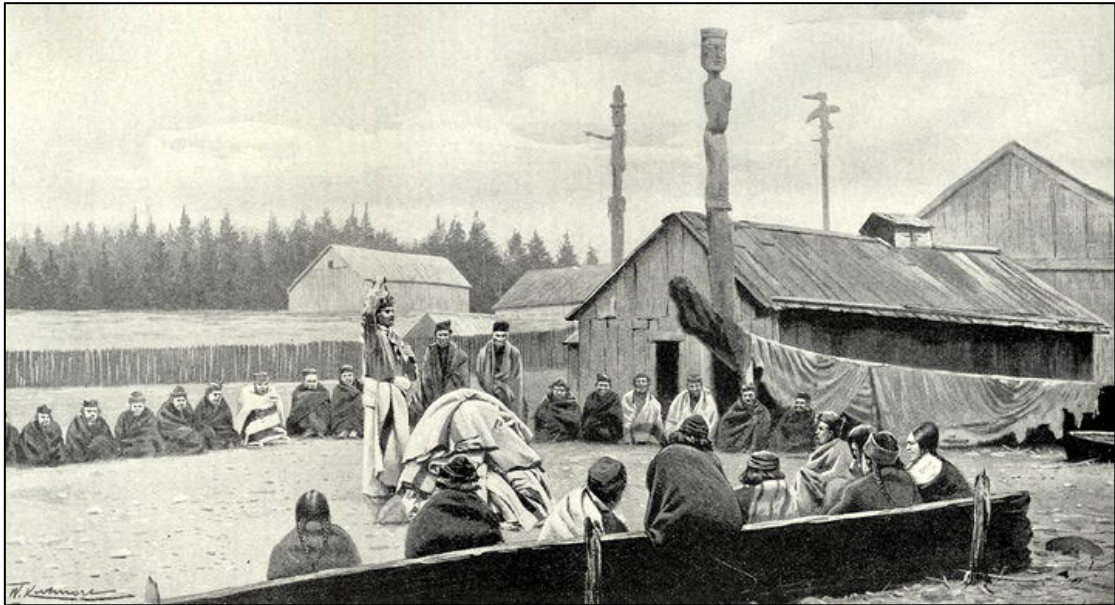
“basic concepts and societal forms common to all the peoples of the Northwest Coast. The two fundamental social units were the autonomous local group consisting of a lineage, or an extended family... (and the) Second, social status, involving the so-called system of rank, derived neither from heredity alone, nor from wealth, but from a combination of the two.” (Durker 1955:108)

The household appeared to be the “basic unit which functioned independently in most matters among the language groups” (Bancroft-Hunt and Forman 1979:37). It was usually formed by clan or blood relatives. Both of these types were almost the same because it was believed that clan members were bond by a blood relationship and they also believed that they had a “common legendary ancestor” (Bancroft-Hunt and Forman 1979:37)

Solidarity in these groups was empowered by myths and legends that narrated their history and traditions. These myths and legends where considered to be, and still are, privileges. They are regarded as property of the clan:

“In reality there were rights, such as the right to use a name, the right to perform a dance at a ceremonial, or the right to wear a special mask. Although the content and form of these were familiar to everyone through their being exercised in public, use was strictly limited to the current holder.”(Bancroft-Hunt and Forman 1979:38)

A ceremony directly linked with social status and hence, social organization was the “potlatch” (fig.2). This ceremony was performed by all the groups inhabiting the Northwest Coast, although there were some variations on its practices depending on the group performing it. Its basis, though, was the same for all groups and as Boas notes, it was “...the method of acquiring rank. This is done by means of the potlatch, or the distribution of property...The underlying principle is that of the interest-bearing investment of property.”(Boas 1966:77)



**Figure 2: Chief Delivering Speech at Festival. Painting of a potlatch at Tsaxis by Wilhelm Kuhnert.**

Bancroft-Hunt provides a general explanation of the potlatch ceremony:

“The word ‘potlatch’ derives from the Chinook word ‘patshat’ (some researchers claim that the word actually came from the Nootkan vocabulary and was transferred through the Chinook), which means to give away. Potlatches were social affairs of great importance at which property was distributed as a demonstration of a man’s ability to uphold a status position. The forms taken varied from tribe to tribe, but throughout the region they were essential in the establishment of what the northwest coast Indian held most dear, his social status. They were especially held where a claimant to a hereditary title and privilege was seeking approval of his claim, and were often given by a father or grandfather on behalf of a child. In these cases they passed on social responsibilities to younger generations, and with the privileges went a transfer of name” (Bancroft-Hunt 1979:51)

So despite the minor differences that one could encounter in the variable practices of this ceremony, if every group was to be examined separately, the purpose of the well-known potlatch was the same for all Northwest Coast Indians as essentially, it was “a group affair that affirmed or reaffirmed the group affiliation of each of its members”(Durker 1955: 133). In other words it is a ceremony directly connected to the way of indigenous life in the Northwest Coast. As such it constitutes a significant cultural reference to the Northwest Coast, and it much like totem-poles, is always mentioned in any presentation on these groups.

**Western Contact**

The first westerner to enter the Northwest Coast area is reported to be the Greek navigator named Apostolos Valerianus, who is more commonly known under the name Jean de Fuca, in 1592. Valerianus was sponsored by the Spanish monarch through the offices of Viceroy in Mexico (Wherry 1964:19) He entered the Straits of Anian later known as Straits of Juan de Fuca.

The first ship landing in the area is reputed to be that of Behring, a Russian explorer, and Tschirikow, a captain in one of the Russian explorer ships, in 1741. The Spaniards arrived in 1774 when Juan Perez “anchored in a harbor later named Nootka” (Goddard 1924:21). In 1775, Juan de Ayala was sent to the area with three small ships in order to explore the southern part of the coast. The first trading contact with the natives is thought to have taken place during May and June of 1779 by don de la Bodega’s second in command Francisco Antonio Maurella.

The first description of native houses, customs, and dresses comes from Captain James Cook who under the orders of England in 1778, stayed for almost a month in Nootka Sound. Next in 1786, La Perouse traveled to the area under the orders of France. In 1786, trading began to develop between the Northwest Coast and English as well as American ships. In 1788, Captain John Meares explored the area and traded from the area of Nootka Sound southward.

A systematic survey of the area was conducted in 1792 by the famous explorer Captain George Vancouver who was acting in service of the English flag. In his reports, the Bella Coola, the Tsimshian and also the Tlingit Indians, are mentioned for the first time. Moreover in the three large volumes narrating his voyage, there are detailed reports on the environment and the climate of the area. Another navigator who came in contact with native people, specifically the Bella Coola Indians, was Alexander Mackenzie in 1793. In his writings, there is information on the Bella Coola villages and their fishing techniques (Goddard 1924:20-24).

**Northwest Coast research after Boas**

After the impact of the Boasian period which is outlined above, the focus of anthropological research in the region shifted to the individual. For instance, Edward Sapir described the Nootkan culture through the narrative of the life story of his informant (Suttles and Jonaitis 1990).

Anthropological fieldwork in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was and still is more focused on the contemporary life of the Native Americans. Examples of such types of research is exemplified by the work of Elizabeth Colson (1953) who studied the Makah, Rohner and Rohner (1970) who explored the Kwakiutl and Stearns (1981) who focused on Masset Haida. (Suttles and Jonaitis 1990)

With this shift of interest in the anthropological research in mind, the following section will offer a brief presentation of the contemporary indigenous situation in the area of the Northwest Coast.

### **Situation after the western contact**

After the first contact between people from the Northwest Coast and the West, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, trade was established in the area. Westerners were known to have traded objects like steel for furs and food. Some of the greatest problems that natives of the area had to face stemmed from the large amount of people coming to inhabit or colonize their land. Similar to the other Indian groups of America, the Northwest Coast Indians were dislocated from their original territory, which was now occupied by Westerners. All undeveloped land was considered to be property of the crown they served; developed land was obtained by “private” methods (Encyclopedia Britanica Online 2012). Another detail of this encounter to be mentioned was the increased death rate of the native people as a result of exposure to unfamiliar pathogens, such as measles smallpox and venereal infections, which had traveled to the area with the western population. Estimates project that there was a decline of the native population amounted to nearly 80% (Encyclopedia Britanica Online 2012).

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Indians of the Northwest Coast began working under wage labor, especially after salmon industry developed. The rise of this industry caused problems for native people’s fishing rights. Legislations, such as the Canadian Fisheries Act, and in the British Columbia, Game Protection Act of 1877, were passed. They were “attacking Tsimshian ownership of aquatic resources, by restricting access to the resource and defining the property relationship” (McDonald 1994:158). This caused major troubles for these groups, as fishing was interconnected with their traditional way of life. In other words, changes, caused by the arrival of the West into the area, had impacts on the contemporary native situation in matters of underdevelopment and identity.

Another important problem directly affecting the Northwest Coast people’s tradition was the prohibition of the performances of several of their rituals and ceremonies, including

the potlatch ban in the 1900s. The cause of the potlatch ban is said to be the consequence of different views between westerners and Native American Indians on the issue of property ownership. Although the ban was passed, natives continued to hold potlatches in secret, but people were often too afraid to attend them because of the risk of imprisonment (Bancroft-Hunt and Forman 1979:67).

As time passed the arguably oppressive nature of the westerner government continued to socially marginalize Northwest Coast Indians, a situation which was widespread among native group all across America. Nevertheless, in the case of the Northwest Coast Indians, there was a significant difference. To explain, they natives managed early to get politically organized and assert their rights from what it came to be the Canadian government. One of the successful reclaimed rights was the repeal of the potlatch ban in 1951. In time, there were also several other cases of successful reclamations of land (Encyclopedia Britanica Online 2012).

Although Northwest Coast Indians have made steps towards recovery, from the period of colonization and onwards, their situation today has not fully recovered all which was lost. They are still facing serious problems of sociopolitical nature. It is noted that Native American Indian communities of North America are dealing with severe issues common to underdeveloped areas all over the world (McDonald 1994):

“Life expectancies are ten years lower than the Canadian average. Poverty, suicide rates, alcohol and drug abuse rates, and penal internment and recidivism all occur at levels far greater than the national average and indicate serious social problems. These and numerous other problems typical of the living conditions of aboriginal people have been well documented (for example, Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs 1980; Frideres 1988; Ponting 1986). Of the numerous solutions that have been suggested, the most favored approach has been government intervention. Yet, after 125 years of mediation by the Canadian government, aboriginal people still experience grave difficulties in pursuing their economic and political goals.” (McDonald 1994:152)

Recently there has been a revitalization in the specific locale in the areas of “economic development, political activism, and cultural identity” (Wasson 2001; Younker 2003; Tsveskov 2007:1). There are efforts being made to “reinvent” (Tsveskov 2007:1) their social, political, and cultural identity within the Canadian nation. This effort includes also the representation of the Northwest Coast Indians by numerous means of media culture including books, films, with the *Twilight* movies being the most recent example, and also various museum exhibitions. The problem sometimes resulting from such representations is the distorted image of the Northwest Coast Indians. Media communicates by, often depicting

images of their past and not of their present. Natives often find these representations of their culture incorrect and anachronistic (Encyclopedia Britannica Online 2012).

With this above general view on the Northwest Coast, I shall now turn towards the general context of the representation of the Northwest Coast Indians in museum exhibitions. In the following section, some examples of museum exhibitions showcasing the Northwest Coast Indians will be presented, in order to demonstrate the ways in which they have been portrayed to the general public. This outline will precede an examination of the upcoming Northwest Coast exhibition in the Volkenkunde Museum.

### **Northwest Coast Indians Exhibitions**

The image of Indians has always been of great interest and of great appeal to the public. Various types of objects connected with leisure time activities, including children's books, novels, photo-albums, researches, films, documentaries, movies, costumes, accessories, games, children's toys, have and continue to provide information, images and views on Native American Indians. When the words Native American Indian are mentioned, nearly everyone has a certain picture on his or her mind of, a tall long faced man with black braided hair, wearing a feathered headdress, holding a bow or an axe, or a spear, usually hunting or dancing around a fire surrounded by totem-poles. Good or bad, accurate or not, this is the image that first pops into many minds with the term American Indian.

So upon hearing the words, Native American Indian, all people have or think they have an idea of what it signifies. But why do so many people have this static image of Native American Indians? This includes countless groups of people, which include those, who have never been to America and stem, from different continents as well as cultures.

As mentioned above, there are numerous objects and mass media forms, that at one point or another, have had a theme concerned with Native American Indians. The reason why almost everyone in the world has read or has seen something relevant about Native American Indians is that nowadays books and images circulate the globe with greater speed than in the past. Additionally, America is a continent that houses one of the most politically and economically powerful countries in the world; therefore, it is a place that nearly everyone in the world knows, a place whose cultural images and products reach across the globe.

In addition to books and films, Native American Indians have also been an important subject in museum exhibitions. Here the subject takes a different kind of a dynamic because of the role that the museum has in society. When placed within the context of a museum

exhibition, Native American Indians no longer have fictional aspects in their representation that a movie or a novel suggests. In the museum the representation of the Native American Indians, like every exhibited cultural group, acquires the validity and prestige that characterize the museum institution. The representation of an ethnic group in a museum exhibition is the result of knowledge obtained from scientific research.

Therefore, based on the purpose of the museum, which according to the 2007 ICOM definition is to “communicate and exhibit the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment”(ICOM 2007), the representation of Native American Indians in a museum exhibition serves as education for the public. Moving away from the representations of the Northwest Coast Indians by the mass media, a few representations of them in museum exhibitions will now be examined. The importance that a museum has as a social and political institution, and the fact that the Northwest Coast Indian community is not always satisfied by their representation in museum exhibitions regardless of the educational prestige that they may carry, should be considered.

In the following section three exhibitions focusing on the Northwest Coast Indians will be analyzed. These exhibitions were selected and presented chronologically in order to demonstrate how museums have displayed the specific cultural group over time. Additionally, the chronological order depicts the emergence of the inclusion of the cultural group’s voice in their representations.

### *Arts Of The Raven*

*Arts of the Raven* (fig.3) was an exhibition on Northwest Coast Indian ‘Masterworks’ (Duff 1967). It was an exhibition held at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1967, and it came together in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of the Canadian Confederation on July 1<sup>st</sup> of 1867.



**Figure 3: Arts of the Raven 1967 photo from exhibition catalogue cover**



In the catalogue, the exhibition defines itself as a high art exhibition and not as an ethnological one. Its purpose is to “show the wide range and aesthetic masterworks of this (Northwest Coast Indian) art,...(the) aesthetic excellence of its forms, and to explicate and establish its claim to greatness” (Duff 1967: Foreword).

The exhibition included many different styles of artifacts originating from the native groups of Tlingit, Tsimshian, Haida, and Kwakiutl. It is noted in the catalogue’s foreword that the artifacts from the groups of Nootka and Coast Salish were specifically excluded from the exhibition for stylistic reasons (Duff 1967: Foreword).

The exhibition consisted of eight galleries. The organization of the gallery displays was delineated as following:

Gallery 1- Faces

Gallery 2-Small Sculptures in Wood

Gallery 3- Interpretation

Gallery 4-Slate, Ivory, Horn, Bone, Silver

Gallery 5- Flat Design

Gallery 6-Charles Edenshaw: Master artist

Gallery 6- Masterpieces of Northwest Coast Indian Art

Gallery 7- Arts of the Kwakiutl

Gallery 8- The art today (This gallery also portrayed artifacts made by two of the three people who curated this exhibition as they were also practicing artists)

(Duff 1967: The Exhibition)

This exhibition was installed under the supervision of three consultants: Wilson Duff from the Anthropology Department of the University of British Columbia, Bill Holm teacher, artist, scholar, curator and ‘a leading figure of Northwest Coast Indian Art’(UW Showcase 1997) who at the time had already published a book on Northwest Coast Indian art (Northwest Coast Indian Art 1965), and Bill Reid a Canadian artist, ‘Haida craftsman and authority on Indian arts’ (Duff 1967: Foreword). The reference made, in the catalogue in respects to this curatorial team, certifies the exhibition’s outcome, “together these three men

represent a unique concentration of accumulated knowledge and of active study in the area of this culture” (Duff 1967: Foreword).

One of the three members of the curatorial team, Wilson Duff notes that, the artifacts were not meant to be in exhibits on gallery walls but nevertheless, they are objects which give an aesthetic pleasure both to their makers and to their users, and in that sense, they do belong to an art gallery. Duff also remarks that some of these objects date back to the 1770s, when the indigenous people of the Northwest Coast first came into contact with the European settlers. A second detail worth mentioning, comes from another member of the curatorial team, Bill Reid who notes that “the high art of the region was the product of a few men of genius, many of whom apparently had long, slowly maturing, productive careers”(Reid 1967: The Art-An Appreciation). He adds that:

“If the impact had been kinder, who can tell in what new channels the old powerful stream of arts of the Northwest Coast may have flowed? We can at least be grateful for the record of human achievement they bequeathed us” (Reid 1967: The Art-An Appreciation)

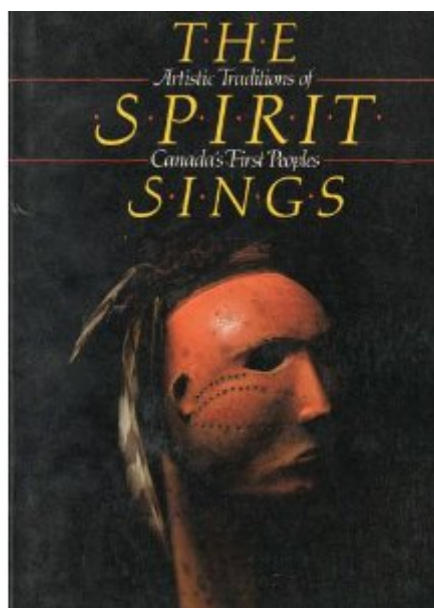
From the above commentary, it becomes obvious that the *Art of the Raven* exhibition is not simply about art. There are elements of historicity involved as statements on the cultural impact of the Europeans contact with the Northwest Coast Indian groups. As much as the exhibition tries to keep its focus on the art of the Northwest Coast Indians, it cannot help but also have references on their material culture and their religion with ethnographic references. In this way, it is also a representation of the Northwest Coast Indians’ culture and also history. Additionally one cannot help but notice the political statement concealed in Bill Reid’s comment mention above, that the European contact brought grave impacts on the Northwest Coast Indian culture that directly affected the development of their art.

So, the *Art of the Raven* exhibition is a representation of the Northwest Coast Indian’s perspective on art and simultaneously, a presentation of their material culture as it was formed throughout their history.

### ***The Spirit Sings***

*The Spirit Sings* (fig.4) is one of the most debated exhibitions held in the last decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; mostly known for the uproar that was caused due to one of the main sponsors of the exhibition.

Held by the Glenbow museum in Calgary, *The Spirit Sings* was an exhibition that the press release of the Glenbow museum's public information and marketing department characterized, as the "flagship project of the 1988 Olympic Arts Festival" (Glenbow museum press release 1986). Within this exhibition, there would be artifacts that left North America during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, objects representative of the Indian and Inuit culture. The exhibition was on display in Calgary from the 14<sup>th</sup> of January until the 1<sup>st</sup> of May in 1988, and then, it moved to Ottawa for four months at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Harrison 1988:353). Responsible for the making of this exhibition was Julia D. Harrison, Curator of Ethnology who provided the idea to, Duncan F. Cameron, Director of the Glenbow museum at the time, and also a scientific community composed of seven persons, who were specialized in distinct regions. What is really worth mentioning about this committee is that each member added valuable information from foreign collections that could later be used to document and identify several private and public collections relevant to the exhibition (Harrison 1988:353). The exhibition would be the premiere opening event of the Canadian Museum of Civilization and would be tied to the Canada Day celebrations on July 1<sup>st</sup> (Glenbow museum press release 1986).



