

Student: Linda Maria Goltsche
Studentnr: 1266136
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Supervisor: Dr. Nana Leigh

The Social Impact of Ethnological Museums in a Multicultural Society: How Exhibitions Can Act as Agents of Mutual Understanding Between Visitors of Different Cultural and Ethnic Backgrounds.

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Abstract

In this thesis an analysis of the social impact of ethnological museums in a multicultural society is presented. It discusses how exhibitions can act as agents of mutual understanding between adult visitors of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. It specifically analyzes different methods of display and incorporated learning strategies used in temporary exhibitions in the two major ethnological museums, Longing for Mecca in Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden and Black&White in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam.

These exhibitions engage past and current issues concerning Muslim and black citizens respectively - ethnic groups that are largely represented in Dutch society. The first chapter argues that current debates about integration and racial discrimination in the Netherlands often lack a reasonable and respectful approach that is based on mutual understanding and could be fostered by museums. It furthermore illustrates the difficult legacy of ethnological museums as creators of master-narratives that promoted colonial policy and racial stereotypes. Museums are shown to have advanced from oppressive and elitist structures of the past and developing towards more democratic institutions that recognize not only visitors of various backgrounds but also increasingly search for cooperation with cultures whose heritage they exhibit. It will be illustrated that currently, temporary exhibitions appear to bear greater potential to involve and cater to diverse audiences and offer room for individual interpretations than permanent displays that often still bare traces of colonial thinking. The following chapter will argue that contemporary museums, that attempt to facilitate inclusion and mutual understanding, first of all have to enable practical accessibility and present themselves as worthwhile and inviting institutions. Next, barriers that might prevent intellectual or cultural access to museums are revealed and museums are shown to be aware of and responsive to the big impact that cultural frameworks have on interpretation processes. The chapter makes an argument for the use of multi-sensory and interactive displays that cater to different learning types. The final theoretical section of this thesis elaborates on the notion that museums are understood as institutions that can increase the visitor's knowledge and affect his values, attitudes and worldview. A large-scale visitor study, combining quantitative and qualitative data, carried out by the Research Center for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester is presented as a beneficial

approach for detecting potential learning outcomes. The five categories of interconnected Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs), emerging from this study serve as a framework for the analysis of possible visitor experiences in the case studies. It is stated that museums need to undertake more large-scale visitor research that also considers individual experiences, in order to learn which exhibition strategies result in the most desirable learning outcomes.

Both analyses of the case studies illustrate that the museums cooperate with the communities they cater to and present their exhibitions in a way that connects to the experiences of the people whose cultural heritage or present-day situations are represented while enabling all visitors to draw connections to their own realm of experience. The outline of the exhibitions, the practical, cultural and intellectual accessibility, the use of objects, the impact of narratives and personal stories, possibilities for physical engagement and the potential learning outcomes are thoroughly analyzed. It will be argued that by showing many personal stories and displaying various perspectives alongside each other, the museums dedicate themselves to a democratic manner of exhibition making and enable the visitors to get into indirect or direct contact with people and viewpoints they might not encounter in their daily lives. The museums themselves provide information, establish contact between these parties and open up a forum for exchange in which mutual understanding can begin. Black&White will be presented as an outstanding example for an exhibition that facilitates mutual understanding by preventing misunderstanding and acts as the moderator of a reasonable discussion. It will be concluded that while it appears that museums can direct their exhibitions to such broad outcomes as 'understanding', they do not have the potential to predict specific long-term results for all visitors since they bring various learning styles, motivations and interpretive frameworks to the museum. Some shortcomings are found in the educational units of Longing for Mecca that appear to not take full advantage of their educational potential. The thesis closes with a call for a thorough modernization of all exhibitions in the museums in order to create fully inviting environments for the diverse audiences of the 21st century.

Introduction.

This thesis discusses how ethnological museums can cater to adult visitors of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds in order to provide a basis for mutual understanding. It will specifically analyze different methods of display and incorporated learning strategies used in temporary exhibitions in the two major ethnological museums in the Netherlands, which are likely to impact the visitor's interpretation and generation of personal meaning. Possible results will be examined for their potential to facilitate understanding. The thesis will address whether or not the museums in question provide access for their diverse audience and make appropriate use of their educational potential and how they could overcome possible barriers and shortcomings.

The interest for this particular subject derived from reading Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's *Museums and Education. Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance (2007)* in which she describes the findings of evaluation studies conducted in educational programs for school pupils in the UK. One of the findings of these studies is that museums meet the governmental demand of operating in a socially inclusive manner regarding school-based programs. Children of diverse cultural and social backgrounds had positive experiences during their visit, demonstrated the ability to relate newly acquired information to their own lives, showed an increasing sense of individual purpose and identity and experienced empathy with other people. The author points out that museums have not yet succeeded in exploiting the full learning potential for adult visitors of all ages and backgrounds. Instead, adult visitors continue to be representatives of the higher, well-educated social classes and museums show little ambition to offer experiences that go beyond the visual experience of the collections. The thesis will demonstrate how museums can overcome these limitations and reach out to underrepresented groups of adult visitors.