**Figure 4: The Spirit Sings exhibition catalogue cover**

William N. Fenton, who claims that he attended the second of the two staff meetings that took place, reported on the planning of the exhibition: A simple installation mostly dependent on lighting and colors would be used. There would not be any wall cases, and all

objects would be able to be seen in the round. Conservation came as a priority to design. There would be special cases made in such a way to protect and conserve the objects according to the loan lenders' conditions. The show would be comprised of six regions: East Coast, Woodlands, Plains, Northwest, West Coast and Inuit. There were also discussions concerning peripheral matters of the exhibition such as, a bilingual soundtrack, a theatre to accommodate 80 people, a series of lectures, provisions for coats and galoshes, street banners and kiosks. These discussions were conducted, as the author maintains, under a "remarkable cohesiveness" and "mutual respect for the other persons' contribution to a team effort" (Fenton 1986:4).

Ultimately, as the exhibition's head curator, Julia Diane Harrison, describes the exhibition was executed as follows: the showroom was divided into six galleries, according to the geo-cultural regions, the East Coast, the Northern Woodlands, the Northern Plains, the Western Subarctic, the Arctic and the Northwest Coast. There was also an orientation gallery, which preceded the exhibition, where a map of the marked regions was displayed along with life size figures of natives, representative of each territory. There was also a short video, serving as an introduction to the ideas that the exhibition was trying to convey; the video contained discussions between a Blood young boy and his grandfather regarding spiritual beliefs (Harrison 1988:354). The exhibition included several loans from international museums, which ranged from objects for domestic use to objects for rituals uses; they were all representative pieces of Native and European contact that took place from 1650 to 1930 (McLoughlin 1999:9).

The importance of this exhibition, as pointed out by the museum but also by other researchers at the time, emphasized the fact that for the first time, objects related to Inuit and Indian material culture, which were spread out in collections around the world, were documented. Many of them were gathered as loans for exhibiting purposes (Fenton 1986:3).

The exhibition itself 'explores Canadian Indian and Inuit culture at the time of earliest contact with Europeans' (Glenbow museum press release 1986) There were three distinctive topics presented through this exhibition:

"(to) present the richness, diversity and complexity of Canada's Native cultures as they were witnessed at the time of contact; (to) explore the common threads that link these cultures and create a distinctive world-view; and (to)emphasize the adaptability and resilience of these cultures."(Harrison 1988:354)

In the Glenbow museum press release is also mentioned the cost of the exhibition. Shell Canada Limited is portrayed as one of the most important sponsors of this exhibition. This information was the cause of the uproar created surrounding the specific exhibition. Shell Canada Limited is an oil company that has been drilling in a territory that the Lubicon claimed as their traditional lands since the 1950s (McLoughlin 1999:9). The lands of the specific territory, Lubicon Lake Cree of Northern Alberta, were under ownership dispute for about 48 years, and the Lubicon band, claimed that at the beginning of the drilling, their income stemmed from hunting and trapping which suffered a significant decrease, a fact which led to an increase of their welfare dependence. There were also social problems that came along with their financial recession such as, alcoholism, tuberculosis, and suicides which had become the “new indicators or Lubicon “worldview” (McLoughlin 1999:9). The Lubicon band took action by boycotting the exhibition, in this boycott participated scholars asking the lender museums to not provide the Glenbow exhibition with any loans of objects. The result from this action was that twelve museums refused to loan the requested objects to the exhibition thus declaring their support for the Lubicon band (McLoughlin 1999:10). Of course many people also criticized the act of the Lubicon band to boycott the exhibition arguing that, there were ulterior motives behind this action and these motives had nothing to do with the exhibition itself. In other words, the claim was that the only thing that the Lubicon band wanted to do was to take advantage of the publicity that such an act would bring to their land claims issues (Fenton 1986:2). Another critique regarding *The Spirit Sings* exhibition, originated from Moira McLoughlin, assistant professor of Santa Clara University California, who asserted that this museum project was only commemorating artifacts made in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century thus giving an outdated image of the Native people today and leaving out their contemporary situation (McLoughlin 1999:10). McLoughlin also pointed out that not all geographically regions were included in the exhibition. A visitor to the Ottawa exhibition noticed that in the map preceding the galleries, where all the regions were marked and a representative figure of each region stands, there was nothing marked or any representative for the Schuswap people who used to and still live in a specific area of that region. When asked, the curator said that since they lacked an expert on that cultural group, they decided to exclude them (McLoughlin 1999:15).

The uproar following *the Spirit sings* exhibition, led to the interference of ICOM, which will be examined in the second part of the thesis. ICOM concluded that the agreement of the Natives involved in such an exhibition is required in order to present related cultural

material. The Canadian Ethnology Association and a lot of European museums supported this decision (McLoughlin 1999:10).

The *Spirit Sings* exhibition, despite the commotion raised around it, was considered to be a success. In this example the museum's sociopolitical role is apparent. As much as the museum claimed that "museums are not political entities" (McLoughlin 1999:10) a lot of people thought and acted otherwise. People are convinced that a museum does act as a communicator of opinions and images forged within its exhibitions. The museum does address people that live in societies and it does affect their view on things. Therefore it has a sociopolitical role. Native people were concerned that the Glenbow museum neglected their contemporary presence in the Canadian society by choosing to only present their ancestors, or as in the Schuswap incident even erase their existence. Also, Shell Canada Limited was an enterprise that directly affected the Lubicon group, and for 48 years, it protected its benefits at expense of that group. There is undeniably a sense of irony when a company involved in such judicial disputes with Native American Indians for such a long time, chose to fund an exhibition about them. But why fund such an exhibition? What was the oil company's purpose to do so?

Many of the interlocutors involved wanted to partake in the publicity surrounding *The Spirit Sings* exhibition. The museum intended to have publicity when it tied the exhibition with the 1988 winter Olympics, but also by announcing Shell Canada Limited as the main sponsor of the exhibition. Shell Canada did aim for publicity when it chose to grant \$ 1.1 million to the exhibition. The Lubicon group did seek for publicity with their boycotting of the exhibition. Publicity is interconnected with politics; in Lubicon's case, their politics behind their actions might have been more obvious than the museum's or the oil company's.

In this example, we see how powerful an exhibition can be. *The Spirit Sings* was involved in sociopolitical disputes in Canada and also caused the mobilization of an international institution to set guidelines for the future collaboration of museums and native communities.

### ***Behind the Scenes: The Real Story of Quileute Wolves***

The *Behind the Scenes: The Real Story of Quileute Wolves* is an exhibition that was created by the curator of the Native American Art of the Seattle Art Museum, Barbara Brotherton in collaboration with the Quileute community. It premiered in the Seattle Art Museum on 14 of August in 2010 and stayed there for a year, after which it travelled to the Smithsonian

National Museum of the American Indian where it was on display from the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2012 until the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2012. The exhibition displayed Quileute artifacts and ceremonies. As Brotherton notes “this is the first exhibition on historic Quileute art and seeks to provide an authentic, first-person account of the “real Quileute wolves”” (Brotherton 2010). The museum comes to add that:

“with the notoriety brought about when Stephanie Meyer’s books (and films) cast them as mysterious, shape-shifting wolves, the Quileute have creatively responded by publicly sharing their songs, dances, stories and visual arts, including the exhibition and programs at the Seattle Art Museum.”(Seattle Art Museum 2010)



**Figure 5: Quileute headdress**

This exhibition was the result of the need of the Quileute people to restore their image to the public which they thought had suffered damage from their misrepresentation in a series of Hollywood films. The movies in question were the very successful, among the teenage audience, Hollywood film series *Twilight Saga*, where the Quileute group is presented as a werewolf tribe. These movies were a result of an equally successful series of fictional novels. The Quileute elders found that this was very ‘disrespectful’ and demanded that something must be done to restore their image (Briggs 2010).

In the summer of 2009, when curator Barbara Brotherton visited the Quileute and asked them whether an exhibition would help to restore their representation to the public, the group accepted the offer. Brotherton researched museums and archives across the United States to gather historic cultural objects. During this research, she came across a very interesting collection in the Smithsonian National Museum of the Native American Indian

from which she requested several objects as a loan for the exhibition in Seattle as well as some teen drawings which were gathered between 1905-1909, depicting scenes from traditional rituals (Briggs 2010). Loans were also requested from the Washington State Historical Society, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Olympic National Park, a lot of which had never been displayed before (Brotherton 2010).

Until recently, the exhibition was on display at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. Objects like wolf headdresses (fig.5), rattles, baskets and a whale-bone dance club were part of the 23 artifacts presented, along with the teen drawings mentioned above. A map was also on display showing the Quileute language place names of villages and aboriginal territories. Additionally, a video of interviews among the group's elders and teens was projected that was associated with their oral and cultural traditions and their opinion on the effect that the *Twilight* movies has had on their lives (Smithsonian 2011).

With the *Behind the Scenes: The Real Story of the Quileute Wolves* exhibition, yet another recent example of an exhibition regarding the Northwest Coast Indians and dealing with their representation is given. What is really interesting in this example is that, this exhibition represents an effort to restore the damage that the Quileute people claim they have suffered from the *Twilight* books and movies. It is an example of how a museum can act as a spokesman for the community it exhibits, which is another social role of the museum. Moreover, in this case the native community accepted this exhibition offer in order to restore their image, so in a way the idea of this exhibition came also from the native community itself and not just from a curator or a museum director. Of course, this is just a first reading of this case.

With a closer look, one could discover more in this example. Within the press releases, brochures and article related to the exhibition, the name of the movies and books in question, which caused the Quileute reaction, is always mentioned. Even the title of the exhibition borrows vocabulary used in the movie business "*Behind the scenes*". The success of the books and the movies was quite big not only in the United States but in many parts of the world as well. So one would say that in a way, the museum while trying to restore Quileute's image to the public, at the same time, is taking advantage of the movie and book craze to advertize and bring more people to the museum, thus revealing a more commercial aspect of the museum's agenda. Indeed the museum's effort to present not only to the greater public objects that even the Quileute themselves were not able to see and educate people from



the native community as well is undisputable. Nevertheless, the advantage of the success brought in by the books and the Hollywood movies cannot be overlooked.

By presenting these three examples of museum exhibitions on the Northwest Coast Indians, presentations on these groups from the 1960s, 1980s, and recently 2012 are reviewed. The representations of Northwest Coast groups by the display of their material culture, always put forward the question of the presentation of their cultural identity. The most common issue raised, is the representation of their contemporary situation at each time given. All of the paradigms above focus on the cultural past of these groups, and therefore the most common criticism refer to their absence of their cultural present. It becomes apparent that the issue of their correct representation always comes forth in exhibitions and that there are a lot of political tensions surrounding these exhibitions. With this information in mind, the case-study of the Northwest Coast exhibition organized by the Volkenkunde museum will be presented. I will demonstrate how all this issues concerning past presentations on this region are addressed in this exhibition, but this time by examine not the exhibition as a result but the exhibition-making process.

### **North America in the Leiden Volkenkunde Museum**

Before addressing the exhibition-making process of the Northwest Coast Indians in the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden, first I should introduce the ‘stage’ that will host this exhibition. Here is some information about the North America department of the Volkenkunde Museum.

#### **The North America department**

The curatorial department of the North America in the Volkenkunde Museum was created in 1991. The formation of the department was a recognition of the scientific and cultural importance of the area of the North America. Until 1991, the North America collection was a part of a bigger collection of the museum. The North America area was part of a greater division of cultural interest in the Volkenkunde Museum, and this resulted to not give the appropriate attention to the North America region.

The North America department holds a significant collection of 8.498 ethnographic objects representing the native North America material culture. Most of the artifacts come from the collection assembled by Herman Ten Kate (1858-1931). Ten Kate was a Dutch anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in the American West around the 1880s (Hovens 2010). During his one year fieldwork (1882-1883) in the Southwest, the Plains and New York

State, he managed to gather a noteworthy collection of Native American objects. Within the Volkenkunde's collection of North America, there are objects from the Northwest Coast, the Northwest Woodlands, Pueblo, Blackfoot, and also objects from contemporary tourist art (Museum Volkenkunde 2010).

### **The Curator**

The curator responsible for the North America department in the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden is Dr. Pieter Hovens. He was appointed curator of the department since its creation in 1991, based on his expertise in the field.

Dr. Pieter Hovens is a cultural anthropologist graduate from the Radboud University in Nijmegen Netherlands. He also attended the North American Indian Studies program in the University of Columbia in Vancouver Canada. His fieldwork research was conducted on urban Indians in Vancouver and Seattle (Museum Volkenkunde 2010). His PhD research was focused on the work of the Dutch anthropologist Herman Ten Kate. Currently, he is a minority policy assistant at the Department of Welfare where he has contributed in organizing integration projects for gypsies and also has coordinated research on ethnic minorities (Volkenkunde website). He is also a part-time curator for the North America department in the Volkenkunde museum. Dr. Pieter Hovens is a member of Dutch organizations regarding American studies, such as the AADAS (Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies), the ACSN (Association of Canadian Studies in the Netherlands) and also social and cultural studies, like NVMC (Netherlands Association for Social and Cultural Sciences) (Museum Volkenkunde 2010).

During Dr. Hovens curatorship, the North America department has hosted five exhibitions including this last one that is expected to be on display this coming October. The first exhibition was made shortly after his arrival in the museum, (1992-1993) *Among Indians: Herman ten Kate in the American West*, then followed (1994-1995) *Folk Art from Distant Places: de verzameling van Elisabeth Houtzager*, (1998) *Indian Stories*, the permanent exhibition (2001) *North America* (Museum Volkenkunde 2010), and the most recent one (2012-2013) on the Northwest coast Indians.

For the purpose of viewing how the exhibitions by the Volkenkunde museum on North America Indians were received, I am going to present a review made on one of these exhibitions. The specific review was chosen for two reasons. The first reason is because of an interesting critic made on the collaboration between museum departments in general. The

second reason is because of very important information given about the curator responsible for the exhibition. Both of these reasons will give an insight on the analysis of the main case study in the following parts of the thesis.

### **Review of a previous exhibition of the department**

The most interesting review regarding the exhibitions made in the Volkenkunde museum is one that refers to the *Indian Stories (Indianenverhaal)* exhibition made in 1998.

The exhibition on Native North Americans held by the museum from September 1998 until December 1999 aimed at restoring several stereotypes existing for Indians, the phrase promoting the exhibition read “a portrait of an Indian man with a feather headdress”. The exhibition included the areas of the Northwest coast, the Southwest, the Plains and the Northeast, and dedicated a special section on the present situation that prevails in the North America region.

A review for this exhibition came from the American Indian Workshop (AIW), which is a program serving as a meeting point for scholars concerned with topics related to the native peoples of North America founded in 1980 (AIW 2012). The review states that in the exhibition, there were many objects from the collection that could easily be recognized as masterpieces; it specifically mentions that “the Southwestern collection is one of the best in Europe” also “outstanding examples of quillwork and beadwork” and “a number of exquisite pieces mainly masks and rattles” coming from the Northwest Coast collection (Frankort and Van Santen 1999: 53).

The interesting part of this review stands in the criticism regarding the layout of the exhibition. It is noted that the exhibition dedicates too much space in the display of the Plains section and also that the information offered to the public is insufficient. It stresses that the content of the exhibition has been given secondary importance in contrast to with the design. Once again, the issue of misrepresentation of the current situation of the Native North American Indian is continued, as in the part of the exhibition that deals with contemporary issues, the current urban style of living for most of these groups is ‘ignored’, thus recycling anachronistic stereotypes. The general estimation of the Indian Stories exhibition is that:

“Indianverhalen” is a rather disappointing interpretation of a very rewarding subject. The presentation is highly unbalanced and uninformative in a variety of ways. Fads rather than facts, commercialism rather than scholarship have dictated the choices; the result is a reinforcement instead of a correction of popular stereotypes. A stronger sense of realism and a

more creative input could have resulted in a much more exciting exhibition.’ (Frankort and Van Santen 1999: 54)

Especially intriguing is the editor’s (Christian Feest) notes on the article, where he points out that all the efforts made by the museum’s curator to maintain an realistic equilibrium between the past and the present portrayal of the Native North Americans was ‘rejected by the museum management’ (Feest 1999:54). Also, in a more general spirit on the contemporary situation that exists in museum world the editor comments:

“Museums and their curators need our support and encouragement in what has become an uphill battle with administrations and managements attempting to impress uninformed or misguided politicians and bureaucrats with large numbers of visitors.”(Feest 1999:53)

Closely examining the review of the exhibition *Indian Stories*, it is evident that once again the issue of a proper representation of the Native North American Indian remains. The accusation of recycling stereotypes persists, as it was in the example of *the Spirit Sings* exhibition mentioned above. It seems like it is really difficult to produce an accurate portrayal of the Native North American Indian. In addition in this review, there is a special mention on the curator of the exhibition, which singles him out of the result of the exhibition. The starting note of the editor informs the readers that there is an ‘uphill battle’ going on inside the museum institution. Objectives collide as noted in the review, ‘scholarship’ versus ‘commercialism’. The editor details to the readers that the curator tried to provide the academic input needed for the balance of the exhibition but that effort was ‘rejected’. That places the curator outside the museum group that was responsible for this exhibition. There is also a remark that the curator of the Volkenkunde North America department was not present at the opening of this exhibition.

This separation of the curator from the museum group that constructed the exhibition, is similar to stating that the curator responsible for the North America department had nothing to do with the outcome of the exhibition. If this is stated in a review about an exhibition made by the Volkenkunde Museum, the readers of this review can easily conclude that there are problems within the museum. These problems are between different departments of the museum, but this is an issue that will be explored in the following parts of the thesis. It would not be out of place to assume that such a review could either have a negative impact on the museum and the relationships between the museum’s departments involved in this exhibition or as outlined, an already existing problem between those departments.

With this input, coming from the editor’s note of the exhibition review, regarding the circumstances in a museum’s exhibition making process, I will continue with the presentation

of the making of the Northwest Coast exhibition. The temporary exhibition made by the Volkenkunde North America department, following the *Indian Story* exhibition in 1998.

### **The Northwest Coast Indians exhibition**

The Northwest Coast project is an exhibition which is scheduled to be on display at the National Museum of Ethnology Volkenkunde in Leiden, Netherlands. When my internship in the museum, started the exhibition-making process had already begun. By the time I joined the North America department, a few steps had already been made. The information gathered regarding the first stages of the exhibition-making process comes from interviews with individuals involved in this process.

The discussion about making an exhibition on the Northwest Coast Indians began in February of 2011. At the time the museum bearing in mind that the next government grant would be deducted by 75% focused on bringing more visitors in. To accomplish this goal, the museum had to choose to produce an exhibition about a topic that would be appealing and stimulate the public's interest. The North America Indians fitted their goal, as it is a department that gathers the highest number of visitors and at the same time, brings publicity to the museum. In February of 2011, the Canadian ambassador arrived with the intention to promote to the Volkenkunde Museum the collection used in the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Quebec exhibition, *Haida: Life, Spirit, Art*. This exhibition was on display from the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2010 until the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2011; the director of the museum at the time<sup>4</sup> found that this would be a brilliant idea for a project and he asked from the curator in charge of the North America department to develop some ideas about a possible exhibition.

The curator in charge saw the collection that the Canadian ambassador was promoting to the museum and noted that the specific collection is rather small to become a temporary exhibition on its own. The problem was that this collection would only cover a small space on the exhibition room, leaving the rest of it empty. In addition after having examined the artifacts of the collection, he concluded that it was consisted of mediocre pieces without any masterpieces.

The first proposal that the curator made was to include additional pieces to this exhibition from the Volkenkunde Museum's own collection and loans from other European

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<sup>4</sup> Now former director since from May 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 a new director was appointed to the Volkenkunde museum in Leiden.

museums. A group of three curators would cooperate in order to collect the artifacts for the exhibition and to gather the information required for the storyline and the exhibition in general. This proposal though, was rejected from the museum department that deals with management affairs. An exhibition that normally would require 3 years to be completed was now under the time constraint to be ready in a few months and on top of that understaffed, since there would be no external help as far as the research/curatorial department was concerned.

The narrative of the exhibition had been decided. The exhibition would be a general presentation of the Northwest Coast Indians with a Canadian focus. It would present the flora and fauna of the area, also the geography, the languages, the tribes and their characteristics in terms of material culture. Special references would be made on their worldview, their rituals, the famous totem-poles, the equally notable potlatch and also their contemporary situation. Starting year for the storyline of the exhibition would be the 17<sup>th</sup> century and would continue until present day.

Upon my arrival to the museum, where I would work as an intern, in January 2012, a general plan of the exhibition was for the most part ready. It was handed to the exhibition management department in order to estimate it financially and plan a marketing strategy. The outline of the exhibition at the time went as follows:

Introduction: A video regarding the Northwest Coast First Nations and a map of the area displaying both cultural and linguistic boundaries

Gallery One: Haida: Life, Spirit, Art (a cultural case study of the people)

Gallery Two: Totem poles (a general presentation) significance, types, tribal styles, history, iconic stature (a pole commissioned by the Kwakiutl displayed as a centerpiece with its own video and more poles, old or new of various sizes)

Gallery Three: Worldview (with a Kwakiutl focus): outline of world view, ritual dramas (winter dances) masks, and a video display

Gallery Four: The Potlatch: A general presentation of the historic potlatch, also referring to the potlatch ban and the potlatch in present times

Gallery Five: Time Line: the history of relations between the Natives and the Newcomers (displayed by photographs, videos,) emphasis on material exchange (by presenting objects from argillite and basketry to modern artifacts)

Gallery Six: Tourism: A presentation still in development with the collaboration of the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia, emphasis to be given on contemporary economics and cultural revitalization.

Educational program: Based on Indian children's drawings from the boarding school at Alert Bay

At the time, contacts had also being made with most of the museums which would contribute loan pieces to the exhibition, and most of the loans were already confirmed. The museums involved were: The Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa (where the exhibition *Haida: Life, Spirit, Art* was developed), Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, Museon Den Haag, as well as other museums European museums (Berlin, Paris, Antwerpen, Rotterdam, Gouda, Croningen, Brussels, Hamburg, Tervuren).

On my first day as an intern, I was immediately introduced in the museum environment by my internship supervisor, the curator of the North America department. I was given a tour around the museum offices and got familiar with the space and departments that I was going to work in for the next two months. I was given a description of the working environment, which was characterized as a friendly environment, something that I could immediately see on my arrival. I discussed my research topic with the curator, so that he could understand how he could help me in finding the information that I might need. The North America curator was very supportive in giving me information about exhibitions made on Northwest Coast Indians in the past, both within the Volkenkunde Museum and elsewhere, and also about issues raised about these exhibitions. We also discussed what I had in mind to do during my internship at the museum, and we clarified to which sections of the exhibition-making procedure it would be possible for me to have access. Given the challenges that my insufficient knowledge of the Dutch language might bring, we agreed that I could overcome it by using the curator as my informant, as to what would be said in anthropological terms, for meetings that it would not be possible for me to attend.

From the first moment of my internship, I felt that I was welcomed in this institution. I found my internship supervisor very willing to help me comprehend my surroundings both the actual premises of the museum, as well as the work done on the North America research department and the exhibition-making. During my first day in the museum, I was given the first task related with the upcoming Northwest Coast exhibition. As mentioned above most of the objects loan requests for the exhibition had already been made, but there were still some artifacts to be requested as loans. My supervisor asked me to make a selection of totem-poles in the British Museum collection that would be suitable for the exhibition; they would be

placed along with other totem-poles in the second gallery. He explained the criteria I would have to take into consideration in order to make the selection, which would be based on geographical origin. I made a list of 27 totem poles suitable for the exhibition and after my supervisor revised it, we made a request for 19 of them to the British Museum. This task was a way for me to participate in the exhibition-making process which involved the collection of objects for the exhibition. I was able to see firsthand how this process worked. This task was an ongoing process which we would follow, my internship supervisor and I, to see how it would develop.

During my internship, I also participated in the exhibition-making process, by gathering information to be used in one of the galleries. Under my internship supervisor instructions, I collected information from literature related to encounters of western explorers and the native peoples of the Northwest Coast. At the same time I closely observed the development on the exhibition-making process by conducting interviews with the people involved in the procedure. The following information on the exhibition was recorded during my time working in the museum.

By mid- January of 2012, the possibility of displaying two large totem-poles outside the museum was being discussed, but, for this plan, extra funding of the exhibition was needed. These totem-poles would be partly carved in Canada and then they would be transferred in Leiden where the carving would be completed by Native Canadian artists; this procedure would be open for the public to observe thus giving more publicity to the upcoming exhibition and the museum. At that time, the director of the museum, along with the deputy director, visited the Canadian ambassador to investigate possible funding for these two totem-poles. Some of the suggestions for extra funding were the Canadian embassy, the Dutch-Canadian business community or even maybe the airlines that would transfer the artifacts from Canada to the Netherlands. A progress on the specific matter of funding was expected on February 6<sup>th</sup> 2012; unfortunately the answer was negative, so another plan of action on the matter needed to be found. As an alternative, it was proposed the possibility for commissioning a smaller totem-pole to be placed inside the exhibition.

Another matter associated with the exhibition was the estimation of the artifacts condition. In the last week of January, the director officially requested an examination of the condition of the objects being used for the exhibition. This would be performed by the collection's department which would take the necessary actions needed to secure a suitable



display avoiding any possible wear that the object might sustain during the time it would be on display.

In the first week of February, the assistant curator travelled to Canada in order to attend some matters related to the exhibition. She visited the Vancouver library in Victoria Canada for archive research and photos that could be used in the exhibition. While she was in Canada, she contacted the curator of the Museum of Anthropology, Dr. Jennifer Kramer, responsible for the Kwakiutl group. She met with a representative from BOMA, an Indian Native gifts manufacture workshop, to discuss the possibility of supplying the Volkenkunde Museum gift shop with some of their work such as miniature totem-poles. Additionally, the assistant curator visited the British Columbia Tourist Association to talk about audiovisual material that they would provide on tourism as an aspect of the Native people current situation. The Tourist association had asked for an official letter from the museum on the ideas of the exhibition and had requested an exhibition map. The assistant curator found the British Columbia Association hesitant at the time to engage in this exhibition, she assumed that the problem was based on financial problems within the association. Another issue regarding the exhibition, as the assistant curator informed me, concerned the storytelling that the museum wanted to include in the exhibition. There were two different opinions regarding that matter. The exhibition management believed that it would be very interesting and appealing to the public, to include storytelling from the native people in the exhibition, while the research department pointed out that something like that would be not possible since these stories could only be used after the native group's elders consent. Storytelling is a very special element within this community and only a few native people part of the group have the privilege to share these stories. Using these stories without their permission would disturb the balance of an ethical and respectful treatment of the museum towards these communities. The presence of the assistant curator in Canada at that time served as a first face to face contact with native and non native people who were involved in this exhibition. She acted as a representative of the museum in flesh, as most of the contact by now was made through e-mails.

February came along with some unexpected challenges for this exhibition. First and foremost the extra funding for the commission of the totem-poles to be placed outside the museum could not be found. The British Columbia Aboriginal Tourism Association withdrew from the collaboration, due to internal affairs, thus affecting directly the display regarding the sixth gallery of the exhibition. Additionally there were some different views, on how to

handle some of the exhibitions themes, within the museum. Faced with this new scenery of events discussions were made on whether or not the museum was able to continue with the Northwest Coast Indian exhibition. Another factor that affected deeply this conversation was a reduction up to 25% of the original budget that the department had on its disposition. With this budget cut, the commission for any kind of totem-pole was impossible, not to mention the transfer of requested objects as loans; it looked like the exhibition would cost the museum more than it had planned in the beginning. At the time, the thought of continuing with another exhibition and replacing the one of the Northwest Coast was considered. This situation came to explain the commentary of the former director of the museum. This remark was made during the interview that I conducted with him. Regarding the topic of the Northwest Coast exhibition, the former director pointed out that “this museum seems to be unable to make an (Native American) Indian exhibition in a sort of peaceful and constructive way”. The meaning of this comment coming from the director will become more evident during the analysis of the exhibition.

Solutions to these challenges were provided by the beginning of March, through constructive dialogue and negotiations. Eventually, extra funding for the commission of a totem pole outside the museum was found. Contact was made with carvers that were willing to construct the totem pole outside of the museum. The intention was to carve  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the totem pole in Canada and the rest  $\frac{1}{4}$  in the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden. At that time, the museum had already received three proposals from Native American carvers. The input of British Columbia Aboriginal Tourism Association would be replaced by artifacts that depicted the Northwest Coast native peoples’ modern art. Ideas included a proposal to dedicate the sixth gallery on the work of a Native North American Indian artist who had also designed the Dutch Olympic team’s emblem, for their participation on the Winter Olympics in Vancouver 2010. This would also refer to the Dutch-Canadian relations. Other thoughts involved dedicating the gallery to several contemporary Native North American Indian artists. The request for the totem-pole loans from the British museum were not expected to be included, as up until then there was not any type of reply from them.

The Northwest Coast exhibition was to proceed as planned with a slight change in the opening date being scheduled somewhere in the first two weeks of October 2012. The totem-poles requested for the exhibition were expected to be placed in the exhibition room by the middle of September and then the rest of the objects would follow. In addition, the museum was planning to organize a totem-pole rising ceremony. This would be performed by the

Kwakiutl group before the opening of the exhibition, and all the carvers would be also present.

What is presented above was the progress made with the Northwest Coast exhibition during my internship at the museum and a short period after. During an interview, I had almost three weeks after my internship was over, with my internship supervisor, informed me that he was expected to go to Canada in the middle of April in order to personally communicate with the collaborating teams from Canada. The exhibition is still in progress, as this thesis is being written, but the main plan of the exhibition has already been decided and finalized. Everything is expected to proceed as planned.

Even though the main case study is about an exhibition in the making process a lot of the issues referred above can be identified, concerning other exhibitions about the Northwest Coast. Again, the issue of a correct representation appears, the museum is being very careful to show the respect and ethics required in representing the Northwest Coast Native peoples. Their current situation is to be addressed in the exhibition in order to give a balanced image of these people on their history from the 17<sup>th</sup> century up to 2012, trying to carefully avoid mistakes already made in the museum's last temporary exhibition on the region. Interesting enough is the fact that in this case, hints of what the review of the *Indian Story* exhibition referred to as commercialism can be located. Such a hint is the museum's intention of doing the Northwest Coast exhibition based on the large number of visitors that it could bring. In addition other hints of commercialism, is the idea of placing a tall totem-pole outside the museum for the people to see even if they are not visiting the exhibition, as well as selling totem-pole miniatures as souvenirs from the exhibition.

The museum's intention to show the needed respect to the cultural communities it displays is a reference to a very important trend in recent museology. Museums and especially ethnographic museums are nowadays producing exhibitions on different cultural groups through dialogue and collaboration with them, hence working with source communities becomes an important part of the exhibition-making process. Again, the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden is a very good example of practicing source community collaboration by offering many paradigms of this collaboration in its recent exhibitions and also many different ways of attempting such collaboration.

In the following parts, the participants in the exhibition-making process will be presented and the actual event of creating an exhibition will be examined.

## Part II: Exhibition-making

Up until now, we have seen how exhibitions display and communicate cultural portraits of indigenous people, and how significant these portraits are in the definition of the native cultural identity and their sociopolitical status. Through the exhibition, paradigms presented in the first part of the thesis and the effect that these exhibitions had on the source communities of the North American Indians and on the museum world, the significance of a balanced and accurate representation is apparent, thus recognizing the larger sociopolitical role of the museum. Through the first part's examples it was demonstrated how critical the relationship between the museum and the cultural group is in the creation of a valid and well-rounded production of knowledge, as the museum has also an educational role.

An exhibition has the capacity to tackle important issues with sociopolitical dimensions. The best paradigm connected to the main case study is the exhibition displayed in Glenbow museum in 1988, *the Spirit Sings*, where the issues of exclusion and misrepresentation of the North American Indians transcended the national borders of Canada and became an international issue, concerning in the beginning museums both in the United States of America and Europe. The value of an exhibition lies in the meanings it transmits to the audience. Therefore since the museum is still considered as an authoritative and prestigious institution, the meanings conveyed withhold these characteristics. In the effort of understanding how oriented and cautious these meanings are to the educational role of the museum, it is needed to look at the manner in which they are constructed by reviewing the participants of the aforementioned construction. Since the Volkenkunde museum in Leiden was the museum where my research was conducted, it will be used as a paradigm.

In this section we will review by whom the exhibitions are created.

### Structure of the exhibition-making process

So how exactly is an exhibition put together? Here is a brief summary of the procedure:

“The process typically includes articulating a theme or exhibition thesis, collecting research information, developing a storyline, establishing a budget selecting objects to be included, reviewing and recording the condition of all objects, preparing loan and insurance forms for any to be borrowed, drafting and editing labels, designing and fabricating object mounts and display furnishings, installing the exhibit, opening and marketing” (Ames 2003:171).

As stated in the above quote an exhibition represents an effort to present a theme related to the museum's collections and to the regional areas of interest to the museum. The following data on the exhibition-making process comes from participant-observation research on the process and from interviews conducted with the individuals participating in the procedure.

First and foremost, before the procedure of constructing an exhibition, there is the conception of the idea of forging an exhibition about a certain subject. The idea can originate from anywhere. It can come from people outside the institution itself with no museological background whatsoever, like in the case of the *Behind the Scenes: The Real Story of Quileute Wolves* exhibition in 2010 Seattle Art Museum, where the Quileute group expressed their intention of creating an exhibition about their culture. It can emerge from government institutions like in the case of the Northwest Coast Indian exhibition in Volkenkunde, where the Canadian ambassador promoted a travelling exhibition to the museum in Leiden. The idea can come-and mostly this is the case-form people working in the museum, like the *Maori* exhibition in Leiden on 2010, where the idea stemmed from the former director of the museum, or the 2011 *Hidden Garden* exhibition in Leiden in which the idea came, from a junior curator of the museum.

After the subject of the exhibition is decided, the estimation comes. This is a 'first base' estimation-in the sense of determining what will be examined as well as, how beneficial a certain exhibition will be for the museum. The Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden is a national museum and it is partly subsidized by the Dutch government; the money coming from the government is assured and more or less, the museum is aware of the amount of governmental subsidy it will receive. Although in the past few years the museum has experience budget cuts, up till now, the specific museum, hasn't "suffered" to the same degree, as much as many other ethnographic museums in the Netherlands. These budget cuts do have an influence on the exhibition-making procedure, as it will be overviewed in the next section.

In the past the issue of governmental subsidy was not a source of anxiety as the museum was reassured about it regardless of the projects it pursued, but this has all changed in recent years. Nowadays, according to the Head of the Volkenkunde Museum's Marketing department, the government stresses that "we (the museum) need to get something back", the museum has to maintain a certain level of income from its projects, and has to justify its need for the governmental fund. These parameters are accomplished by defining the audience of

the museum or in other words, by clarifying the ‘target groups’ that these museum projects and especially the exhibitions, addresses. An evaluation is needed, or as the head of the museum’s Marketing department informed me, “we have to take responsibility for what we organize and do, just organizing exhibitions is not good enough. We have to stage target groups and define who our target groups are, and (evaluate) when (an exhibition) is good, or not good enough or magnificent”. So, a first estimation of the project is needed. Questions need to be posed. Will it be sufficiently good or interesting for the public? What types of groups could be targeted by such an exhibition? How many people are estimated to visit the exhibition?

With a positive first evaluation of the idea for the exhibition, a project group for constructing the exhibition is formed. This group consists of representatives from the museum departments who are directly involved in the exhibition-making process.

### **The Project Group of an Exhibition**

#### *Communications Department*

This is a big department of the museum which also includes the Public Relations and Marketing departments responsible for advertising the exhibition and organizing events around the subject of the exhibition. The Education department is also included in the Communications department of the museum and is in charge of organizing activities addressed to children concerning the exhibition’s subject. Their common purpose is to draw more people in to visit the exhibition. In general, the Communications department is responsible for “actually translating” the information regarding the context of the exhibition which is originating from the Research department, for “a wide public or special groups” as my interviewee informed me. Individuals from this department state that, they have a leading role in the exhibition’s project group, because they have to “look at the budget and be in keep with the time schedule”. The Communications department is also the institutional branch that comes in contact with the designers of the exhibition, who are external partners to the museum<sup>5</sup>. In terms of exhibition-making, this department is the exhibition management

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<sup>5</sup> The Volkenkunde Museum mainly works with the Opera designing group from Amsterdam, which is responsible for the museum’s renovation. This redesigning of the museum took place from 1996 to 2001 (Staal, de Rijk and Riley 2003). Occasionally, the museum chooses to work with different designer companies.

department and normally they co-ordinate the different aspects of the project. The exhibition's project group manager "mostly" is a member of the Communications department.

#### *Research Department*

This department consists the museum curators of the museum who represent a group of regional experts on territories divided by the museum in such a manner that all areas in the world are covered. The Research department was also addressed by my interviewees as the Curatorial department. This department is responsible for research concerning, the museum's collections and, the exhibits, as well as for the development of projects in partnership with other museums or the source communities. They are responsible for all kinds of international relations with partners overseas. In terms of exhibition-making, they are in charge for all the scientific content of the exhibits, and in more general terms, for the content of every product of the museum. Within the project group of an exhibition, the curator, "puts on the table" his academic knowledge on the subject and his network of relationships within the source community related to the project. They are responsible for the 'storyline' of the exhibition or in other words, how the subject of the exhibition is going to be narrated by the museum to the audience; this is a task done in cooperation with the representatives from the Communications department, as they are responsible for the translation of the information as previously noted. Another task which falls to the curator is the listing of the objects which are going to be displayed in the exhibition from the collection but also objects which are going to be requested as a loan from other museums.

#### *Collections Management Department*

The department consists of the Conservation department, which is accountable for the collections' maintenance; the Storage Management department, which safe-keeps the objects; and the Loans Administration department which is responsible for the loans that the museum receives relating the transportation of objects in and out of the museum. The responsibility of the Collection Management department is to tend to the collections of the museums and give "advices" on the objects' physical condition. The representative from the Collections department comes in the exhibition's project group at the stage where the lists of the objects to be displayed from the collection have been made and the loan requests from other museums have been confirmed. An assessment on the condition of the objects that are to be showcased in the exhibition in terms of "which objects could be displayed, which objects require too much work to be displayed" is noted by the head of the Collection

Management department. Based on the assessment, the project group of the exhibition readjusts the lists of objects. Once that list is finalized, it is sent to the designers company where the design of the exhibition is going to be planned out. The Collections Management department has also input in the design and display of the exhibition, regarding any final adjustments that may be required. For example, as far as the organization of the space in the exhibition showcases is concerned, the department ultimately provides the physical information on the objects, regarding how they should be supported and how they should be displayed.