Education and possibilities for lifelong learning nowadays take up a central position in museums, declared not only in mission statements of individual institutions but also in definitions of higher-ranking organizations such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM). Studies carried out by the Research Center for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester offer valuable information on the character of learning in museums and the ways in which museums can contribute to social inclusion. They are especially beneficial for

understanding sociocultural approaches of museum education that recognize the social context of the visitor that provides the framework for the individual shaping of meaning. Publications by associates of Leicester's RCMG like Richard Sandell, Sheila Watson and, especially, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill will therefore significantly shape the theoretical foundation of this thesis. It is however important to note that neither the research done by others nor this thesis can offer exact measurements of learning and interpretation results of museum visitors. Hooper-Greenhill's abovementioned study assigns the large number of statistically measured learning processes and results emerging from interviews with participants to broad categories of learning outcomes. These categories of GLOs (Generic Learning Outcomes) will be used as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the educational potential of museum displays brought forward in the case studies. They are deemed most useful for this analysis because of the underlying combination of considerable statistical evidence and qualitative data, which allow for conclusions about *potential* learning outcomes without ruling out others. It will be argued that museums need to undertake more large-scale visitor research that also considers individual experiences in order to learn which exhibition strategies result in the most desirable learning outcomes.

Ethnological museums offer an interesting environment for a research on the interaction with ethnically diverse audiences. More than any other kind of museum, they hold collections of the cultural heritage of cultures from all over the world and more than any other kind of museum, they have been accused of unfair methods of acquisition and promotion of racial stereotypes in the past. Parts of the thesis discuss the responsibility to contribute to social inclusion that is imposed particularly strongly on ethnological museums due to their shortcomings in the past. As will be mentioned, only in the late 20th century, anthropology started leaning towards a more socio-cultural approach of material culture and museums began to consider the social life of objects and engage with issues of representation. Drawing on another publication by Hooper-Greenhill *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (2000), it will be shown that objects nowadays are thought to make important contributions to the construction of knowledge and identity. Considering museum objects as culturally generative is a useful perspective for a discussion of appropriate representation and cooperation with source

communities in contemporary museums of ethnology. Furthermore, James Clifford's notion of museums as 'contact zones' (1997) will be introduced as a concept that describes conditions which allow for cooperation and exchange between stakeholders of different cultural backgrounds. It is exemplified how museums nowadays explore appropriate ways of exhibiting objects of foreign cultures that meet the demands of increasingly multicultural societies.

The two temporary exhibitions chosen as case studies are *Longing for Mecca – the journey of the pilgrim* in Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden and *Black&White* in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. The analysis of the exhibitions has been established after several visits to both exhibitions; photos taken during those visits serve to illustrate the findings. Furthermore, interviews with staff members who were significantly involved in the planning of the respective exhibitions have been conducted. The interviews add to the analysis and offer an insight into the planning processes, motivations and viewpoints of the exhibition makers. As the research focuses on the possible experiences of adult visitors that occur from an individual visit to the exhibition, special events and additional educational programs for visitors of all ages are not part of the analysis.

Throughout the thesis, the terms 'groups' or 'communities' are used when referring to people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These terms are preferred to 'minority' which implies a high degree of social exclusion that cannot generally be assumed for all members of the groups in question. The research looks at the possibilities for improvement of the relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens and between black and white people in the Netherlands. It assumes that misunderstandings and conflicts can occur between all representatives of these groups, regardless of their social standing and financial or educational background. The terminology also considers that none of the groups is homogenous and self-contained. Many black citizens in the Netherlands are descendants of former slaves in the colonies of the Antilleans and Suriname but black immigrants from other countries might find themselves in similar relationships with their fellow citizens. As will be shown in the following chapter, more Moroccan than Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands practice their religion, making it disputable whether they would consider themselves members of the same group at all. The term community is useful for this research as it is often used to describe local groups of

people sharing for instance the same country of origin or being of the same age. Elizabeth Crooke (2011) elaborates on the concept, explaining people's idea of community might be based on a whole range of deep-going, "thick" characteristics or on few "thin" characteristics. It is "a word that alters in different contexts in an almost chameleon-like fashion".¹ As the interviews with exhibition makers demonstrate, 'community' is a widely used term in the museum world that helps to make audiences of various backgrounds graspable.

'Understanding' is a broad term that throughout this thesis is used to describe a state of mind in which people set aside their most destructive prejudices and approach each other on the basis of general mutual interest and respect. Understanding can entail more specific results such as a growing interest in learning about another culture, changing political stances or the beginning of regular contact and enduring relationships between people of different backgrounds. These possible results have the potential to contribute to greater social equality and a more peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society.

Chapter 1 introduces some of the issues prevalent in Dutch society that support the call for increasing mutual understanding. It particularly looks at the endangered relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands that has resulted in many direct confrontations in the past years. Furthermore, this chapter elaborates on the ways ethnological museums have prevented understanding in the past and instead have actively excluded people whose objects they collected. Finally, it is discussed how museums have moved on from oppressive practices since the 20th century and have increasingly searched for cooperation with ethnic communities and embraced new visitor groups. The chapter also offers an impression of the contemporary practices in Museum Volkenkunde and the Tropenmuseum.

The following Chapter 2 discusses the ways in which museums can become more accessible and offer satisfactory learning opportunities to their adult visitors. It mentions barriers that might prevent people from visiting or returning to a museum and those that might inhibit intellectual

¹ Crooke, Elizabeth: *Museums and Community*. In Macdonald, Sharon (ed.): *A companion to Museum Studies*. Malden, Blackwell. 2011. pp.172-173.

and cultural access to a collection. Museums are shown to be aware of and responsive to the big impact that cultural frameworks have on interpretation processes. The chapter makes an argument for the use of multi-sensory and interactive displays that cater to different learning types. Finally, it introduces the potential learning outcomes that can affect people's attitudes and behavior and form a basis for understanding.