*'Source Community Department'*

The term department is used rather loosely here in order to suggest their level of input in an exhibition. Of course the Research department is responsible for the context of the exhibition which most of the time is also derived, in part, from consultations with the source communities. In this way the curators, so to speak, represent the voice of the source community within the project group, as it is not often possible for the representatives of the source communities to observe the procedure closely. As will be later described, this was not the case with the Maori exhibition in 2010 in which, Maori representatives were physically and actively participating in the procedure of making the exhibition. They were also a part of the discussions taking place on the events planned and on how to approach certain activities while adhering to their traditions. As a member of the museum staff informed me, the Maori taught the museum staff about their traditions, acted as advisors to the exhibition, and were in contact not only with the Research department but also several other departments of the museum. So, in the context of the exhibition-making process being a procedure in which the representatives of each department discuss and plan out the exhibition, one could say that, the Maori representatives actually served as representatives of the 'Source Community department'. This 'department' had its own input to offer in the procedure.

Having presented above what exactly constitutes an exhibition's project group, one can see the emergence of what was called the 'Source Community department'. Now I will turn to the following questions. What exactly is this source community and how is it related to the museum and its exhibitions?

In the following chapters, I am going to focus on the source community aspect. I will present what exactly this term signifies and the importance it holds for the larger museum



world. I will explore how the Volkenkunde Museum works with source communities and how that relationship is poignantly depicted in the case of the Northwest Coast exhibition.

### **The Source Community aspect**

In order to analyze the exhibition-making procedure of the Northwest Coast exhibition, I must first refer to the source community aspect that affects not only the exhibitions produced by a museum but also most of the products that a museum generates. It is a very important factor in the contemporary museum world, especially in ethnographic museums which is reflected in the case-study of the Volkenkunde Museum presented in the premise of this paper. Discussion of the source community aspect will enrich the scope under which I will examine the events taking place in exhibitions made in the Volkenkunde museum in the following part. Since the Northwest coast exhibition is a product of the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, source communities should be mentioned in order to better comprehend the main case study.

Before I review the ways in which an ethnographical museum works with source communities, I must first detail how and why this new tendency occurred in the museum world. Also, a definition must be provided as to the exact nature of source communities, which are now entering and restructuring the museum practice.

In a first general effort to explain the term source community, one could draw from a simple dictionary based definition. The word *source* means “a place from which something comes or is obtained” (Crowther 1995). The second word of the term, *community*, is defined as “the people living in one place, district or country, considered as a whole (or) a group of people of the same religion, race, occupation, with shared interests, (it also means) the condition of sharing, having things in common or being alike in(the) same way” (Crowther 1995). So, putting together the conceptual significance of these two words from their dictionary definitions, one might conclude that when we talk about *source communities* we refer to people of the same religion, race, occupation, who have shared interests, who have things in common and are alike in some ways, and from whom something comes or is obtained.

A question results from this above experiment. How far is the meaning of the term *source communities* in museological respects from the conceptual meaning found in the dictionary? The answer to this question will be provided with the help of Laura Peers and Alison Brown. They state that source communities are “the communities from which the

museum collections originate” (Peers, Brown 2003:1). With this it is obvious that the two meanings are not that different semantically.

It is important to mention here that *source community* is not a widely accepted term in museology. There are disputes as to what exactly a *source community* is and how the *source community* of the past connects with that of the present. In his article *Repatriation and the Reconstruction of Identity*, Jason Jacobs argues that “the peripheries of an ethnic group may be in constant flux, and need not reflect the boundaries of language, cultural practices, or perceptions of physiological phenotype” (Jacobs 2009: 85). So, it is possible that the present community of origin or ethnic group of origin has no connection to the ethnic group of the past. If that is the case, it calls into question what exactly constitutes a *source community* as a term of museologists? Jacobs further asserts this claim by presenting the history of contacts that took place between the indigenous people of Cuba and settlers, to demonstrate how much culturally (and genetically) distinct the present day Cubans are in relation to their indigenous ancestors. Also, through his paradigm concerning the repatriation of human remains, he indicates that motives for such claims are greatly political and that “histories are revised and streamlined as well” (Jacobs 2009: 85) as the construction of ethnic identity is a procedure involving both the sharing and the forgetting of memories (Eriksen 1993:93). Due to well reasoned arguments like that of Jacobs, the term *source community* is not widely accepted. The people forming the community in the past, at the time in which material culture was taken, are deceased and the people that form the same community in the present, sometimes appear to have grave culturally differences with the culture of the past.

Next an overview of the significance this term acquires within the museum world and the nature of the resulting collaboration will be presented.

### **Source Community collaboration**

“Contemporary museums are repositioning themselves as they respond to the powerful currents of cultural pluralism, decolonization, and globalization (and also focus on) changing relationship(s) between museums and the societies within which they operate.”(Phillips 2003:155)

The collaboration between museums and source communities constitutes an expression of the above spirit guiding the mission statement of contemporary museums.

This shift of interest of museums seems to have occurred after the 1990s. The uproar caused by *The Spirit Sings* exhibition in 1988, had the Native people of Lubicon boycotted the exhibition as a protest to Shell Canada Limited involvement. In this protest a lot of

European and American museums participated by refusing loans. As a result of this remonstrance a very important issue regarding the presentation of indigenous people in museums came up. This specific incident had a very interesting effect for the museum world:

‘in response to advice by the Glenbow’s director to the National Museum of Denmark that refusal to lend (objects) would be construed as interference in the internal affairs of Canada, the International Council of Museums took an unprecedented action. In support of the Lubicon, ICOM passed a resolution calling on museums not to exhibit the cultural material of aboriginal groups without the agreement of the natives involved’ (McLoughlin 1999:11).

This incident results in the first formal instruction given by an international association towards the inclusion of the native voice in museums.

Since the 1990s, there is an observable post-colonial critic developing within the museum world. Several forms of literature emerge regarding the representation of indigenous people in museums, particularly related to the issue of involving them more in consultations over the collections insofar as, object conservation, the exhibition-making process, and on matters regarding the museum influence on their social and cultural identity (Karp, Lavine, Clifford, Kreps, Rosoff). What is very interesting is that this post-colonial critic in museology followed a theoretical current of colonial and post-colonial critic in anthropology which had developed in the late 1970s:

“many features of the (anthropological) discourses developed under and for colonial rule were still operative in present-day anthropology. A critical hermeneutics, sometimes informed by a more epistemologically inclined neo-Marxism, elaborated the continuities between colonial and postcolonial constructions of anthropology’s object (Clifford 1982, Fabian 1983, Webster 1982). Analyses of the political role of textual representation, developed by literary theorists (Williams 1977), entered anthropology through the critique of orientalism and other forms of colonial discourse (Barker et al 1985, Bhabha 1994, Clifford & Marcus 1986, Clifford 1983, Said 1978)” (Pels 1997:166).

In turn the museums started re-evaluating their role in the present-day context, a post-colonial era, and its view on the ways it works with, studies and exhibits cultures. Source community collaboration is a result of this re-evaluation. The meaning of the term source community in contemporary museology:

“refers both to these groups in the past when artifacts were collected, as well as to their descendants today. These terms (also the term ‘originating communities’) have most often been used to refer to Indigenous peoples in the Americas and the Pacific, but apply to every cultural group from whom museums have collected: local people, diaspora and immigrant communities, religious groups, settlers, and indigenous peoples.”(Peers and Brown 2003:2)

The practice of collaboration with source communities therefore is a re-evaluation of the museum’s relationship with them. In this new scope, the cultural knowledge that these

communities hold is recognized and is perhaps more importantly respected. By acknowledging the significance of inclusion, it is crucial that this insider knowledge is incorporated in museology. After all academic knowledge about various cultures can only be completed with an insightful knowledge of both culture and tradition. In other words this new museum practice represents an effort in “altering the traditional relations of power between museums and source communities. It asks for partnership rather than superficial involvement.”(Peers and Brown 2003:2)

Indeed during the interviews conducted in the Volkenkunde Museum, people often referred to ‘building relationships’ with the source communities. It is not just about collaboration between two partners as the word collaboration suggests a sense of temporality; rather, it is about building relationships, something that requires continued and sustained effort.

Source community collaboration is a very critical practice of the contemporary museum. It is a vital requirement for the existence of the museum as an institution that promotes education and research, because it enables the acquisition of new information which compliments scientific research. In order for the museum to survive as a social educational institution:

“the museum world needs movement in at least three arenas: (1) the strengthening of institutions that give populations a chance to exert control over the way they are presented in museums; (2) the expansion of the expertise of established museums in the presentation of non-Western cultures and minority cultures....and (3) experiments with exhibition design that will allow museums to offer multiple perspectives or to reveal the tendentiousness to the approach taken” (Lavine and Karp 1991:6).

As already seen in the first part of the thesis while presenting the review of the 1998 *Indian Story* exhibition in Leiden, and also will be seen in the next part, the last arena in which Lavine and Karp refer to can sometimes backfire to the museum and bring opposite results from the ones intended.

Now that I have reviewed what source community collaboration signifies in the museum world, I will explore the ways in which it is being practiced. In the following units, I will present examples of source community collaboration which has taken place in the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden, and also the views of individuals working in the museum concerning this collaboration.

### **Working with Source Communities in the Volkenkunde Museum**

Since the 1990s the museum had already developed relations of collaboration with international partners. An example of a project of that kind was the restoration of the traditional clay houses in Djenné in Mali. In 1994, the Dutch embassy in Bamako requested that the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden to pursue restoration project of Djenné clay houses, and a team of Malian and Dutch experts was formed to carry out this task (Bedaux 1999:10).

Since 2001, the museum has been focusing in building networks of collaboration or as the former director described in our interview “introducing the museum to the world”. In 2000 an Asia-Europe museums network (ASEMUS) formed including countries like the Netherlands, Sweden, Singapore, Australia, Austria, Belgium, China, Cyprus, Finland France Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea ,New Zealand, Pakistan Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Thailand, United Kingdom, Vietnam, Korea, and many others (ASEMUS 2012). Taking into account that there is a lot of Asian material in European ethnographic collections, gathered mainly from the colonial period, an idea was born of forming a network between museums which would share those collections. This idea came to be a “fantastic vehicle” with which the cooperation between European museums and museums from the collections’ countries of origin would be possible. The concept around this idea was that it would be more fruitful to enter into a partnership than to enter into a circle of opposition with numerous conflicting claims of ownership over the collections. Co-ownership of a collection recognizes the rights of the countries of origin, over the collection. This, as stated by the former director, “makes it available to everyone and acknowledges the meaning of collaboration”.

Under the scope of this partnership, the museum started conducting various projects with museums from the countries of origin. Such a task was the Peranakan<sup>6</sup> research project, which started in January 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 and continued for two years. The Volkenkunde Museum together with the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore, were the main partners of this collaboration, in which other museums from Indonesia and the Philippines also participated. The aim of the project was to strengthen the Peranakan cultural identity (ASEMUS 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'Peranakan', in Singapore, refers generally to the community of Chinese communities whose ancestors' intermarriage with local Malays brought about a unique fusion of cultures. Peranakan Chinese culture is an example of cross-cultural fusion in South-east Asia during the colonial period, mainly in Singapore, Malacca and Indonesia. (ASEMUS 2011)

During this project, research was conducted over the collections placed in these museums; objects were identified as Peranakan material culture and inventories were created.

Another project illustrating collaboration between museums was the *Shared Cultural Heritage*, where the Volkenkunde Museum along with the National Museum in Jakarta worked together on Indonesian collections from the both participating museums. Their collections were complimentary to each other and they also had been shared over the years through exhibitions, constituting these two museums as a type of sister institutions. The result of this research made during this project, was an exhibition made in Jakarta and in Amsterdam during the period of 2005-2006 (Virtual Collections of Masterpieces 2012). These projects do serve as examples of the museums cooperation with the countries of origin, but still refer to instances of cooperation between institutions; between museums, or between museums and governmental institutions from the countries of origin.

The Volkenkunde Museum started working consciously with source communities in 2007. The word consciously, refers to the museum's awareness of the balance needed in order to work in the context of the post colonial theoretical current. This is the year when the real involvement with indigenous people began. The year 2007 marked the commencement of the project *Sharing Knowledge and Cultural Heritage* in which people from Greenland and Surinam, visited the museum in Leiden in order to look at the collections and discuss together with the curators about the objects found in the collections. The aim of this specific project as described by the Chief curator of the museum and also curator of the Middle and South America is "to study our collections from a perspective of plurivocality and to disclose the objects and their context in a multi-layered way" (Van Broekhoven 2010:141). The way to achieve that is to work close with source communities and by having consultations with native representatives of these communities.

When community representatives from Greenland visited the museum in 2007, they were shown some objects from the museum's Greenland collection. These objects were chosen from the curator of that regional department, on the basis that they were objects that required more information on their use and origin. In the context of this project, representatives from Surinam communities were also invited to the museum to visit sections of the museum's Indonesian collection and participate in discussions with the curatorial staff. With the *Sharing Knowledge and Cultural Heritage* project, the museum opens its collections since 2007, to the representatives from the countries of origin which represents, in turn the opening paths to dialogue and consultations. This results in acquisition of more information

on the collections that will compliment the pre-existing academic knowledge, and in laying the foundation for future collaboration in research projects and exhibitions.

The most recent example of source community collaboration in the Volkenkunde museum, that in a way came to confirm the long-term aims of the *Sharing Knowledge and Cultural Heritage* project, was the *Maori* exhibition housed in the museum from the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2010 until the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2011. This exhibition was a product of consultations between the museum and the source community representatives that visited the museum several times to discuss the collection and events associated with the exhibition.

### Examples of Source Community collaboration

The following information came from interviews conducted with members from the Volkenkunde Museum's staff.

The *Maori* exhibition (fig.6) displayed in the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden from October 2010 till May 2011, is the most representative example of the museum on exhibitions



**Figure 6: Maori exhibition poster**

that were made through source community collaboration. One of the aims of this exhibition was to present the rich past and present of the Maori tradition to the Dutch public. The Dutch public was not entirely unfamiliar to the Maori as there are some historical connections between the countries of the Netherlands and New Zealand, as the later served as a migrant destination for a lot of Dutch people during the economic recession of the 1950s in search for work. Still the image of the Dutch public on the Maori is not an adequate representation of their culture.

The Volkenkunde exhibition on the Maori attempted to alter that image by making a general exhibition on the Maori and not focusing on anyone representative culture group from the Maori communities. For this reason, the museum collaborated with Maori parties from New Zealand but also from the Maori community in London. Along with the artifacts from the museum's collection, there were also artifacts from contemporary artists shown in the exhibition. This collaboration between the source community and the Volkenkunde Museum,

was motivated by a desire to illustrate diversity through a display of the different viewpoints within the community.

The museum made a program of the exhibition and the events associated with the exhibition; this program was presented to the representatives of the Maori community. Consultations were made between the both parties and the project began to materialize. The subsequent exhibit-making process was undertaken very carefully ensuring that the Maori community was free to contribute in any way they considered to be beneficial for the exhibition. In the events that would take place around the exhibition, the loan of a Waka canoe to the museum was also involved. This loan was handled strictly under the supervision of the Maori community, thus giving the necessary respect to the participant party and its traditional culture. The canoe was constructed in New Zealand and given ritual treatment. An accommodation for it was built in Leiden, always following the protocols mandated by the Maori tradition.

Nevertheless, as one might imagine, there were times during the consultations where the discussions between the two parties involved a degree of stress and tension. The involvement of the London Maori community seemed to offend the Maori representatives from New Zealand, as they could not find the connection of the relation between the two communities. At first they were very reluctant to cooperate as they did not recognize the Maori London community as “real Maori”. Another point of debate was whether or not to display the works of art coming from a Maori artist from the London community. This Maori artist had not received a stamp of approval from the Maori, so his work did not “speak” for the Maori. The issues, detailed above, were the result of the relationship of the Maori community with the communities of diaspora. They were not product of the museum collaboration. The solution for these obstacles to the creation of the exhibition came from the curator responsible for the exhibition by consistently informing the parties of what was going to happen and who exactly would participate. In other words, the curator initiated dialogues in which it was made clear that “they were welcome to contribute (in the exhibition), since it was after all a common project, but they should not tell the story for us (the museum)”. Ultimately, it all worked out very well, and the exhibition was very successful.

One more remarkable thing about the experience involved in the installation of the *Maori* exhibition is that the contact that the museum had with the community was not limited to the Curatorial department. Indeed almost all departments came in contact with the source community in order to plan not only the exhibition but all the events involved with the



exhibition, like the opening ceremony, interviews in the media, promotional events. During my interviews with people from different departments in the museum, almost everyone referred to the example of the *Maori* exhibition which, was the most recent instance of museum contact with the source community during the process of the exhibition-making.

The extend of the Maori community participation in the exhibition making process in the Volkenkunde Museum and also the recurrent reference of the Volkenkunde Museum staff to the *Maori* exhibition, underlines its significance. For me, it was very appealing to observe, during the interviews, the way in which most of the interviewees mentioned the example of the *Maori* exhibition, as the most representative and faultless case of an exhibition made with the assistance of source community collaboration. In fact, the success of this particular exhibition, as a direct consequence of source community collaboration had already reached me, through talks with my professors, before I had even visited the museum.

What I found really intriguing, after the positive remarks on the exhibition from my interviews, was that the procedure of making the Maori exhibition, had faced some difficulties. In this case the problems which appeared were mainly caused by tension between the New Zealand Maori community and the London Maori community. As mentioned above, this was not an issue created by the museum, but it was an issue that was brought in to light by the museum on the basis, of trying to incorporate within the exhibition two Maori communities that were not on good terms (London community and New Zealand). The issue was that the Maori diaspora community was not acknowledged by the New Zealand as 'real' Maori. This brought tension in the exhibition-making procedures, when at one point, the latter did not want to engage in any dialogue about the exhibition if the diaspora community was also to participate. These obstacles were ultimately overcome through dialogue initiated by the curator responsible, who knew what the core of the problem was and how to address it. This incident could reveal yet another role of the museum, as an institution that can contribute to improve relationships between communities.

At this point the issue brought by Jacobs regarding the authenticity of a source community mentioned earlier, takes a different aspect. If the fact that a source community of the present is related with the source community of their ancestors is disputable, how can the relation of a diaspora community with the source community of their ancestors not be questionable? Is a diaspora community a source community like Peers and Brown claim in their definition given above?



**Figure 7: Roots 2 Share logo**

Another example of the museum working together with source communities is the *Routes 2 Share* project. It is a website which serves as database for more than “8,000 photographs and slides from East Greenland” (Buijs and Rosing Jakobsen 2001:15).

Furthermore it provides the opportunity for East Greenlanders to access the database in order to view and identify possible ancestors as well as add any information they consider relevant to these photographs. The idea for the project came from a small exhibit created by the curator of

the Arctic region department of the Volkenkunde Museum and one of her colleagues. This aforementioned exhibit consisted of 20 printed photographs of Jacob Van Zuylen, a Dutch scientist, from the 1930s portraying East Greenland. The exhibition was also later displayed in museums in Europe (Copenhagen) and East Greenland. The interest from the public and from the museums hosting this exhibition, and other similar ones, was so great that led to the idea of a cooperation between museums in the Netherlands and Greenland (Buijs and Rosing Jakobsen 2011: 9-10). The reason for this exhibition’s success was that Greenlanders were able to personally connect with these photographs, as they often portrayed people who the audience could recognize as their ancestors.

Around 2007, a contract for future cooperation was signed between the Volkenkunde museum in Leiden and the National Museum of Ethnology in Greenland (European Museum Academy 2012). In 2009, the Ammasalik Museum also in Greenland and the Museon in the Hague were included in this contract. These four museums had objects from East Greenland culture and on that basis they participated in the *Routes 2 Share* initiative (Buijs and Rosing Jakobsen 2011:10).

The idea for the project was formed and in 2010, after the funding for this program was granted, the *Routes 2 Share* website (fig.7) was launched. The concept for this project was to create a website which would contain a wide photographic archive with material provided by the collections of the four participating museums. This website would be accessible not only to people in Greenland but also worldwide. In this way, on one hand, the public can view the photographs and ask for copies of these pictures for personal reasons. If for example they

happen to recognize one of their relatives in them, in this case a form of virtual repatriation occurs, as the developers describe it (Buijs and Rosing Jakobsen 2011:3). On the other hand the people who access the database can contribute any relevant information they are willing to share. In this case there is the aspect of sharing knowledge. The website (<http://www.roots2share.org/>) was translated in four languages East Greenlandic, West Greenlandic, Danish and English so as to be accessible for all people who might be interested in it. The people in charge of this program saw to it that the program would be accessible for people living in Greenland where internet connections are scarce. The curators from the Museon in the Hague and the Volkenkunde museum took on the task to present the program in East Greenland through community meetings and workshops organized (Buijs and Rosing Jakobsen 2011:15).

The purpose of this project can be located in the concept of *Sharing Knowledge and Cultural Heritage* initiative back in 2007. *Roots 2 Share* is an attempt to open the Greenlandic photograph archive to the public; and benefit both the public and the museum with the shared information. This program reflects an example of virtual repatriation, the photographs taken from the 1930s, 1960s and 1980s in Greenland portraying native people, return to Greenland. Of course, this is not an example of full repatriation of the material, since the original photograph is kept in the museum and the claimant only receives a copy of that photograph. Based on that, like the curator participant from the Volkenkunde Museum, who is also one of the creators of the project, informed me, someone could express ownership claims over the photographs. Though the photographs do belong to the Dutch museum photographic archives, and therefore the Dutch government, as they were taken during scientific expeditions by the participating scientists, Greenlanders could claim that they are the rightful owners of the photographs. Based on the fact that the persons portrayed are their relatives, Greenlanders could argue that they should be getting the originals and not just copies. This constitutes a case of legal *versus* ethical claim. A case like that could not stand legally in court. Nevertheless one of the curators responsible for the project believes that the Greenlanders claim is more “real”.

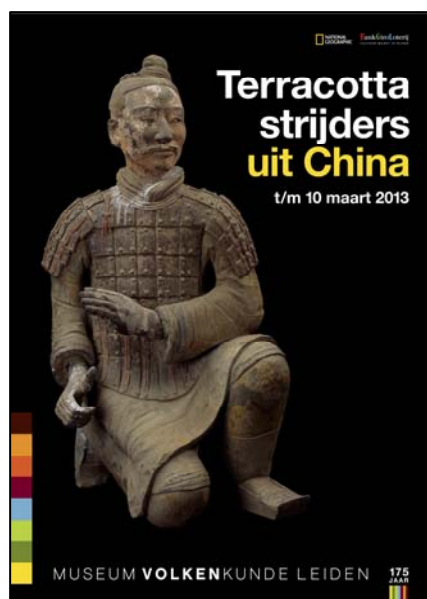
The *Roots 2 Share* program is an innovative program that combines a lot of the elements that should characterize a contemporary museum and its projects, such as, transparency, openness, as well as knowledge acknowledgement and sharing. All these elements are enabled through source community collaboration, and *Roots 2 Share* engages in that practice, but it also goes further. This project is also active in the realm of repatriation,

even if it is virtual in nature. This constitutes another important issue in the museum world. Another intriguing aspect of the *Roots 2 Share* project, regarding my research is that, this program was also frequently mentioned by my interviewees as a fine example of a Volkenkunde Museum project working with source communities. All these add to the significance that this project holds for the museum.

This program similar to other initiatives made by European museums represents an effort to repatriate objects and share knowledge with the source communities. Similarly, there is another project known as the “*Reanimating Cultural Heritage*” which originates from the cooperation of the British Museum, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow museum and the National Museum of Sierra Leone (Basu 2011:38). The “*Reanimating Cultural Heritage*” project is the outcome of a research project named “Reanimating Cultural Heritage: Digital Repatriation, Knowledge Networks and Civil Society Strengthening in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone” (Sierra Leone Heritage org. 2012) which aims to “literally reanimate objects that have become divorced from their original social and cultural contexts”. (Basu 2011:38) The website (<http://www.sierraleoneheritage.org>), like that of the *Roots 2 Share* project, is an internet database that gives public access to Sierra Leone collections from several museums in the world.(Basu 2011:38) It constitutes yet another attempt to share knowledge and ‘virtually repatriate’ objects to the Sierra Leoneans. Another parallel between the two programs is that the “*Reanimating Cultural Heritage*” may as well be a program available to all Sierra Leoneans through the internet, but the fact of the matter is that Sierra Leone is a region where internet access is “currently limited” (Basu 2011:38) to the greater public. The question which emerges here is who ‘virtual repatriation’ actually addresses, when access to these websites is limited to the privileged few that have internet connection. Could this be another form of excluding the general public from these collections? This was a common practice used in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when collections “constituted socially enclosed spaces to which access was remarkably restricted....in the most extreme cases, access was available to only one person: the price” (Bennett 1995:93).

A more “classical” way of collaborating with source communities is depicted through a recent exhibition made by the Volkenkunde Museum on the *China terracotta soldiers* (fig.8), which is on display from the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2012 until the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2013. This collaboration is deemed classical in the sense that the collaboration is between institutions, in this case the Volkenkunde Museum in the Netherlands, the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Relics Bureau and the Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Promotion Center in China. The museum decided

on this exhibition because it is trying to give more attention to the China department, which has previously been rather “quiet” and in a way, neglected in contrast to other departments like Japan or Korea.



**Figure 8: Chinese Terracotta Soldiers exhibition poster**

In June 2011, the curator from the Volkenkunde China department visited China to investigate the possibility of a loan from the Qin Shi Huang Terracotta Warriors and Horses Museum. It was made clear that the museum wanted a year-long loan for a small scale exhibition which would be displayed together with the Volkenkunde Museum’s permanent collection. At first, the museum asked for two terracotta soldiers and a horse but that was rejected on the terms that the horse would be too difficult and fragile to transfer. The museum then asked for a piece of a horse’s head but that too was impossible, since the policy of the Chinese institution is to lend out objects with complete forms. According to the Chinese

authorities, the complete objects help the visitor to better comprehend the artifact historically. This negotiation resulted in the acquisition of three terracotta soldiers and in the selection of twelve more objects from the Chinese museum collection. The museum had to abide by the rules that the Chinese authorities had, in order to have this exhibition.

During the following November, Chinese representatives came to the museum to check that the venue was safe in the sense that none of the objects of the Volkenkunde Museum’s permanent collection, were illegally excavated or stolen property. Due to the Volkenkunde Museum’s renovation, the museum was unable to show them the objects and instead made a list which was given to the Chinese representatives. This list led to problems for the exhibition, which continued up until the last days before its opening, related with the transfer of the loans to the Netherlands.

This was a very serious problem taking into consideration that this was an exhibition made explicitly for the display of the Chinese terracotta soldiers and it would be odd if they were missing from the final exhibition. The cause of this awkward situation was that the list given to the Chinese representatives, to reassure the Chinese authorities that all the objects intended to be on display from the Volkenkunde Museum’s collection in the exhibition were

legally acquired, probably did not, as the curator responsible noted, “reached the right hands back in China”. This created doubts among Chinese lending authorities whether or not the Volkenkunde Museum was a “safe” museum. Ultimately the problem was resolved when the curator of the Volkenkunde Museum’s Chinese department traveled to the country of origin in order to clear up any misunderstandings. The result was that the terracotta soldiers along with the other objects loaned out reached Leiden in time and the exhibition proceeded as originally scheduled.

The case of the *Chinese terracotta soldiers* exhibition is, as mentioned above, a co-operation between institutions. A Dutch institution and Chinese institutions, so one could argue that this does not constitute a source community exhibit but a transnational one. Following this argument, one could juxtapose Peers and Brown’s statement which has been previously discussed in this paper that the term *source communities* “apply to every cultural group from whom museums have collected” (Peers and Brown 2003:2) and in the China department’s case as in all the regional departments case, the museum collection falls under this category.

The *Chinese terracotta soldiers* exhibition has a special characteristic on the basis that as the curator responsible for the exhibition said, “it is an exhibition within an exhibition”. So, to summarize in this case, there is the ethnographical exhibition with objects coming from the museum’s collection and an antiquity exhibition with the loan of the terracotta soldiers. In terms of source communities, we have a transnational exhibit within a source community exhibition. Under this scope, the Chinese institutions constitute the source community. This claim is justified by the actions of the Chinese representatives to make demands and to visit the Volkenkunde Museum, in order to examine the objects that were going to be on display together with the terracotta soldiers and the other objects that were given as loans. Their actions bring to mind the visits of the Maori representatives to the museum to assure that the exhibition would respect and abide by the customs involved in their cultural traditions. These case-studies are similar but clearly not the same.

Perhaps, one of the reasons causing this misunderstanding between the two institutions was based on cultural differences that were not taken into consideration as much as they should have been. In this context when the Chinese representatives came over to Leiden to ensure that the objects displayed along with the objects they were willing to lend, were legally acquired or not, they must have expected to leave with more than a list to fulfill the purpose of their visit. One reasonable question emerging from this case is why have an

antiquity exhibition in an ethnographic museum and not in an museum of antiquities? But perhaps this is an example of the different ways of displaying, an example of innovating modes of exhibiting culture.

Here the collaboration mostly occurs through negotiations between institutions. Nevertheless these negotiations were carried out by taking into account the conditions under which the Chinese authorities were willing to cooperate, regarding the pieces they loaned. The problem created in this exhibition started after the request to place the Chinese loans within the Volkenkunde permanent exhibition and not in a separate space like the Chinese institution normally requires. Once the Volkenkunde request was granted, the Chinese authorities had to be reassured that the pieces that they were lending would not be displayed with pieces acquired by illicit trade. As soon as these issues were addressed, the exhibition proceeded. This exhibition paved the way for various future collaborative programs between the Volkenkunde Museum and museums in China, which include also exhibitions. This along with the focus needed to be placed on the Chinese department of the Volkenkunde Museum, was one of the main reasons to host the *Chinese terracotta soldiers* exhibition.

### **Source Community collaboration with other departments**

Examples of collaborating with source communities are not limited to the Curatorial department of the museum, though it is the department that holds a primarily role in these collaborations. As previously mentioned other departments of the museum also come in contact with source communities during the course of various projects which take place in the museum. When the museum decides to open its collections to representatives from source communities in the context of the *Sharing Knowledge and Cultural Heritage* project, the department that comes in contact with the representatives is also the Collection Management. People from this department also recognize the views of the source communities on the ownership of the objects and the responsibilities that ownership brings. They are aware of the spiritual knowledge that the community has of the objects and they are open to their opinions, as long as they do not affect the objects physically.

Another department which also comes in contact with the source communities is the Communications department. It is acknowledged by the people of this department that collaborating with source communities is a task mostly undertaken by the Curatorial department, but at some point they collaborate with the representatives from the source communities, mainly when an exhibition is involved and the type of this exhibition requires

it. The Communications department knows that museum visitors very much enjoy coming in contact with people from the source communities.

The Publicity department occasionally also work together with the source community during the exhibition making process. Knowing that journalists and the media like to speak with someone who knows the country and the culture displayed in the exhibition directly, the department consults with the representatives of the source community and examines what information could be used and what not according to native people when giving interviews to the press.

The collaboration between the museum and the several source communities is a procedure that does not involve just one department of the museum. Indeed the Curatorial department typically has a bigger, more significant role in this collaboration than the other departments. Still, this collaboration sometimes constitutes a holistic experience for the museum, involving all of the departments. Different departments are involved in each project, especially in an exhibition-making project. People from each department of the museum are involved in the process expressing each department's take on the project. Then of course there are people involved from source communities or countries of origin, who also express their point of views on the project.

### **The North America department case**

The Curatorial department of North America in the Volkenkunde Museum based on the institution's policy of sharing information has since the 1980s, always been giving information related to the artifacts of the Volkenkunde collection, when requested from several tribal museums and cultural centers. This information and knowledge sharing is not done unconsciously; the native people's interest is always a factor in these decisions. In 1988, Volkenkunde Museum was one of the twelve museums which refused loans requested for *The Spirit Sings* exhibition at the Glenbow museum, as previously mentioned. Supporting in this way, the Lubicon group and corroborating the criticism that the native people had expressed over their representation in museums. (Hovens 2010)

In 1990, Tigua Indian representatives visited the museum and they asked to access the collection. Their request was accepted and they examined artifacts of the collection that were gathered among their cultural group in 1882 (Hovens 2010). Since 1999, a digital database of the collections from all departments was formed called, *The Museum System*. Through this database, accessibility to the museum's collections is enabled for a wide public.

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The department also launched a few publications, which took the form of catalogues where artifacts from the collections are illustrated. These catalogues were introduced to several tribal museums for the purposes of sharing information.

Another aspect of collaboration with source communities, which was briefly addressed earlier in this paper, is highlighted in the North American case. People from the Collections Management Department are open to suggestions regarding the safekeeping of ‘culturally sensitive artifacts’ (Hovens 2010). Some of the staff members from the Collections Department had previously worked at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC, which as noted ‘encourage(s) “the direct and meaningful participation of Indian people” in all aspects of the museum’s activities’ (Rosoff 2003:72) . They have also participated in meetings such as the Canadian Conservation Institute conference (CCI 2007) regarding the preservation of aboriginal heritage where ideas from indigenous experts were introduced (Hovens 2010).

Apart from sharing information and artifacts with the native communities, the North America department also intends to start transmitting knowledge gained through research. Publications regarding a research project on the Blackfoot collections placed in Dutch museums from the Volkenkunde Museum, the Zeeuws Museum and the University of Leiden have already been produced. Additionally, the publication on the scientific research conducted with the use of the knowledge given by the Native Elders to early ethnographers and collectors, on Ten Kate’s 450-piece North America collection, is being distributed to source communities’ tribal museums and cultural centers. All the publications of the North America department are resulting in digital publications on the internet with the hope for its accessibility to a greater audience which especially includes always tribal museums and cultural centers. (Hovens 2010)

The intention of sharing information and knowledge was also incorporated in terms of exhibition-making. After the renovation of the internal space of the Volkenkunde Museum, the new space of the permanent exhibition opened in 2002. The display of some objects in the new galleries was planned after taking into consideration Native American views on the objects’ non tangible aspect.

During the exhibition-making process of the *Indian Story* displayed in the museum in 1998, the department tried to include consultations with the native groups. There was an intention to involve in the process a Native expert who was willing to cooperate by offering

his tribal knowledge regarding the presentation of some objects from his community. Unfortunately, that plan did not follow through as ‘extensive re-arrangement of objects and re-writing of texts would result in an unbalanced representation of Native North peoples cultures and history’ (Hovens 2010:121). Ultimately the balance of representation was not achieved as the Volkenkunde Museum intended, as we saw from the review over this exhibition previously outlined in this paper. A few years earlier in 1992, the department organized another big exhibition on account of the Columbus Quincentennial regarding Herman Ten Kate’s studies and fieldwork in North America. Again, the exhibition consultations with the natives was impossible due to ‘lack of funds and the short time of preparation’ (Hovens 2010:121).

From the last two examples regarding the North America Department’s past exhibitions and source community collaboration, it is evident, that the department has tried to incorporate the native voice into its exhibitions. Unfortunately, it does not seem to be able to do so, due to factors that are not connected with the source community but to the museum, itself. In both the *Herman Ten Kate* and *Indian Story* exhibitions, efforts were made to include source communities in the procedure, but due to a lack of time and money, issues that the Communications department of the museum is responsible for, source community collaboration was not possible to accomplish. From these two incidents a conclusion might be drawn that there must be some kind of disagreement between the North America department and the Communications department of the Volkenkunde Museum regarding the exhibition process. This disagreement does not seem to involve the source community directly, it is more of a disagreement between the museum’s departments, and for that reason, it will not be addressed in this part of the thesis. At this point, reference is being made to the fact with the aim to point out that there seems to be an odd climate between these two departments for the past 20 years. With this in mind the statement of the curator responsible for the North America Department that source community collaboration in reality is much more “down to earth” and “unromantic” that it is usually depicted in theory, becomes clearer.

It is obvious that the North America department, is in collaboration with the source communities in many different ways, in terms of research, publications and even on object conservation matters. In the North America Department’s case, it becomes apparent that contact involves several institutions, national, tribal museums and cultural centers and of course representatives of a tribe visiting for consultation over the collection.

Taking into account, the North America department's experience in working with source communities both in publications and in exhibition projects, we can now approach the main case study, the Northwest Coast exhibition, and the museum's involvement with source communities during the installation of this exhibition.

### **Source Community in the Northwest Coast Exhibition**

Regarding the Northwest coast exhibition programmed to open in October 2012, the museum also came in contact with the representatives from the source communities. The intention of the Volkenkunde museum is to incorporate views on the contemporary situation of the Northwest Coast Indians in the exhibition. Initially, they wanted to employ material borrowed from the British Columbia Tourist Association. Contact was made through e-mails and with the assistant curator's visit to Canada. As mentioned before, this plan had to be abandoned, because of the British Columbia Tourist Association's incapacity to collaborate with the museum due to internal issues. The museum then proposed instead to display objects coming from several contemporary Native artists or the work of one particular artist, who in the past had also collaborated with the Netherlands for the emblem of the Dutch team in the event of the 2010 winter Olympics in Vancouver. In order to do that, they tried to get in contact with these artists and negotiate the possible terms of their participation on the exhibition.

Furthermore, for the commission of the totem pole for the exhibition, the museum had to get in contact with potential carvers. When the plan for the totem pole was finalized, two members of the museum staff traveled to Canada in the beginning of March 2012, and visited the U'mista Cultural Society center in Alert Bay British Columbia. The cultural center introduced three potential artists who would be willing to undertake on the totem pole carving. The museum representatives received the proposal and returned back to Leiden in order to make their decision. Indeed the contact with the source community did not stop there, as in the midst of April the curator responsible, also visited Canada to consult further with the representatives of the source community that were going to participate in the making of this exhibition.

In the Northwest coast exhibition case, contact with the possible source communities for collaboration first began through e-mails, informing the community of what the museum intended to do and how they could contribute to the upcoming exhibition. After the British Columbia Tourist Association first agreed to contribute to the exhibition, a trip to Canada was made by the assistant curator with the purpose, among other tasks, to establish contact, in

person. After the British Columbia association left this collaboration, other potential artists were approached by the museum to contribute to the exhibition.

Since the early stages of the Northwest coast exhibition-making process, the curator responsible, had the intention to leave a gallery in the exhibition's showroom available for the collaborating source community to use freely. In this way, the source community would have the opportunity to depict their view on the Northwest Coast Indians. It would be a gallery free of curatorial intervention. The intention of doing this stems from the North America department's curator view on the inclusion of the native voice in exhibitions. Granting a space within the exhibition showroom solely for the source community to use and express themselves, would constitute as the curator said "a real and substantial cultural exchange", like the source community cooperation ought to be. In other words this gallery would be the source community speaking. According to the curator, the commissioned totem poles, as impressive as they would be, do not constitute an example of cultural exchange but an act of commercial exchange.