Chapter 3 and 4 discuss the case studies in Museum Volkenkunde and the Tropenmuseum. Both chapters elaborate on the ways the museums have reached out to the communities they cater to in the planning of the exhibitions as well as in their efforts to become inviting to potential visitors. Each exhibition is being considered as an entity that potentially evokes strong interpretation and learning outcomes through its significant content, overall design, particular displays and opportunities for direct engagement and reflection. Where necessary, the analysis points out shortcomings of the exhibition and suggests possible improvements.

The final conclusion characterizes the strongest findings about the museum's potential to contribute to mutual understanding. It furthermore interprets understanding as a basis for more specific and long-term results that might challenge particular problems in multicultural societies. Finally, the conclusion presents some remaining issues for the future of ethnological museums.

1. The Inclusion of Ethnic Communities in Ethnological Museums.

Why Understanding Each Other Is Crucial: Muslim and Black Inhabitants in the Netherlands.

As stated in the introduction, this thesis examines the ways museums cater to adult visitors in order to foster mutual understanding between people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The two exhibitions that have been selected as case studies take a look at the lives of (Dutch) Muslims carrying out the Hajj and black and white citizens living with each other in the Netherlands, respectively. Both of these ethnic groups are largely represented in Dutch society as Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese and Antillean people form the four largest groups of non-Western immigrants; their members experience varying degrees of social inclusion and acceptance.

According to a sample survey conducted by the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek/CBS (Statistics Netherlands) in 2006, five percent of the Dutch population are Muslims, making the Islam the third biggest religious denomination in the country after Protestantism (19 %) and Catholicism (29 %) while 42 percent of the Dutch citizens state to have no religion.² Most Muslims living in the Netherlands come from Turkey (38 %) and Morocco (31 %) and other non-Western countries, primarily Suriname, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia.³ Another study, conducted by the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (The Netherlands Institute for Social Research) in 2012 shows that only 20 percent of all Turkish Muslims practice their religion while almost all Moroccan and Somalian Muslims are religious. Unlike predicted in an earlier study in 2004, the SCP found little evidence for growing secularization in 2012; according to the report a growing number of second-generation Muslims visits the Mosque on a weekly basis and

² Cp. van Herten, Marieke: *Weinig Nederlanders gaan regelmatig naar kerk of moskee*. CBS webmagazine, 11/06/2008. URL: <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/vrije-tijd-cultuur/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2008/2008-2476-wm.htm>. (25/03/2014)

³ Cp. van Herten, Marieke: *Ruim 850 duizend islamieten in Nederland*. CBS webmagazine, 24/10/2007. URL: <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/vrije-tijd-cultuur/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2007/2007-2278-wm.htm>. (25/03/2014)

marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims remain widely undesired. In addition, the study states that 63 percent of the Turkish Muslims and 80 percent of the Moroccan Muslims feel that Dutch people show a negative attitude towards Islam.⁴ Feeling discriminated against is a subjective feeling which is why these percentages do not offer reliable information about the actual attitudes of Dutch people towards Islam. The large percentage of people who perceive rejection does however indicate the necessity to improve the relationship between Muslim people and their fellow citizens.

A look at public disputes and changes in the political landscape of the Netherlands reinforces this impression. In recent years Muslims have often been accused of demonstrating a lack of willingness to integrate themselves into Dutch society. Especially Moroccan people have been criticized for their unwillingness to adapt to the Dutch culture and language as well as for their high involvement in crimes. Since the early 21st century political populism from the right has been on the rise in the Netherlands, significantly influencing public debates about Islam. In 2002 Pim Fortuyn, leader of the party *Lijst Pim Fortuyn*, polarized the political landscape with blatant statements about unresolved issues in different areas, distancing himself from the political climate of moderation and consent. He publicly denounced Islam as a backward culture and pleaded for harder integration policy that obligates Muslim immigrants to learn the Dutch language and fully adapt to Dutch culture. Fortuyn offered few concrete plans but attracted much public attention by disregarding what was considered to be political correctness. He achieved significant political success in the 2002 local elections when *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* became the strongest party in Rotterdam with 35 percent of the votes, but he was murdered by a radical environmental activist in May 2002, one week before the parliamentary elections.⁵

Two years later, in November 2004, the filmmaker Theo van Gogh who was criticizing Islam in his works, was murdered by a Moroccan Islamic fundamentalist. At the end of the same year radicals set fire to several mosques and Islamic schools. While the situation did not escalate any

⁴ Cp. Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau: Persbericht. Geloof blijft belangrijk voor Nederlandse moslims. Den Haag, 06/11/2012. URL: [file:///vuw/Personal\\$/Homes/12/s1266136/Downloads/Persbericht%20Moslim%20in%20Nederland.pdf](file:///vuw/Personal$/Homes/12/s1266136/Downloads/Persbericht%20Moslim%20in%20Nederland.pdf). (27/03/2014)

⁵ Wielenga, Friso: Die Niederlande. Politik und politische Kultur im 20. Jahrhundert. Münster, Waxmann. 2008. pp. 356-358.