Perhaps, that is why the two members of the museum staff that visited U'mista cultural center to discuss about the totem poles, came from the Communications and Financial departments of the museum. In the interview with the Communications department representative who travelled in Canada, she points out how important is to have face to face contact in the course of the source community collaboration. She adds that, matters could be arranged through e-mails and phone calls, but the danger of misunderstandings, due to possible communication gaps, always lurks. She was very pleased to be able to visit Canada and meet with the people from the U'mista culture centre and also some of the Kwakiutl representatives. The Communications department representative notes that "It is very important to look each other in the eye and shake hands and say, we are having a project together. But sometimes that can be a problem because, there are lots and long trips to be made, and the museum doesn't always have the money to make these trips possible."

The striking difference between the Northwest coast exhibition and the *Herman Ten Kate's* and *Indian Story* exhibitions is that in this case there is actual contact between the museum and the source community. This time, the North America department has initiated real cooperation with the source community, at least up until the end of April when I was able to follow the events, before I started writing my thesis. In the Northwest coast exhibition, not only were source community collaboration attempted, but also it has included other departments of the museum in this contact with the source community, like the case of the

*Maori* exhibition. Indeed the motives for evolving the Communications and Financial departments directly in this cooperation with the source community may be different from that of the Maori case, but regardless, it is still contact between the Volkenkunde Museum and the source community. The motives of the visit of the Communications department to Canada will be explained later during the third section of this paper as they are more related with the communication between the museum's departments and not with the source community collaboration, therefore they should be examined on a different context.

## **Feedback**

Having presented several examples of the Volkenkunde museum's collaboration with source communities, it would be appropriate to mention what kind of feedback the museum gets from these communities. The following remarks come from the museum staff in different working positions and indicated with the use of brackets.

The most frequent and general answer given is that the feedback the museum receives from the source communities, whom they have collaborated with is very good. The representatives of the source communities are "impressed", "happy", and "glad", with the collaboration. When the source communities representatives "see the collections in the storages, they see that they are well cared for and they appreciate that", they see that "the objects that their ancestors made are kept with so much care and respect", objects that might no longer be existent "because usually same of these objects were thrown away after use".

These good impressions, with which the people from source communities are left with, form the basis for collaborations in future projects. Often, some suggestions are given. In some cases the feedback they get from the communities is to show more of the museum's collections. Other suggestions may be a little more critical concerning, for instance, the procedures followed or the people chosen to commence the collaboration. For example the cooperating source community representatives' knowledge on cultural matters may be disputed by the rest of the source community, or indigenous elders might be vexed when they are not involved from the very start in a project. Sometimes the community might be disappointed in some particular forms of display, like for example, when the objects are not well presented according to their tradition.

Through these feedbacks, the source communities' opinion is evident of their various collaborations with the museum. From the commentary outlined above, it is understandable that the prevailing feeling of the communities is appreciation for the museum's safekeeping of

the collections. However it is important to keep in mind that these remarks are not coming directly from the representatives of the source communities but from members of the museum staff. Therefore one should be cautious of the fact that there might have been some opinions expressed differently if were articulated from the source community representatives themselves.

Having the source communities' direct opinion would be very useful in order to balance the aforementioned view on the nature of feedback, but that was impossible in this project for two reasons. For one, acquiring the opinions from all the source communities mentioned in the examples presented would demand much more time than the three months of research that I had at my disposal. Next the relationships build between the Volkenkunde Museum and the source communities are well safeguarded. To clarify what exactly I am referring to when I use the word safeguarded, I will now present my attempt to contact the source community of the Northwest Coast exhibition.

In an attempt to gain a more holistic view on the source community collaboration between the North America department and the collaborating source community for the Northwest Coast exhibition, I approached the curator responsible for the exhibition. I respectfully inquired whether it was possible for me to communicate with the representatives of the source community in order to ask some questions on their views on the collaboration. I also suggested that this interview could be done in the presence of the curator responsible, and only after he had reviewed the questions that I would ask. In this way it would be assured that I would not ask something inappropriate or offend any of the participating parties. The curator responsible responded that a meeting of this sort would not be possible, because this collaborating relationship was in its early stages and he did not wanted to take any risks that could harm it in any way. Out of respect for the curator and having already known how difficult the specific exhibition's making process had been up until the time of this conversation, I did not insist on pursuing this line of inquiry.

Another intriguing aspect on the collaboration with the source communities is the Volkenkunde Museum staffs opinion. The museum's stand point on this collaboration has briefly been presented through the examples, but what is their opinion of it, how do they view it and how do they perceive their role in it.

### **The Museum's perspective on the Source Community collaboration**

“Anthropology museums are becoming less object-oriented and more people-and community-oriented, less exclusively focused on the past and increasingly interested in contemporary issues in source communities.”(Hovens 2010:126)

After presenting the ways in which the Volkenkunde museum is working with source communities, it would be suitable to see what the museum staff, involved in these collaborations, thinks about this practice. For instance, one could pose the following questions. Why is a focus on the source community important? How do they view their role in this practice? The following statements and quotes in brackets come from interviews with the museum staff.

The museum nowadays is more open than it was in the past during the decades of the nineteen fifties, nineteen sixties and the nineteen seventies. Even from the nineteen nineties when it was more obligatory than understandable that the museum institution had to be more open to the people whose cultures were exhibited. In order to engage in collaboration with the source communities, the museum had to learn to “let go of control, of the objects, of the people, of the audience”. This control is related with “a colonial disposition” that has dominated the western way of thinking for centuries until now. People up until recently have been accustomed to viewing the collections of indigenous people through the colonial perspective. That perspective is constructed, like the knowledge and the way of the western civilization's thinking, have been molded ever since the Enlightenment, to observe the world in a certain way. There is still a colonial disposition existent, and this becomes apparent in the way that all previous colonial superpowers, like Europe and the United States are dealing with the world.

As an ethnographic museum, the Volkenkunde needs to adjust its practice in order to work in a post-colonial context. The post-colonial era is now a reality. The museum Research department's manager states “letting go of power becomes a necessity”. If someone still wishes to work under a colonial point of view, in the sense that he or she wants to have all the power, the museum's Research department manager explains “serious problems rise and it is impossible to do so, the indigenous people are the ones who are going to decide whether they will work with you or not”. The museum needs to be open and transparent in the post-colonial era and that is exactly what the Volkenkunde museum in Leiden aims to accomplish. Working with source communities is the way to open the museum to the world. For the last 20 years, the museum world has focused on these types of debates regarding source community

collaboration. Especially when it comes to exhibition making, the native voice has to be present, as well expressed by the museum's former director "you can't tell about them without them".

The former director of the museum notes, "Ethnographic museums have been very insulting towards the countries of origin, for many years, by exhibiting them without including the people of these countries in the procedure", and continues "collaboration with source communities is important because it adds importance to all the objects from the collections stored in the depo. It creates opportunities and ways for those who are interested in those collections to get access to them and very often those are the communities". This collaboration is also important for the museum "it enriches the knowledge of the museum staff, which is already vast, although given to the large size of these collections not vast enough". So ultimately more knowledge is being obtained, "if you want to make sense of what there is in the (museum) storage rooms, apart from the academic 'wisdom', there is also the angle of the source community 'wisdom', they talk about the collections and what they mean to them, it is a very fresh point of view".

The museum's ability to become more open and to be able to work within the post-colonial context is imprinted upon source community collaboration. The museum's manager of the Research department remarks that the museum wants to "be open, transparent, bring the communities in collaborating. There is a new kind of knowledge being shared, being produced and new scientific ways of looking objects and results, ways of communicating become more inclusive". But at the same time, while the museum is attempting to be more open, it has to also be very careful in the way it enters these co-operations, "we (the museum) always have to be conscious of our colonial mindset and at the same time of the indigenous mindsets which are very different. It is not a question of which one is better but of being understanding", the museum's manager of the research department notes. The communities' past and present situation is also an important issue to take into account; the research department manager clarifies "we (curators) have to be very aware of the sociopolitical issues within the community, otherwise there can be problems of miss-presentation".

Judging from the museum's representatives who are, for the most part, involved in the source community collaboration, the Volkenkunde Museum tries to keep up with the post-colonial contemporary practices. It focuses more on the source community co-operation and attempts to be more open and transparent to the indigenous cultures and to the public, and from the examples presented above, for the most part, it seems that the museum is successful.



## Roles

The most important role in the source community collaboration falls to the museum's Research department, which consists of the curators. The curators are regional specialists responsible for setting up the collaboration with the source communities. Every curator has a certain thematic and theoretical background, and most of them already have contacts and have worked with source communities because of their interests. They are familiar with the language that their community of study speaks and are able to communicate with them. They also have a certain network within the source community they study and with which they collaborate. These networks are established either during their fieldwork which they have conducted before start working with the museum, or after. Currently, the department consists of eleven curators which cover regions, according to the museum's collections. This way the Research department can cover all thematic areas of the world, but of course that does not mean that they already have contacts with indigenous source communities all over the world.

Each curator views his role in the source community collaboration differently. They all admit that as far as the museum staff is concerned, they are the basic partners in this co-operation. This perception of their role corresponds to the relationship they have with the source community. For example there are curators who mainly come in contact with the source community's institutions, such as museums. In this case the curator sees his or her role as a *negotiator* and sometimes a *diplomat*, he or she have to attend to each partner's benefits (Volkenkunde museum and source community museum) by avoiding miss-understandings. There are also curators who are mostly involved with doing archival research on their source communities. These curators being actually far from the indigenous people, in terms of personal contact, they find themselves in the position of *defending* the source communities' customs and traditions when these are required to be used in a project, as an exhibition for example. Finally there are the curators who have a very personal relationship with the source community they work with, due to extensive fieldwork they have conducted and are still pursuing. This relationship represents a balance between the personal and the professional realm, hence the curator feels the need to *protect* the interests of his or hers source community.

As I have already mentioned, the experience of working with source communities is one that involves most departments of the museum. So even though the Research department shoulders most of the weight of the responsibility for the collaboration, other departments find that they also have certain roles in this procedure.

The director of the museum is one of the main representatives of the institution and always comes in contact with most of the representatives from the source communities. The former director of the Volkenkunde museum view his role on this collaborations as the “*elder*” of this institution, be *‘the wise old’ man*, or in Surinamish terms the *‘captain of the river-ship’*”. He has stimulated the building of these relationships between the museum and the source communities but he recognizes that it is not something that he can take credit for, the curators are the ones that actually build the relationships. The director’s role is more centered on creating an atmosphere of trust and friendship, the real connection with the source communities occurs in a curatorial level.

The Communications department of the museum also comes in contact with representatives from the source communities, though not in all projects. The Communications department becomes involved in the procedure depending on the project. They are usually involved when that project is an exhibition. The department states that “working with source communities fits more to the Research department, because they study the cultures”. This department views itself as more generalists, “we know a little bit about everything”. Their role in the source community co-operation, when an exhibition is involved, is to “*translate*” the information they receive from the research department for the public groups that they expect.

Another department also involved in these co-operations, whether the project is an exhibition, or consultations over the objects of the collections, is the Collection Management department. This department’s “expertise” is to look after the collections of the museum. They position themselves as “*advisors* on what can happen with collections”. Of course the roles of safe keeping the collections and giving advises on how to prevent damage of the objects, and thus protect as much as possible the objects physical condition, is not solely restricted on source community collaboration. These are the Collection Management department’s responsibilities, in general, in the museum. As advisors, their position in the collaboration with source communities is to “*assist*” by giving estimations on what physical damage can be caused to an object if it is to be used. If that is acceptable to the community’s representatives, then there is no reason why the object cannot be used for a certain purpose. The Collection Management department is aware of the fact that they are not the owners of the objects and that there are not “*protecting*” them for their own purposes but for “other parties involvement and interests”.

At this point it would be wise to turn to the issue of the collaboration between the museum departments and source communities. Continuing from what has been previously outlined in the course of this paper, the importance and gravity that the Research department grants this practice is more than obvious. One would conclude that the leading part in source community collaboration is placed upon the research department. Since the curators that are part of the Research department are the ones responsible for creating and building relationships with the source communities, their opinion is more important. The rest of the departments follow their guidelines regarding the museum products produced by this partnership, whether these are research projects or exhibitions. After all the quotes given above from my interviews, the entire museum staff acknowledges their expertise. That would seem to be the case but it is not, especially when it comes to exhibitions.

Though an ethnographic exhibition has to have a correct and infallible content, as every museum exhibition should have, there are more factors to be considered. When it comes to exhibition-making, all of the departments participate, and the same principle applies in working with source communities for making an exhibition. The target of all the departments is to fulfill their own purpose when it comes to exhibition-making. Exhibitions certainly are about content but that is not the only important element of an exhibition. They are also about entertainment and bringing more people in the museum. The two later elements of the exhibitions are responsibilities of other departments in the museum.

In the analysis of the exhibition-making process in the third section of the thesis, the collaboration between the departments will become clearer through analysis. With the main case study, and other examples mentioned, the aims and roles will be further presented and explored.

Now that I have presented the ways that the museum works with source communities, the museum's standpoint in this collaboration, and the different roles taken by the museum's staff during these collaborations, the nature of these co-operations becomes more understandable. In trying to give a little more insight on what the people working in the museum, think of these practices, it would be important to present their views on how collaboration with source communities could be improved. In this way perhaps some points were things could have been done differently can be detected. Issues which the museum, although "it does its best", could have attend to more, or could have done better.

## Thoughts on Improvement

When it comes to collaborating with source communities, the museum recognizes that it is a rather “complex” procedure. The complexity of the matter lies in the undeniable fact that this is a collaboration where two different perceptions on the world meet. On the one hand, we have the museum representatives who mainly express the western viewpoint and the source community representatives who express the community’s viewpoint. As the museum representatives stress out “there is no recipe in how to deal with source communities, but there are some important ingredients” such as, “power balance”, “mutual respect”, “openness”, “transparency”.

As mentioned above, the museum has to let go of control when dealing with such projects, even though sometimes it is not always so keen on doing it. The museum comes in contact with people who hold different views on things, hence different knowledge of the things that the museum keeps and displays. In order to have a balanced view of the collections that the museum holds and of the communities which they originate from, it has to be open to the new type of information that the indigenous people have to offer, recognize their “type of ownership over the collections”, respect their cultural background, and be transparent in its actions in order to gain their trust and start building relationships.

During the collaboration, the museum always has to keep in mind that they are dealing with individuals representing a community and:

“communities are not homogenous, and source community members inevitably represent a range of perspectives. Museums entering into research projects need to deal with this diversity and ensure that different community voices are represented on project teams” (Peers and Brown 2003:4).

There are certain guidelines, morals, values that are not shared or translated the same way by all the Indigenous people of one community. The museum has to be conscious of the fact that the persons representing the community do not speak unanimously for all the people of a community, and in order to be able to recognize something like that, knowledge of the contemporary sociopolitical situation of the community is needed.

The museum believes that there is constant room for improvement. There may not be a recipe on how to conduct collaboration with source communities but there is a “strategy” for future relationship building through “transparency”, “balanced power relations” and “evaluations”. Of course, all these elements concern the ethnographical museum in general and also Volkenkunde museum as it falls into this category.

As far as the National Museum of Ethnography in Leiden is concerned there are more specific parameters that should be taken into consideration according to the statements of the museum staff. Collaboration with source communities could be improved more with adequate budget for conducting the projects, “bringing people over to the Netherlands from distant countries or visiting the countries of origin often to maintain contact, is not always possible when you have to keep up with a certain budget” says the Communications’ department manager. Having enough time to engage into consultations with indigenous people is also very important especially when an exhibition is involved, “for a balanced representation, and that is impossible to achieve when exhibitions are constructed in a very short timeframe” notes the research department manager. So better programming in terms of time and budget is required.

Another rather important parameter that the museum has to also tend to, is the assumption that, since it is open to the world, its standpoint is well recognized, “this museum tends to assume too much. It thinks that everyone knows what it stands for” remarks a member of the Research department. This assumption can and sometimes has, led to problems within collaboration with source communities. The museum’s standpoint has to be further interpreted by presenting the right material, especially to museums or museum related institutions in countries of origin, where contact has not yet been established. So apparently more effort is needed regarding the transparency of the Volkenkunde museum.

Consequently, there is room for improvement as the museum staff indicates. That is only logical taking into consideration that the Volkenkunde Museum has only actively practiced source community collaboration for the past five years. This improvement should focus on the available time and budget and also on the museum’s representation to the source communities.

Up until now, the exhibition’s project group and the source community relationship to this project group have been explored. Also, the ways in which source community collaboration is expressed in the museum, the type of projects that originate from it and how people who are involved in these projects view it has been discussed. From the examples of the *Maori*, the *Chinese terracotta soldiers*’ and the Northwest Coast exhibition it seems apparent that source communities have a crucial role in the ethnographic exhibition making process.

In the next section the exhibition-making process in the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden will be analyzed. Having already identified all the participating interlocutors during the exhibition-making process, meaning construction in the museum, and how this occurs before it contacts the audience will become clearer.

### **Part III: The Process**

In the previous parts, all the participating actors in an ethnographic exhibition-making process were introduced not only generally, but also in terms of the specific case-study of the Northwest coast exhibition. In the first part of the thesis, the exhibition's subject, the Northwest coast Indians, was introduced. In the second part of the thesis, the participants involved in the exhibition-making process were presented and analyzed with a focus placed on the nature of their source community cooperation. This emphasis was needed since, as previously mentioned, source community collaboration is an extremely important practice of a contemporary museum and in particular, an ethnographic museum. It was also a necessary approach for the Northwest coast exhibition, as it is an ethnographic exhibition and as such, attempts to incorporate source community collaboration, in its making process.

With all the participants or interlocutors in the making process of an exhibition presented, in the third part of the thesis, the act of the exhibition-making will be explored. In this part, the process of the exhibition's construction will be analyzed through the Northwest coast exhibition. Focus will be placed on the process and challenges faced during that time, through the Northwest coast exhibition paradigm and from other exhibitions, as well. Also the roles of the participants in this procedure will be analyzed.

The Northwest Coast exhibition will be interpreted, under this prism.

#### **Making of the Northwest Coast Indian exhibition**

The idea for the Northwest Coast exhibition came from outside the museum, in February 2011, from the Canadian ambassador. He proposed to the Volkenkunde museum to have an exhibition based on the travelling exhibition of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Quebec, *Haida: Life, Spirit, Art*. At the time, the museum was also trying to find an exhibition that would bring more visitors in, which would help avoid future deductions in the next governmental subsidy. After reviewing the objects of the travelling exhibition, a first estimation was made on what would be included and what not regarding the displayed objects. So after a first evaluation of the idea and with the approval of the former director of the museum, it was decided that the exhibition would be undertaken.

Once the decision for having the specific project was certain, the project group for this exhibition was formed. The project group consisted of representatives from the departments, previously presented, Communications, Research, and the Collection management departments. Discussions about the exhibition commenced.

At first a proposal was requested from the curator responsible for the exhibition. After evaluating the objects of the travelling collection and estimating the museum's showroom space and the museum's collection, the curator decided that the storyline of the exhibition needed to be changed. The travelling exhibition's objects were not considered masterpieces, and they were too few in number to cover the showroom space. The storyline of the exhibition was altered, and now it involved a general presentation of the Northwest Coast Indians. For this purpose, loans of objects from other museums were pursued. Taking into account the time available to plan the exhibition which was relatively short and the fact that the curatorial position of the North America department is only part-time, the curator requested, in his first proposal, a collaboration with two more curators from other museums.

The project group examined the proposal based on the budget required and the existing budget, and after consultations, they decided that the collaboration of two more curators would be impossible, so that request was rejected. Another proposal was made by the curator which adjusted in a way that could accommodate both the budget and time available.

After the curator's proposal was accepted by the rest of the group, the storyline of the exhibition was decided, and the objects to be used from both from the museum's collection and those requested as loans from other museums were listed, the exhibition's plan started taking shape. The discussions of the project group now turned towards questions regarding the context of the exhibition and how to make the exhibition more exciting. It was suggested that it would be impressive to place outside the museum two totem-poles because that would draw in more visitors in. For that purpose two totem-poles could be commissioned to be carved. This suggestion led to the vice director's request for extra budgetary funds, from sources which included the Canadian embassy or the Dutch-Canadian business community.

In respects to the content of the exhibition, different views on how to make it more appealing to the public started emerging and that became a source of tension between the project group's representatives. During this period an estimation on the list of objects was requested from the Collection Management department. At this point of the exhibition-making process and only 6 months away from the original planned day of the opening of the



exhibition, nothing was certain yet regarding the content, the totem-poles or the extra funding. The only nearly assured matters regarding the exhibition were the requested object loans from the other museums and still that was not completely final (as I had said in the first section a loan request was made from the British Museum which, at that point the British museum had not responded to, and ultimately it never did), and the collaboration with the British Columbia Tourist Association.

January 2012 marked a very interesting period in the exhibition-making process of the Northwest Coast exhibition. Challenges started to appear on different levels, beginning with the time needed for constructing this exhibition. As pointed out by the Research department, and more precisely the curator responsible for the exhibition, the assistant curator of the North America department, and the chief curator of the Research department, the available time for the construction of the Northwest Coast Indians was simply not enough, and that created more pressure to all members involved in the process. This was followed by a lack of sufficient budgetary funds, since as mentioned before the Northwest Coast Indian exhibition had experienced a budget cut during this period so, the extra funding needed for the totem-pole outside display was nowhere to be found. Tensions culminated with discussions over the content of the exhibition in which differing views conflicted.

Before analyzing these varied perspectives, first we have to make note that all of the museum's departments aim to have the best exhibition possible. An ideal exhibition with a concrete and accurate content, and balanced representation of a culture, which will be impressive and appealing to the public, and give more publicity and visitors to the museum. In this respect every department tries to master its goal such as the Research department on the content part and the Communications department on the translation and publicity parts. The difficulty begins when these individual departmental responsibilities start to interfere with one another.

In the case of the Northwest Coast Indians' exhibition, there were lots of discussions over how to make the content of the exhibition more appealing and intriguing to the audience, and this contrasted with the Research department's view on the content. The communication between the two departments, Communications and Research, was so difficult, that during a scheduled meeting of the exhibition's project group with the representatives from the designing company, the designers left the meeting suggesting that a co-operation under these circumstances would be impracticable for actually successfully making an exhibition. One of the subjects of these discussions was whether or not to include the theme of storytelling

(fig.9) in the exhibition. As already mentioned in the first section, storytelling is a very important aspect of the Northwest Coast Indian culture. It consists of myths and legends that narrate the history and traditions of the Northwest Coast Indian groups. What is of great importance to mention regarding the story telling is that, these stories cannot be told by everyone. These stories are property of certain clans and can only be told by authorized people of the clan. They are considered privileges of very specific members of the clan.



**Figure 9: Northwest Indian Storytelling Festival 2010**

The debate, as the assistant curator informed me, started with the Communications department representative, suggesting that using stories from Northwest coast American Indian clans in the exhibition would be very appealing to the public. That suggestion was rejected by the curator, on the basis that this would be an enormous lack of respect to the source community since storytelling is property of the clans and there are very clear restrictions on who is authorized to tell them. This debate over the storytelling was part of a series of discussions regarding the content of the exhibition were negotiations were constantly made between the two departments. The general difficulty was that the knowledge provided by the Research department was unsuccessfully translated by the Communications department into information lacking “substance, content, and connection with reality (source community’s reality)”. The example of the storytelling debate is described here to show the two different ways of thinking that exist in the exhibition’s project group. It also was the last discussion on the matter, when the idea of abandoning the Northwest coast exhibition was beginning to be considered as an option. In order to avoid the abandonment of the project, a new circle of discussions started.

On February 2012, the exhibition’s project group members started consulting with the director, and the chief curator, among others, in order to find a way to overcome this challenge. As the chief curator of the Research department informed me, the way to overcome

the obstacle of the exhibition's content was to send "the people who don't really want to listen or they don't take the curators voice for granted to areas where the indigenous people are, over there they can communicate and interact with them and say: "Oh! They are people too; they are not just the Haida or the Kwakiutl.""

And indeed they went! In the beginning of March 2012 people from the exhibition's project group, the Communication's department representative, who was also the project manager of the exhibition, and a representative from the Finance's department, traveled to Canada and visited the U'mista Cultural Society, a cultural center, in Alert Bay Canada. Once there they came in contact with people from the cultural center, and they talked about the exhibition. Meanwhile the financial problem over the commission of the two totem-poles was resolved. The Finance department of the museum together with the Communications department, estimated that the museum had the budget to ask for the commission of one totem-pole which would be partly carved in Canada, and partly carved in the Volkenkunde museum's garden for the public to see. Part of the negotiations that took place in Alert Bay was the commission of that totem-pole, for which the U'mista Cultural Society was "very enthusiastic" as the Communications department representative noted. The cultural center recommended three possible carvers that could undertake the specific project, and it was left up to the exhibition's project group to make the decision.

March 2012 appeared to be a very good period for the exhibition-making process. Problems related with the communication between the Research and the Communications department seemed to have been restored. This was achieved after clarifying each representative's responsibility in the exhibition and after setting up a few conditions concerning the future of this collaboration between the two departments. At this point, it was more difficult for me to follow the procedure of the exhibition-making process since the time of my arranged internship/fieldwork on the museum was over. Nevertheless, I continued to research the subject through interviews conducted with members of the museum staff involved in the specific procedure.

I was very welcome to conduct these interviews with them. Through these interviews, I was able to keep up with the progress of the exhibition-making process up until the period of writing up my thesis. Though I was not able to be at the museum often and, observe the progress as well as the atmosphere surrounding it, I could still perceive the behavior of my informants when I asked information on the specific subject. These behaviors of the informants during the interviews served as a source of data to understand the

atmosphere around this on going process. My interviewees always started to address the specific subject, with general comments about the exhibition-making process, and about individuals eagerness to succeed towards a common goal. Some of the informants, which were not part of the specific exhibition's project group, commented and gave me information on the challenging obstacles that had emerged and almost led to the exhibition's cancelation. The individuals who were part of the exhibition's project group, expressed their willingness to complete the exhibition. They simply informed me about the progress of the exhibition, and refused to comment on what that miscommunication between the two departments was about; they just gave some insights regarding individuals and goals involved in general terms. Judging from their comments, their reluctance to address the specific subject and also the change in their behavior while doing it so, I drew some conclusions. Even though the communication between the museum departments was restored, and the project was progressing, the tension remained. This tension did not appear to be personal in nature but rather, the product of different professional agendas which is a subject I shall explore further.

By the end of March, things where progressing as planned with the exhibition project. The totem-pole issue was solved, possible carvers where found, the content of the exhibition was decided and the problem caused by the British Columbia Tourist Association, which was mentioned in previous chapters, was also resolved by replacing the gallery that was going to display the material, with artifacts from contemporary artists. By the beginning of April, the process of the exhibition was going as scheduled. The dates for placing the objects in the exhibition room were estimated, the date of the exhibition opening had been decided for midst October and plans for it were made, including plans for an totem-pole rising ceremony before the opening day.

In the middle of April 2012, the curator responsible visited Canada for further consultation with the source community. This was the third visit of a museum representative in Canada within three months, along with the proceeding visits from the assistant curator in February 2012 and the Communications department representative in March 2012.

By the end of May 2012, the first glimpses of the upcoming Northwest Coast exhibition from the museum's Marketing department began to appear on the museum's website. From May 27<sup>th</sup> 2012, certain 'special activities' commenced highlighting American Indians for what the museum described as '*Indian Summer (Indianenzomer) in the Volkenkunde museum*', which is held annually, and this time visitors were reminded that the online access to the American Indian collection was available on the museum website (Museum Volkenkunde 2012). Another very novel way of advertising the museum's



**Figure 10: North American Indian headdress. Comanche, the Plains**

American Indian collection was a post published in the Volkenkunde Museum's social network webpage (facebook). On this post the museum grasped the opportunity of the disclosure of the Dutch team participation from a very famous annual European song contest (Eurovision), to promote the museum's North American Indian collection. The basis of that connection was the Dutch participant's outfit which included a type of headdress resembling in a way the North American Indian headdresses (fig.10). This post was linked to the museum's web page where information about American Indian headdresses was provided.

From the analysis of the Northwest Coast Indians exhibition-making process is obvious that the source of the miscommunication between the departments is the result of their different views of what an exhibition should be about. On the one hand, is the Research department represented by the curator, which wants to create a well scientifically accurate exhibition, where the representation of the Indigenous people will be infallible, balanced and respectful towards the source community. On the other hand, it the Communications department who also wants to present an exhibition based on accurate and respectful content, but additionally wants to create an exhibition which will draw as many visitors as possible into the museum. So the basis of this miscommunication is these two departments' varying goals for the same project. The Research department's goal is to provide accurate knowledge of the culture presented and to also protect the right of the source community to a respectful and balanced presentation of their culture, of their identity. The Communication

department's goal is to create an exhibition designed for the Dutch public which will be impressive and appealing within the available, in each case time and budget.

So essentially, the specific challenge appearing in the Northwest coast exhibition-making process comes down to a very contemporary question in the museum world regarding exhibitions, quality *versus* quantity. The answer to this question will be further explored.

Issues of miscommunication between the museum departments are not solely found in the Northwest Coast exhibition. This exhibition was employed as an example of the kind of challenges faced during the construction of such a project. The museum's Research department manager notes that "in every museum, every exhibit making is friction, especially when it is about indigenous people".

### **Challenges encountered in the making of exhibitions**

Next other challenges which appeared in other recent exhibitions undertaken by the Volkenkunde museum will be presented. The information below comes from interviews conducted with the museum staff.

This miscommunication between departments presented above, is a quite common source of challenges during an exhibition's making process. Another example comes from the *Maori* exhibition in 2010. When the exhibition-making process was on the stage when the posters for promoting the project were to be made, an aspect of miscommunication appeared on whether or not the Maori actually were the first inhabitants of New Zealand. The Publicity department of the museum uses an external company to make the promotion posters for the exhibitions. The idea was to use images of the Maori depicting them as the first inhabitants of New Zealand. That company raised objections on whether or not the Maori were the first inhabitants of New Zealand. They suggested that it would be inaccurate to use Maori images portraying them as New Zealand's first inhabitants. This argument was based on a research that the company itself had conducted which proved that, New Zealand's first inhabitants were actually giants. Consequently, they thought that this image would be more accurate for the exhibition's promotion. The Publicity department after learning of the company's research results on the Maori culture, consulted with the curator responsible to confirm whether their claims were actually true.

The issue emerging in this specific case occurred because of the Publicity department's openness to take into account research conducted by a publications company

instead of relying on the museum's Research department knowledge on the Maori culture. In other words, the knowledge and the cultural expertise of the museum's curator responsible for this region were disputed on the grounds of the research made by a publications company. This situation suggested that the museum's Publicity department placed an advertiser's and a curator's opinion on the Maori culture at the same value.

Another example of miscommunication within the museum's departments comes from the Indonesia exhibition. This is slightly different from the exhibition examples presented thus far. The difference lies in the fact that the Indonesia exhibition is one of the permanent exhibitions of the museum and is not a contemporary one like the *Maori*, the *Chinese terracotta soldiers*, or the *Northwest Coast Indian* exhibition. Due to a general renovation of the museum, over the past year, most of the Volkenkunde permanent exhibitions were closed. Recently from January 2012, showrooms have started to open up again. The Indonesia exhibition is expected to open again during the summer of 2012. Upon this reopening of the exhibition, a new addition was considered. The exhibition will, for the most part keep its original formation, but in the showroom, a gallery with dolls will be added. These dolls were made by the Indonesians under the demand of settlers during Indonesia's colonial occupation by the Dutch, and were given as gifts to the Dutch Queen. The idea of including the dolls in the permanent exhibition replacing a large showcase of textiles came from the Communications department. They thought that the textiles showcase was rather "boring" and the dolls would be more interesting for the Dutch public to view. At first, the curator responsible for Indonesia was against in displaying these dolls, and insisted that textiles are an important part of the Indonesia culture attest to a great deal of symbolism. The curator's main argument against the idea was that it would be awkward to use space in the Indonesia's permanent showroom, "which is already limited", in order to display objects that are not even an Indonesian culture concept, in the place of textiles that hold a particular cultural significance. After consultations between the departments, a compromise was made and the permanent exhibition will now hold both the textiles and the dolls.

In the case of the Indonesia exhibition, the issue of what is interesting enough for the public appears. Again, the issue is debated between the Research and the Communications department. In the end, the addition of an exhibit is decided not based so much in regards to the Indonesian culture but with regards to the tastes of the Dutch public. This raises questions regarding the final form of the exhibition's content in respects of its accuracy. Of course, the dolls were made by Indonesians and their attires may be of Indonesian concept, but these

dolls were not customarily made before the Dutch occupation, and it was not a custom conceptualized by the Indonesians during the occupation as the curator responsible states these dolls are of “colonial concept” they are not “part of their (Indonesian) culture”. Another fact given by this case is that the Communications department has the last saying when it comes to exhibitions. Again, as the curator responsible points out the manager of the Communications department in terms of “what goes in and what goes out in an exhibition, (the) final decision is in her (manager’s) hands”.

One more perspective on the communication between the departments of the museum, comes from the 2012 *Chinese terracotta soldiers* exhibition. In this example, there are no challenges created by miscommunication between the museum departments but the suggestion on the collaboration is quite interesting. In the designing stage of this exhibition-making process, the curator responsible notes that, “it would be good to see more involvement” between the Research department and the designers company, because the designers need to understand more what they are displaying. The curator had some input in the designing process but not as much as he would like. During the exhibition-making process, the curator responsible met with the museum’s publicity department, who then talked with the designers. The curator notes that “you need to create as much as possible coherence between these different departments”. The designer needs to talk with the curator to understand what they aiming to show to the public. The curator would have liked, given that there was enough space at the showroom, to display the terracotta soldiers in such a manner that the visitors could walk all around them. Of course it would be possible to put all the information related to the terracotta soldiers on a text by the exhibit, but it is more important for the audience to see the whole exhibit and ‘observe’ the information given by the exhibit itself.

With this glimpse into the nature of cooperation between the designer and the curator, one could conclude that, the museum does not find it necessary for the designer to know what needs to be shown with an object used in an exhibition. The curatorial department provides the cultural and historical context that surrounds the objects. The objects are part of the storyline. Within this logic and the comment made by the curator, the museum finds it more suitable for the Publicity department to consult the curator and then cooperate with the designers, than for the curator to actually talk with the designers. This is yet another view concerning disagreement on content of the exhibition on the basis of what an exhibition is aiming to show to the visitors. From the level of communication between the Research



department and the designers, one could understand, based on the terms of what the curator and the designer represent in an exhibition, the subsequent level of communication between the content and the design of an exhibition.

Again in these paradigms, we can ascertain that most challenges occur between the museum's Research department and the Communications department. As we noted in the Northwest Coast Indian case, this is not a misunderstanding of particular individuals but a misunderstanding or better, an issue of different interpretations of how to reach the same purpose. The academic knowledge of the curator combined with the cultural knowledge of the source community has to be translated to the Dutch public in an intriguing and appealing way, in order to convince them to visit the museum. This is what the exhibition-making process is all about. And in order to make a successful exhibition both in content and popularity, a balance between education and entertainment has to be achieved. But this necessary balance is quite difficult to reach and maintain. Not only because each department strives to fulfill its goal, external factors also play an important role in maintaining the aforementioned balance.

In the period in which I conducted my research in the museum, the issue of the economic recession was ever-present in the process of exhibition-making. Not in terms of lacking money in the existing budget, but in terms of reassuring a low reduction on the next governmental subsidy. This subsidy given by the government was expected to already be redacted due to general abatements on Cultural funding. The reassurance of a low cut in governmental funding correlates to an increased amount of the museum's visitors. Increasing the number of visitors in the museum is beneficial for the institution for two reasons, for receiving the governmental subsidy and for increasing the institution's profit. The museum receives as mentioned before governmental subsidy that constitutes an almost 60% of the museum's budget, the rest of the 40% of the budget needs to be covered by the museum itself. Of course, the visitors of the museum are not its only source of income; its income is also supplemented by several other projects that the museum undertakes. But visitors are still important.

While interviewing people from the museum staff on the effects on the economic recession, I got different answers. People from the Research department are aware of the issue of quality *versus* quantity, this "has been an ongoing discussion in the Volkenkunde museum for the past 10 years", as I was informed by one of the curators. They do understand that in the last few years more focus is being put towards quantity, of course that does not mean they

agree with it. The Research department is also annoyed by the occasional use of cultural stereotypes in promoting the exhibition to lure visitors in the museum, for example the use of tipi tents as a reference to American Indian housing. Although tipi tents were a type of housing for some Native American groups in the past, they do not represent the housing of all Native Americans especially nowadays. But a compromise is made between the departments, that when the visitor comes in and sees the exhibition he or she will receive infallible and accurate information on the subject. The Research department does feel the effects of economic recession on the exhibition-making process by the amount of focus being given lately on making the exhibitions appealing to the audience. Nevertheless, they believe that the real effects for the museum and the exhibition-making process will be more intense in the coming years, with big subsidy cuts and shrinking departments.

The Collections Management department seems to agree with the Research department in viewing the economic recession as something that will directly affect the museum and hence the exhibition-making process in the coming years. Their main focus was on the possibility of the subsidy decrease along with the decrease of the museum staff which would affect greatly the projects that the museum would like to pursue. That includes research projects, publications, exhibitions, and maintaining a good relationship with the source communities, since contact is very important in this type of relationships. That contact, in financial terms translates as trips around the world.

People from the Communications department seemed to be more conscious of the economical effect that the museum is already experiencing. They informed me that the museum financial issues have been affecting the institution for the past three to four years, as the Volkenkunde Museum had less money than the years before. The museum has emphasized, for the past three years, the need to bring in more visitors, which is unfortunate as my interviewee from the Communications department notes “because Volkenkunde *was* a museum that always focused on quality, but now it has to focus on quantity too” and she continues “we (the museum) are more like a company. We are still an educational institution but we have to earn money too”.

One small contradiction seems to exist to the aforementioned statements from the Communications department and the Research department interviewees. The change of focus of the museum to quantity is placed three years ago, in 2009, by the Communications department, whereas the research department informs us that this has been an issue for ten

years now, something that the review of the 1998 exhibition *Indian Story*, presented in the first section, appears to confirm.

So in the question of quantity over quality, the Volkenkunde Museum's response at the moment is: a forced focus on quantity. This focus is forced because it is not made by the museum but as a result of the museums' connection with external factors such as the government, so here again we turn towards Tony Bennett's and Foucault's views on the museum's relationship with the State.