further, the events certainly drew attention to the often problematic relationship between Dutch citizens and Muslim immigrants. Many political observers blamed the escalations on shortcomings in integration policy, stating that the famous tolerance of the Dutch was in fact ignorance of different population groups that were coexisting but not cooperating.⁶

Since 2005, the populist one-man party *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV, Party for Freedom) of Geert Wilders has polarized the political landscape; high results in the parliamentary elections in 2010 even led to the party's supporting role in the minority government of Mark Rutte. Wilders is pleading for a harsh immigration policy that is particularly directed at people from Central and Eastern Europe and migrants from Islamic countries. Some of his most radical goals concern the practice of Islamic culture in the Netherlands such as the closing of Islamic schools, the introduction of a tax for headscarves and the prohibition of the Burka and the Quran.⁷ Wilders' Islamophobic statements often occupy the news for weeks, leading to heated follow-up discussions between representatives of different political parties, followers of the PVV and Muslim communities.

Populist parties such as the PVV build their campaigns around oversimplified statements that attract the attention of the masses. In its manifesto, the PVV declares: "The Islam is most of all a political ideology; a totalitarian doctrine aiming at dominance, violence and oppression."⁸ Hate-filled and uninformed statements like these are likely to prevent a peaceful approach towards the problems and instead provoke equally unreasonable reactions. Mutual understanding is therefore an absolute necessity for a rational discussion between representatives of different ethnic groups.

Black inhabitants in the Netherlands are an even more diverse group, as their geographical origin, religious affiliation and citizenship status differ widely. Many originate from Suriname and the former Netherlands Antilles and are descendants of former slaves. Slavery has been abolished in Suriname and the Antilles in 1863 and mass immigration of (newly) Dutch citizens

⁶ Ibid. p. 361.

⁷ Cp. Verkiezingsprogramma Partij voor de Vrijheid: De agenda van hoop en optimisme. Een tijd om te kiezen: PVV 2010-2015. p.15. URL: http://www.pvv.nl/images/stories/Webversie_VerkiezingsProgrammaPVV.pdf. (25/03/2014).

⁸ Cp. Ibid. p. 13.

from the former colonies to the Netherlands began in the 20th century. Therefore a lot of black Dutch families have been in the Netherlands for generations while others have immigrated more recently.⁹ People born on Aruba, Curacao or Sint Maarten today hold Dutch citizenship.¹⁰ Many other black citizens belong to the ever-growing group of refugees and asylum-seekers from Somalia that have been coming to the Netherlands since the beginning of the Somalian civil war in 1986.¹¹ A report concerning the development of integration of immigrants in the Netherlands, published by CBS in 2012, illustrates that Surinamese and Antillean citizens live less segregated from Dutch citizens than immigrants from Morocco or Turkey. They have frequent contact with people outside their own group, and especially members of the second generation consider themselves part of Dutch society.¹² It seems likely that this high degree of social integration is due to the historical affiliation of the colonies to the Netherlands and the fact that Dutch is the native language of many people from the former colonies. Nevertheless, the report also indicates the high representation of Antilleans in crime statistics, especially concerning criminal assault and property crime.¹³ People of Somalian origin are shown to be facing a lot of problems with the Dutch language and less than a quarter of the Somalian population between the ages of 25 and 65 in the Netherlands is employed.¹⁴ Shortcomings of the integration process are regularly subject to heated public debates; especially in case of Somalian immigrants, most of whom are Muslims, the debates overlap with the aforementioned Islam-critical trends in the political culture of the Netherlands.

While integration – or the lack thereof – is a widely acknowledged issue in Dutch society, racial discrimination is often trivialized or thought to have vanished altogether. The debate around the character of ‘Zwarte Piet’ puts this notion into perspective as it offers the most prominent

⁹ It is important to note that while most black citizens originate from the former colonies, not all of the 347.000 Surinamese and the 144.000 Antilleans residing in the Netherlands in 2012 are black, which again indicates the incomprehensibility of this group.

¹⁰ Article 3.3 of the Dutch Nationality Act, *Rijkswet op het Nederlandschap*.

URL: http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0003738/geldigheidsdatum_09-07-2014 (09/07/2014).

¹¹ In 2012 there were 34.000 Somalians living in the Netherlands. Cp. Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek: Jaarrapport Integratie 2012. Den Haag/Heerlen, CBS/Grafimedia. 2012. p.37. URL:

<http://www.cbs.nl/NR/rdonlyres/A1B765EE-5130-481A-A826-2DCCD89F81C9/0/2012b61pub.pdf>. (09/07/2014).

¹² Ibid. pp. 10, 154-156.

¹³ Ibid. p. 188.