The effect that the economy has on the museum was mentioned here solely for the purpose to analyze why the museum eventually chooses quantity over quality, and to understand the true source of the museum departments' miscommunication that sometimes affects the exhibition-making process. So now it is understandable why the museum gives priority to the exhibition being more intriguing, why the storytelling in the Northwest Coast Indians case was negotiated on being on display, even though it would be a cultural insult to the North American Indians, and why the Indonesian dolls are going to be on display within the permanent exhibition without them even being a original Indonesian cultural concept. We can also understand why the museum chose an annual European song contest to promote its North American Indian collection, and why it was also considering the publication company's research result according to which, the first inhabitants of New Zealand were giants and not the Maori. Song contests and giants are more appealing to the masses, or to use more financial terms, they are more commercial, they sell more.

All in all, it seems apparent that the exhibition-making is a cooperative process where individuals with different roles and agendas negotiate over the exhibition's related subjects, all for a common purpose, to make a successful exhibition. One member from the Collections department describes exhibition-making as "a discussion based on good communications. Sometimes communication doesn't go necessarily the way you want it to go, so there can be problems for that and there can be frustrations", and continues "if people are involved in the right time and it is clear what the individual project team members responsibilities are, then it goes reasonably well. Most of the time problems come from lack of communication".

So clarity on each project group member's role in the procedure is needed in order to avoid miscommunication. At this point, I will briefly refer to each department's representative role in the procedure of making an exhibition. The word briefly is used because the roles of the people involved have already being mentioned in the second part of

the thesis, in the section on the roles involved in source community collaboration. The reason I mention them again is to show that they do not vary much.

### **Roles within the exhibition-making process**

Starting from the Communications department, the role that the representative has in the exhibition-making is that of the *coordinator* of the process, he will try to keep the balance between the things required for the exhibition with the budget and time available. He is also the *translator* of the research department's information to the public, the "*mediator*" as said by an informant, between the curator and the visitor. He is also the one who *promotes* the projects.

The representative of the Research department is the one who *provides* the content of the project, whether it is an exhibition or some research project or a publication. He is the one responsible for the infallibility of the information provided. He is also responsible for building the relationships with the overseas parties involved in the exhibition, in terms of the source community, whether it is a community or museum related institutions from the source community. He is the *defender* of the source communities' cultural rights in the exhibition and at the same time the *protector* of the source community from the colonial remains of the western mindset, and the power of commercialism. He is the *mediator* of the good and balanced collaboration between the source community and the museum.

And then there is the representative from the Collections department, who is the *advisor* regarding which objects can be used for an exhibition, and how they can be displayed in a manner that protect their physical condition. He is also responsible for the safe transportation of the objects, when required. He is the *mediator* between the Communications, the Research departments and the objects, always in terms of issues related with the objects physical condition.

Additionally in a more subtle way we have the source community representatives. They also *provide* cultural information on the objects and at the same time *protect* their cultural tradition and hence their identity. They are the direct *mediators* between the museum and their culture.

Now the exhibition-making process has already been presented, with all the parties involved. Also the source community's significance to the museum and the museum's projects has been introduced. Moreover, the complications that might occur during the

making of an exhibition have been outlined. With all this in mind, I can conclude in an opinion that answers the main research question, articulated at the beginning of this thesis.

## Conclusion

In the Introduction of this research it was suggested through references to the work of Bennett and Foucault, that the museum's relationship with the political and social scenery of the State never cease to exist. Nevertheless, in recent years as Karp, Lavine, Clifford, Peers and Brown report, among others, several moves have been made in order for the museum to distance itself from the state and diminish its authoritative role, by opening up to its audiences and the cultural communities it exhibits. Different views and opinions are being sought, respected and to a certain degree incorporated in museum products whether that is a research publication or an exhibition.

The museum is an institutional concept that 'acquired its modern form during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries' (Bennett 1995:19). So it is a concept developed during the period of colonialism as a means to promote the idea of nationalism developed also during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, by conceptual definition, the museum is an institution that constructs identities whether these identities refer to the western or other cultures. Up until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, these identities constructed by the museum included the colonial viewpoint, which was a trend that occurred not only in the museum world but in other disciplines, like Anthropology. From the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new era-known as the post-colonial era-emerged that brought changes in the way of thinking and consequently in the world of the museum. Indeed, as previously discussed, the current of critical anthropology in the 1980s is chronologically close with the current of critical museology in the 1990s. These new scientific conceptual modes necessitated a change in the way the museum dealt with its research subjects; the native voice of the peoples whose culture is being safe kept in the museums' storages and exhibited in the museums' showrooms should be included. The native people are to be included in the construction of their identity, and they are to object and protest when their identity is being compromised.

The inclusion of the source communities in the museum suggests a transition in the museum practices. The meaning constructed within the museum has included new interlocutors.

So eventually, returning to the main research question of "*How are the various views and agendas of the people, who are involved in the construction of an exhibition in an*

*Ethnographic museum negotiated, or not, in the exhibition-making procedure and what are the results?*” The answer is formulated based on the presented data.

The individuals, who are involved in the construction of an exhibition in an Ethnographic museum, mainly come from the museum’s departments. The idea for an exhibition can be initiated by anyone from the museum staff, or a person, community, institution outside the museum. The departments involved in the procedure are, the Communications department, the Research department and the Collections Management department. Consequently, when the museum decides to produce an exhibition, a project group is formed consisting of representatives from these three departments, the project manager, the curator, and the collection expert. Each of these representatives expresses the views and agendas of the departments they come from.

The Communications department views the exhibition from the public’s point of view. They pose the guiding question, what type of exhibition would be sufficiently appealing and comprehensible to draw visitors into the museum? This department’s agenda is to make an exhibition that would draw the largest possible amount of visitors. The criterion for achieving that purpose is based on assuring the sufficient museum budget, which the museum has to cover from its own projects. So their agenda is related to the realm of finance.

The Research department views the exhibition from an academic point of view. They pose the guiding question, how to provide infallible, respectful and balanced body of information for the exhibition? This department also expresses the source community’s perspective in the exhibition; they are the ones responsible for building the relationships with the countries of origin, ergo they express the voice of the source community within the exhibition-making procedure. In other words, the agenda of the Research department is to make an exhibition which will give accurate information on the exhibit presented and avoid stereotypes or misrepresentations. The criterion for achieving that purpose is based on maintaining the quality of knowledge that the museum as an educational institution provides. Their agenda is related to the realm of knowledge.

The Collection Management department views the exhibition from the scope of the objects’ safe keeping. They pose the question, how can the objects be displayed in a manner that causes the least possible damage? To put it in another way this department’s agenda is to make an exhibition that will not cause any type of physical damage to the objects, as in a national museum most of the objects are property of the State. The criterion for achieving this

purpose is based on maintaining the quality of the museum collections. Their agenda is related to the realm of collection safe-keeping.

Apart from the respective departments' agenda, each of these representatives is a professional in their field of expertise and also has their own professional agendas. These agendas are common for all the individuals involved in the exhibition making process and are based on the criterion to succeed in their professional carrier. Their professional agenda in the exhibition-making case is to fulfill the purpose that each of the departments that they represent has.

Source community collaboration is a very important and integral part of the Volkenkunde Museum's work, as explicitly demonstrated in the second section of the thesis. That is why I identified the source community as a 'department' that participates in the exhibition-making procedure. The relationships between the Volkenkunde Museum and the source communities are very carefully build by the curators. I came to understand that quite clearly when I requested to conduct an interview with the representatives acting for the source community of the Northwest Coast exhibition, and I was discouraged from doing so. As I previously mentioned, the reason for this was that the connection with that community had been recently made it was still fragile, so all means to protect that connection were necessary. Perhaps, the questions of an intern could have had negative effects.

The manner in which these representatives work and interact was shown through the various examples of the exhibition-making process presented throughout the thesis. The exhibition-making process is a constant dialogue between the departments of the museum and also between the museum and the source communities. This dialogue often contains miscommunications that are either subtle or very intense, but ultimately the exhibition is completed. The question, in all cases, is what will be the resulting type of an exhibition.

The problems or "challenges", as some of my informants like to refer to it, and I have also in the course of this thesis, occur due to contradicting agendas. It is very difficult to create an exhibition that will fulfill all the aforementioned characteristics. It is not impossible though, as the 2010 exhibition on the Maori appears to be an "exceptional" example of a successful collaboration between the museum departments and the source community. It is the exhibition that almost all the informants referred to when they talked about a successful exhibition that was made in collaboration with the source community and drew a lot of visitors. Although as already shown, there were some minor cases of miscommunications.



With agendas contradict each other, the prevailing one determines the result. In this case the result is the exhibition, and the contradicting agendas belong to the Communications department and the Research department. By the references made to the museum's financial structure, one can easily understand which agenda prevails in the end, but that does not necessarily mean that the other department's purpose is disregarded or ignored.

In the case of the Northwest Coast Indians exhibition this contradiction was reinforced by the 1998 exhibition *Indian Stories*. This exhibition caused a breach in the collaboration between the North America research department and the Communications department. In the interview conducted with the former director, I asked about any kind of problems occurring in the Northwest Coast exhibition. The former director in an attempt to provide me with a context of the atmosphere between the two departments, he mentions of a "traumatic experience (taking place) 10 years ago while they were making an (North American) Indian exhibition and that was absolutely horrifying. Although it was a successful exhibition and brought in a lot of people." I did not manage to discover what this traumatic experience was about and maybe that is not needed to further understand the situation. What is made evident by the former director's comment is that, indeed the communication between the Communications department and the North America research department is problematic, and this was not something created during the making process of the Northwest Coast exhibition. That breach was something really evident to me during my fieldwork from their interaction. The result is yet to be seen, as the exhibition process is still ongoing.

To demonstrate how the people involved in the exhibition-making process view this procedure, I will use phrases from my interviews with the museum staff. According to the museum staff, the exhibition-making process is "a co-operative process", "negotiation", "friction", and "constant battle" until the exhibition is completed.

As far as the distance between a museum and the State that houses it in 2012 is concerned, I will answer through the paradigm of the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden. First and foremost, an answer can be provided from the name of the museum, which reads "National Museum of Ethnology" which indicates a sort of connection with the Dutch government to anyone who reads it. A second connection with the government is, as a member from the Collection Management department pointed out, that the objects of the collections of the museum are not considered as property of the institution but as property of the Dutch government, in terms of national heritage. A third connection with the State comes from the previously mentioned governmental subsidy. Taking into account these three

connections, it seems apparent, just like Bennett suggested, that the museum is still connected to the State. But from the Volkenkunde example, it becomes evident that the museum is open to the people and dialectical as a post-colonial museum should be.

The conclusion brought out by this research, is not so much about the distance of the museum from the State as it is the museum's connection with commercialism. It is very interesting that in an educational institution that promotes research and entertainment, there are departments such as marketing and public relations, which as stated before fall into the Communications department's jurisdiction. These are departments commonly found in the world of business and commerce. It is also very interesting that the exhibition's project group manager usually comes from the Communications department, whose agenda lies within the realm of finance. Additionally, commentary from the informants underline that the final decisions on the exhibitions are being made by the Communications department. So in the question of which agenda ultimately emerges victorious, the aforementioned data already provides the answer. At this point, the comment made 12 years ago by the editor of the *Indian Story* exhibition review on the first part of the thesis, describing the interaction between a museum's Research department and Communications department, should be considered '... (it) has become an uphill battle with administrations and managements attempting to impress uninformed or miss-guided politicians and bureaucrats with large number of visitors' (Feest 1999:53). On the basis that a museum constructs and promotes identities, does that mean that, the identities constructed and promoted by museums are put together in such a way in order to attract more visitors, hence not based on accurate data but on necessarily impressive fabrications?

On the question of quality *versus* quantity, which has been a source debate in the museum world for the past 10 years, the answer must be quantity judging from the data. Yet all the members of the museum staff stress out that the museum aims for balance between both, and that is understandable. Stating that the museum aims just or more for either quantity or quality would not be good for the museum's image and would not comply with the ICOM's definition, provided in the beginning of the thesis.

All things considered, what happens during the process of making an exhibition is individuals coming together from different sectors, each expressing varied views and agendas, but all looking to meet the same purpose of, how to make an exceptional exhibition, in terms of the factors of content, publicity, and representation. It is a process of constant dialogue and consultation, a true consultation of the muses.

## Epilogue

As pointed out in several sections of this thesis, the Northwest Coast Indians exhibition is still in the making process. As such, it would not be possible for me to present all of the stages of this process up until the opening of the exhibition, since I had a specific time-line in which I had to conduct my research and submit my paper. In an attempt to collect as much information as possible on the Northwest Coast Indian exhibition's progress, and therefore present a complete, as allowed given the circumstances, portrayal of this exhibition-making process, I decided to hold one final interview, before I submit my thesis. The purpose of this interview was to learn how the exhibition was progressing. I wanted to inquire whether all scheduled activities went as planned in April or whether there had been any changes. This epilogue is meant to serve as the most recent update on the Northwest Coast Indian exhibition, three months before the exhibition's opening.

With this in mind, I visited the curator of the North American department in the Volkenkunde Museum. The following information is derived from our interview.

As previously mentioned the curator responsible for the Northwest Coast exhibition traveled to Canada in the middle of April 2012. While in Canada, the curator met with Bill Cranmer, a Kwakiutl chief who is, one of the executive members in charge of the U'mista cultural centre. Cranmer was in full support of the totem-pole that is going to be manufactured for the exhibition. The curator also visited a gallery of modern Native American Indian art, in the context of including works of contemporary North American Indian artists in the exhibition as already discussed in this thesis. He abandoned the idea of collaborating with the specific art gallery because the art works were too expensive for the museum to afford. After the curator's trip to Canada, two members of the museum visited Alert Bay Canada in order to sign the contracts for the totem-pole at which the curator remarked that "all went well". The totem-pole is already under manufacturing process and is expected to arrive in the Volkenkunde Museum on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2012.

Additionally, the man responsible for the visual material (i.e. video, photos), used in the Northwest Coast exhibition also visited Canada, and at the time that this interview took place June 2012, he was already there. He traveled to Canada for the purposes of collecting

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media which would include the Kwakiutl chief, the Kwakiutl community, and their contemporary way of life.

Until the end of June 2012, the exhibition by and large kept the schedule established in April, even though there were changes. The designers of the exhibition essentially followed the suggestions of the curator but also, added a few alterations of their own. These changes are considered as interference to the exhibition's timeline by the exhibition's curator. Moreover there will be no objects of contemporary art in the exhibition, since it was not possible to find artists to contribute to the project. No contact was achieved with the artist who had designed the emblem of the Dutch team for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. The curator informed me that he could not get in touch with him while he was in Canada, and alternative of using objects of contemporary art from an art gallery, mentioned above, was abandoned.

The most important exhibition change that occurred relates to the travelling exhibition of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Quebec, the *Haida: Life, Spirit, Art* exhibition. It appears that the Volkenkunde Museum was under negotiations with the Canadian Museum of Civilization during the entire period of the exhibition-making process, with the aim to include the *Haida: Life, Spirit, Art* exhibition at a reasonable price. However this exhibition will not be included in the Volkenkunde Northwest Coast Indian exhibition. The reason for this development is that the exhibition was too expensive for the Volkenkunde Museum to borrow. The curator adds that another reason for the failure of this negotiation was that the Volkenkunde Museum lost too much time in negotiations by delaying its bid, the end result he also notes, is a consequence of the Volkenkunde Museum's "bad programming".

With this aforementioned development with the Haida travelling exhibition, in the middle of June 2012, some modifications were put into effect. In place of the objects that were to be displayed from the Haida exhibition, the showroom of the Northwest Coast exhibit will contain video material from the visual expert that collaborates with the Volkenkunde Museum, and the commercial video on rituals provided by the director of the U'mista cultural centre, who is also a professional film-maker. In addition, more objects will be included in the exhibition. The Department of Indian affairs in Ottawa will contribute to the Northwest Coast exhibition with fifteen masks, clothing material and objects of graphic art. Furthermore, the museum decided to include twenty objects from a private collection. As the curator informed me, an individual contacted the museum after learning from the museum's website about the upcoming exhibition, and expresses her desire to contribute to this project. This particular

individual had engaged in volunteering work with the Kwakiutl while she was in Canada and during that time she collected several objects of Kwakiutl material culture via gifts from the natives or personal purchase.

What is truly intriguing, with all of these events taking place in the Northwest Coast exhibition-making process, is the announcement by the curator responsible for the exhibition, at the begging of June, that he will not hold any responsibility for this exhibition.

As it is detailed above, there were a lot of changes taking place after April 2012 in the Northwest Coast exhibition. First and foremost, the exhibition from which the Volkenkunde Museum got the inspiration to make a Northwest Coast exhibition is ultimately not going to be included in the final project. The idea for a gallery that was supposed to display objects of contemporary North American Indian art is not materialize. In the absence of these exhibition elements, the project group of the exhibition decided to add more audiovisual material and objects.

The Northwest Coast exhibition-making process was characterized by the pressure of limited time and the lack of a sufficient budget. The pre-existing bad climate insofar as the communication between the North America department and the Communications department of the Volkenkunde Museum is concerned, also played a part in this situation. The curator's announcement on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2012 that he will not assume any responsibility for the exhibition comes to confirm the rising scale of misunderstandings and the overall working atmosphere.

The Northwest Coast exhibition case is an example where, the different viewpoints on several matters of the exhibition, combined with problems created by time and money, or bad programming even, as the curator noted, failed to meet. It is an example where consultations did not develop smoothly. Nevertheless the project will be completed. The disclaimer of the exhibition, from the Research department representative of the exhibition's project group, could be considered by some as a comment on the exhibition's content. The result is yet to be seen and assessed by the audience.

The exhibition is going to proceed as planned. The opening date of the Northwest Coast exhibition is the 5<sup>th</sup> of October.

## Appendix

Here are the questions asked in the interviews that were conducted during and after my internship/fieldwork with the museum staff in of the Volkenkunde museum in Leiden.

### **Background information:**

- Studies/Specialization
- Previous Experience
- How long have you been working with the museum?
- Function/Role within the museum

### **Exhibition:**

- Who proposed making the exhibition?
- Who made the actual proposal of how the exhibition will look like?
- Narrative/Storyline
- How did the collection came about? (of the artefacts presented)

### **Exhibition making process:**

- Who were/are involved in the exhibition-making process? (lenders, designers, project group)
  - Collaboration with source communities (who are they, how did you contact them, personal network from fieldwork)
  - How was/is the collaboration process?
  - Disagreements, delays within the collaboration with source communities, if so of what kind?
  - How was your experience in working with source communities, any problems encountered? (did you had any feedback from them)
  - Were there any disagreements, delays with the collaboration of different departments within the museum, if so with whom-of what kind-how were they resolved?
  - Are you satisfied with the exhibition? (outcome/ at this stage)
  - What did you plan/are you planning for the opening of the exhibition?
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-Was /is there anything you would like to have done differently in the exhibition?

**Department (Public, Research):**

-Tasks of the department/ what is the department responsible for?

-Who form this department?

-What is the department's role in the exhibition making process?

-Difficulties that the department faces

-What is the department's role in the collaboration with source communities?

-Are there problems in this collaboration and if so of what kind?

-Do you feel that there should be any changes in this collaboration, of what kind?

-How is the collaboration of this department with other departments of the museum?

**Opinions:**

-How does the collaboration with the source communities play out in reality? (Can it be improved, in what way?)

-What is your role (curator, publicity etc.) within the source community collaboration?

-In the aspect of bringing more people in the museum and therefore benefit more economically, are there any "sacrifices" being made in expense of the exhibitions "educational" purpose, If so in what way?

-Has the economic recession influenced the process of the exhibition making (pressure, sudden budget cuts)?

These questions form the structure of the interviews taken. These questions served as a basis from my interviews. There were also many questions in between or following my basic questions according to the responses of my informants, which were different in each interview depending on my interviewee and his or hers answers.

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## Figures

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