¹⁴ Ibid pp. 152-153, 118.

example of a contemporary discussion about skin color and the legacy of slavery. The helper of Sinterklaas is based on illustrations of black Moor pages from the mid-19th century, dressed in a colorful Renaissance-style servant's uniform with a black face and bright red lips. Opponents of the tradition criticize the depiction for its relation to colonial oppression and slavery and see it as an offense towards black people. Others defend Zwarte Piet as an innocent and jolly character, free of racist undertones, who belongs to the Sinterklaas tradition and should not be altered. The discussion regularly dominates the Dutch media in the weeks before the Sinterklaas celebrations on December 5th and reached a peak in 2013 when official complaints against the parade in Amsterdam were submitted and a member of the United Nations Human Rights council joined the discussion in favor of the opponents of Zwarte Piet. In July 2014 a court verdict in Amsterdam declared Zwarte Piet offensive, forcing the mayor to revise the license for the next parade and likely causing the organizers to alter the representation of Zwarte Piet.¹⁵ More than the possible outcomes and compromises that will result from that, it is the discussion itself that draws attention to neglected issues. Many people who are defending Zwarte Piet as entirely innocent seem to disregard the obvious colonial connotations and the ongoing impact these representations have on black citizens nowadays. The fact that many of the complaints originate from within Surinamese and Antillean communities who represent a large part of Dutch society indicates the need for a reasonable exchange in which both sides understand and respect each other's agendas. Unlike social media such as Facebook and Twitter, a museum can offer a physical platform for this sort of discussion that is open to everybody and confront the participants with the necessary background information while moderating the discussion.

¹⁵ Cp. Van der Velden, Lisa: Rechter Amsterdam: Zwarte Piet is een kwetsend figuur. In: Volkrant.nl, 03/07/2014.
URL:
<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/3683270/2014/07/03/Rechter-Amsterdam-Zwarte-Piet-is-een-kwetsend-figuur.dhtml>. (09/07/2014)

How Understanding Was Impeded: The Difficult Legacy of Ethnological Museums.

Objects deriving from non-Western cultures have been housed in European cabinets of curiosities since the Renaissance and were later included in museums of art or natural history. Only in the middle of the 19th century, the ethnological museum was established as a separate category, displaying existing collections alongside recently acquired objects from colonies. The newly emerging national states were competing for hegemony in Europe as well as in their colonial territories and ethnological museums served as evidence of successful expansion and inspiration for a national consciousness. Rather than facilitate understanding for foreign cultures, the ethnological museums of the 19th century created difference and claimed authority over the cultures they exhibited and the experiences of their visitors. This becomes evident when looking at the means of acquisition and display and the relationship between museums and their audiences.

Collecting activities were less restricted by ethical considerations in the 19th century than they are today and often they were based on and justified by the assumption that one was dealing with dying cultures anyway. Scientific exhibitions conducted by museums or governmental institutions of the colonizing nations, especially France, Britain and Germany, brought home objects from all corners of their overseas territories often wrongfully acquired through looting and desecration.¹⁶ Consequently, many objects that hold profound meaning to their cultures of origin, such as sacred artifacts, ceremonial objects and even human remains found their way into Western collections. The acquisition of these objects and the knowledge and power embodied in them caused immense shifts in authority over the source culture's identity. Only after the 1970s did this lead to ethical debates about repatriation, many of which are still going on today.¹⁷

The display of objects often promoted stereotypical and racist views of colonized peoples and served to convince the audience of the need to civilize them. In many cases, artifacts of indigenous peoples were displayed among objects of natural history which illustrates the

¹⁶ Cp. Shelton, Anthony Alan: *Museums and Anthropologies: Practices and Narratives*. In: Macdonald, Sharon (ed.) (2011), pp. 67-69.

¹⁷ Cp. Bouquet, Mary: *Museums. A Visual Anthropology*. London/New York, Berg. 2012. pp. 152-154.

common perception that their lives were less socially and technically advanced than those of Western cultures.¹⁸ Evolutionary arrangements adopted from archeological exhibitions such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford took that notion further by comparing objects and placing cultures at different stages of evolutionary development with 'primitive' peoples on a lower stage than the civilized European cultures. Typological and geographical systems of classification such as those developed by von Siebold and Jomard allowed for a scientific display of objects that focused on their function but denied the cultures of origin any sense of aesthetic or refined artistic behavior.¹⁹ Instead, as Welsch and others state in their examination of World Art, "their art was considered ugly, misshapen, out of proportion, and associated with "primitive" rituals and magic. Such objects offered proof that tribal peoples were too primitive to manage the valuable resources of their native countries, resources that European industrialists coveted."²⁰ Ethnological museums thus not only justified collecting activities but promoted the notion that colonial policy was the right and the responsibility of superior societies.

Furthermore, being royal or national institutions, ethnological museums served a unifying function for their respective nations, evoking a sense of pride and competition with other colonial powers. According to Mary Bouquet, the "spectacle of others" who were shown to be at a lower stage of development was an appealing experience for visitors of all social classes who felt they were part of a superior society. Exhibitions in ethnological museums or at World Expositions were means of mass communication since they were presented ideas about the world to the majority of the population that had no opportunities to travel and gain first-hand knowledge about foreign cultures.²¹ Additionally, they served the purpose of civilizing the lower classes by introducing them to the visual, intellectual learning styles of the higher social classes.²² Education was thus understood in a broad sense rather than being directed at individuals and held notions of social control. The matters of display emphasized the visual

¹⁸ Cp. Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean: *Museums and Education. Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*. New York, Routledge. 2007. p. 195.

¹⁹ Cp. Shelton (2011), pp. 65-66.

²⁰ Welsch, Robert L., Venbrux, Eric, Sheffield Rosi, Pamela (eds.): *Exploring World Art*. Long Grove, Waveland Press. 2006. p. 2.

²¹ Bouquet (2012). pp. 72-76.

²² Cp. Hooper-Greenhill (2007). p. 197.

experience and navigated the visitor's glance through the collections. By deliberately including or excluding objects and stories in their exhibitions and creating an apparently harmonious and complete overview, museums created so-called master narratives. The "modernist museum", as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill labels the nineteenth-century European model, chooses a one-way path of communicating apparent truths to its passive visitor.²³

The two museums discussed in this thesis are the most prominent examples for ethnological museums in the Netherlands, both dating back to colonial times. When it opened its doors in 1837, Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde (formerly: Rijks Ethnographisch Museum) was one of the first ethnological museums in the world. The early collections consisted of objects acquired in China, Indonesia and Japan, commissioned by King Willem I (1772-1843) and about 5000 Japanese objects from the private collection of Philip Franz von Siebold, a German physician working for the Dutch military in Japan and the Dutch East Indies.²⁴ The Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam forms part of the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (Royal Tropical Institute), founded in 1910 as an institution dedicated to the scientific studies of the Dutch overseas territories. The institute and its collections emerged from the Koloniaal Museum, founded in Haarlem in 1864 that exhibited objects brought to the Netherlands from the colonies.²⁵ In April 2014, Museum Volkenkunde, Tropenmuseum and the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal merged into the new Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures). Due to major budget cuts in the past years, the three museums had already been working together closely before the ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Foreign Trade and the committee for International Trade and Development Cooperation granted funds for a merged institution. The museums will remain in their current locations and focus their cooperation on public services, education, scientific research, international cooperation and entrepreneurship. According to its

²³ Cp. Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean: *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. New York, Routledge. 2000. p. 151.

²⁴ Cp. Museum Volkenkunde: *We zijn al 175 jaar oud*. URL: <http://volkenkunde.nl/175-jaar-volkenkunde>. (16/04/2014).

²⁵ Cp. Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen: *Geschiedenis*. URL: <http://www.kit.nl/kit/Geschiedenis>. (16/04/2014).

mission statement, the National Museum of World Cultures aims at contributing to an open view at the world.²⁶

Laying the Foundations for Understanding in Ethnological Museums.

As demonstrated in the previous section, European museums of ethnology have long served as agents of colonial power in their mother countries and have promoted notions of Western supremacy. By objectifying representatives of other ethnicities and reinforcing racial stereotypes they prevented any respectful approach towards the cultures they exhibited, let alone understanding. Only in the 20th century, postcolonial thinking and the demands of increasingly multicultural societies influenced museum practice and changed the very nature of ethnographical museums.

According to Anthony Alan Shelton, after decolonization ethnological museums were confronted with the task of gaining social relevance but largely failed to find coherent, sustained and legitimating narratives appropriate for postcolonial times.²⁷ Important changes occurred in the 1980s from within anthropology when the discipline began to study material culture in its own right rather than using it as visual evidence for their research. Studies conducted during the so-called “visual turn in anthropology” focused on relations between people and objects and the social life of artifacts, as Mary Bouquet (2012) illustrates, and provided museums with the much needed relevance for contemporary society. Researchers also reengaged with historic collections and made attempts to analyze their entangled histories. These developments were crucial for the development of the ethnological museum as a more democratic institution because in order to uncover the full context of ethnological artefacts, it was considered necessary to engage in a dialogue with the respective source communities.²⁸

The need for social inclusion and community outreach is stated in the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (2004), which demonstrates a growing international awareness for the role of

²⁶ Tropenmuseum: Tropenmuseum, Afrika museum en Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde gefuseerd tot nieuw nationaal museum. URL: <http://topenmuseum.nl/nl/fusie-volkenkundige-musea>. (16/04/2014).

²⁷ Shelton (2011), p.73.

²⁸ Cp. Bouquet (2012), pp. 94-97.

museums as social mediators.²⁹ Principle number six states: “Museums work in close collaboration with the communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve”.³⁰ The following guidelines call for the return and restitution of cultural property that has been wrongfully taken from its country or people of origin, calling upon the museum’s willingness to correct past wrongdoings and scrutinize their own histories. According to the Code of Ethics, museums have to involve contemporary communities in the process of exhibiting their heritage, gain their consent and respect their wishes and traditions.³¹ The inclusion of these principles in the Code of Ethics highlights a radical rethinking: not only is it scientifically necessary to include and consult the ethnic groups whose heritage is exhibited but refusing to do so is condemned as unethical in the museum world.

According to David Fleming (2002), museums also become more socially inclusive by abandoning the traditional structures within the institution. Hierarchical structures are lowered and museum staff receives more professional training, especially with regard to teamwork. Museum recruits nowadays show diversity in gender affiliation and socio-economic background, which strengthens connections to diverse communities and makes it “a democratized profession rather than an elitist one”. He furthermore addresses the need to fulfill governmental demands to consult their visitors and meet their needs in order to remain eligible for public funding and become socially inclusive.³²

What has been elaborated on so far are general shifts in attitudes towards ethnic communities that are likely to result in exhibitions that have the potential to foster understanding between different ethnic groups. It is however important to realize that the representation of cultural

²⁹ ICOM: International Council of Museums. ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums was adopted in 1986 and revised in 2004. It establishes the values and principles shared by ICOM and the international museum community. It is a reference tool translated into 36 languages and it sets minimum standards of professional practice and performance for museums and their staff. By joining ICOM, each member agrees to respect this code. URL: <http://icom.museum/the-vision/code-of-ethics/> (10/04/14).

³⁰ International Council of Museums: ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums. ICOM 2013. pp.10-11. URL: http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Codes/code_ethics2013_eng.pdf. (10/04/14).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Fleming, David: Positioning the museum for social inclusion. In: Sandell, Richard (ed): *Museums, Society, Inequality*. London/New York, Routledge. 2002. p. 220.

heritage in museums is the result of complex interplays of interests. According to Carol Duncan (1995), “to control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths.”³³ In ethnographical museums where the interests of several different communities congregate, it can be crucial to find ways of cooperating that are decisive rather than advisory. James Clifford (1997) uses the concept of museums as contact zones, “the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations”. Clifford argues that museums will continue to be regarded as paternalistic unless they engage in collaborative exhibition planning and share the control over their collections and thus incorporate a wider range of historical experiences and political agendas. He does however point out that in many cases the connections between communities and collections are indirect, which complicates decisions about authority and representation and presents museums with the task of negotiating critically without offending their potential audiences.³⁴ The concept of contact zones is highly useful for understanding agencies in the contemporary museum, as turning to source communities in the process of interpreting collections can not only explain and contextualize the objects but also draw connections to their current situation and “ongoing stories of struggle”.³⁵ Museums that choose to share control and power by engaging in contact work thus not only fulfill their role as preservers of cultural heritage but demonstrate a sense of responsibility for their collections and take the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to contemporary social and political debates.

An example of successful cooperation with an ethnic community that goes beyond mere consultation is the exhibition *Het Verhaal van de Totempaal* (The Story of the Totem pole) about Native American cultures of the Northwest Coast that was on display in Museum Volkenkunde from October 2012 until April 2013. The central object, an eight-meter-high totem pole, was put up at the center of the exhibition room and accompanied by related objects and video

³³ Duncan, Carol: The Art Museum as Ritual. 1995. In: Preziosi, Donald: The Art of Art History. A Critical Anthology. Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press. 2009. p. 425.

³⁴ Clifford, James: Museums as Contact Zones. In: Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century. Cambridge, Harvard University Press. 1997. pp. 192, 208.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 193.

documentations.³⁶ In the weeks before the opening of the exhibition, the half-finished pole was completed in the museum by a team of Kwakwaka'wakw-artists, indigenous people from Vancouver Island, under the direction of famous artist Rande Cook.³⁷ The crafting process was open to the public and was documented on film for the exhibition. After the exhibition ended, the totem pole was put up outside the museum entrance where it is now permanently on display. Rande Cook has chosen to include his father's and grandmother's family symbols, a thunderbird and a killer whale, and the face of a man in the middle as representations of the elements and personal connecting symbols. The totem pole is therefore a highly personal object made by a contemporary representative of an ethnic community and the point of departure for him to share the stories of his people, explain culturally specific practices and allow the visitor an insight into the lives of contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw-people. The museum exhibits and keeps the totem pole while the artist chooses how much of his intangible heritage he shares with the public, creating a state of shared authority. Many other objects of different Native American cultures shown in the exhibition belong to the historic collections of the museum. By commissioning a new object and documenting its making, the museum positions itself as a relevant platform for contemporary indigenous cultures and their needs.

Ethnographical museums still have to go a long way to make this sort of reciprocal exchange with source communities their principle of operation. A visit of the permanent collections of both Tropenmuseum and Museum Volkenkunde clearly shows that more democratic principles have not yet transformed the entire collections. The different exhibition rooms of the Tropenmuseum show a variety of different approaches, some of which appear to be more than outdated. In the section about the Dutch East Indies – the use of the colonial term for Indonesia is debatable in itself – seven life-size mannequins tell the personal stories of Dutch citizens living in the colonies. There is no similar display that offers historical accounts of the experiences of the colonized peoples. Instead they become visible through their artefacts which were collected by the Dutch, making them objects to the colonizing subjects. Not only does this section

³⁶ Museum Volkenkunde: Het Verhaal van de Totempaal. URL: <http://volkenkunde.nl/nl/verhaal-van-de-totempaal> (12/04/14).

³⁷ Museum Volkenkunde: Het houtsnijdersteam. URL: <http://totempaal.volkenkunde.nl/nl/houtsnijdersteam> (12/04/14).

demonstrate a highly uncritical view on Dutch colonialism but by excluding Indonesian people from the historical display, the museum also excludes current Dutch citizens of Indonesian origin. The permanent exhibition on Indonesia in Museum Volkenkunde is much more topical and does justice to cultural and ethnic diversity in the past and present, while making clear and neutral references to colonial history. It takes a closer look to notice that the museum is not sufficiently engaging with its own colonial past. Six statues of the Javanese Singosari temple are placed at the entrance of the exhibition room with the information board declaring them the masterpieces of the collection due to their rich religious symbolism and cultural significance. The museum informs the visitor about the acquisition by Dutch Governor Engelhardt in the early-19th century but does not address the precise circumstances. Considering that the acquisition took place during the colonial reign, it can be assumed that the statues were either bought for a price that does not reflect their actual worth or even looted. At this part of the exhibition, Museum Volkenkunde avoids a discussion about its past involvement in unethical practices and instead presents the statues in a 19th century fashion that evokes awe and pride. These visible relicts of the colonial past seem to conflict with temporary exhibitions and outreach programs that aim at inclusion of (source) communities and question practices of the past. According to Anthony Shelton (2011) however, temporary exhibitions in ethnological museums are most likely to reflect critical scholarship and new exhibition practice as they developed independently from grand narratives and seemingly universal truths.³⁸

³⁸ Shelton (2011), p. 78.

2. Accessibility and Learning Opportunities for the Adult Museum Visitor: Contemporary Approaches and Possible Outcomes.

Basic Accessibility.

In order to contribute to the combatting of exclusion and misunderstanding between ethnic groups, museums have to create inviting environments for all their target audiences. Graham Black (2005) points out that it is necessary to create enduring relationships with new, previously underrepresented groups while at the same time continuing to cater to existing audiences.³⁹ It is impossible to successfully reach out to all underrepresented groups, but museums are required to study their existing and define their desired audiences, which can for instance include source communities whose heritage is exhibited or specific groups of immigrants.⁴⁰

This means that museums do not only have to change the character of their exhibitions and fundamental cooperation with source communities as elaborated in Chapter 1, but also critically assess their practical accessibility and everyday operations. Potential barriers that deter people from experiencing a satisfying visit or visiting at all can be organizational, attitudinal, physical, intellectual or cultural. According to Black, organizational barriers are constructed by the museum and can for example express themselves in the actions and attitudes of curators and staff members who lack the necessary skills to engage with visitors of various backgrounds.⁴¹ Attitudinal barriers can also be based on the assumption that there are no exhibitions that are relatable and interesting for specific communities which is why museums that do cater to those communities, have to increase their promotional activities and actively invite members. Physical access is often considered an issue that mainly concerns people with disabilities but museums that attempt to become widely accessible also need to consider the physical needs of families with children and senior citizens. Barriers that prevent intellectual and cultural access to

³⁹ Black, Graham: *The Engaging Museum. Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement*. New York, Routledge. 2005. pp. 46-47.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 53.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 47.

collections seem to be the hardest to challenge as they present museums with the challenge to take the intellectual and cultural backgrounds of a large variety of visitors into account.

Potential visitors can – consciously or unconsciously – encounter barriers long before they even set foot into the museum. A previous encounter with an unhelpful staff member might discourage visitors from returning. An exhibition that presents encounters between cultures as a one-sided story might raise the feeling of being patronized with those on the other side of the story and prevent them from visiting. Exhibitions that could be appealing and relatable for all visitor groups but are advertised in difficult language might put off potential visitors who do not have professional command of that language. Matters like these might seem marginal since they do not necessarily reflect the contents of the exhibition, but they have the power to exclude large groups of people by making them feel to be out of place.

If museums intend to facilitate inclusion and mutual understanding, they first of all have to adjust their basic conditions and commit to “refusing to write off entire sections of the population as non-visitors”⁴² in order to provide a space for exchange.

Museum Learning and the Adult Visitor.

The ICOM Museum Definition (2007) states: “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.”⁴³ This definition not only documents that education is widely accepted as one of the main tasks of the museum but it also indicates an awareness for potential contributions to changes in society. Museums nowadays are understood as institutions that can increase the visitor’s knowledge and beyond that affect his values, attitudes and worldview.⁴⁴ In order to understand how they can stimulate these

⁴² O’Neill, Mark: The good enough visitor. In: Sandell, Richard (ed.) (2002), p. 38.

⁴³ International Council of Museums: Museum Definition. 2007. URL: <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/> (01/05/2014).

⁴⁴ Greinier, Robin S.: Museums as Sites of Adult Learning. In: B. McGaw, P. Peterson and E. Baker (eds.), The International Encyclopedia of Education, 3rd Edition. 2010. Oxford, Elsevier. p. 150.

outcomes, which will be discussed in the next section, it is important to look at the character of adult learning in museums. This section will furthermore introduce the possible tools that can be used by exhibition makers to impact the visitor's experience, which will provide a basis for the analysis of the two case studies in chapter 3 and 4.

For most adult visitors, a museum visit is a conscious choice of spending their leisure time. They take along specific motivations and personal agendas and tend to deliberately look for learning opportunities, which have a crucial impact on their experiences during the visit. The motivations of individual visitors can range from recreational purposes, to general interest in a specific museum or exhibition, to deeply personal reasons such as finding out more about one's own culture and heritage.⁴⁵ Museums are required to take these agendas into consideration when creating exhibitions and contemplating learning opportunities. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill illustrates however, there are still many museums that explore the wide range of learning opportunities mainly with regard to children and school bound programs while the experience of adult visitors is often still limited to "learning at a glance".⁴⁶ A possible explanation for this might be the free-choice character of the adult visitor's museum experience. Unlike school-programs that pre-select specific topics for the students, the individual visitor decides for himself to which parts of the exhibition he draws his attention and for how long. This along with the abovementioned personal motivation might cause museums to perceive the adult visitor as exceptionally unpredictable and difficult to provide with learning opportunities.

Although not all museums are committed to providing equal educational programs to learners of all ages, they generally tend to retreat from the one-sided transmission approach. They increasingly abandon their traditional master-narratives and acknowledge the needs of the visitor by letting him move more freely between exhibition spaces and facilitating open-ended interpretations of the objects. Michael Baxandall (1991) sees the diminishment of curatorial authority as a method for museums to encourage the visitor to become more active in the interpretation process: exhibitors can offer relevant facts on objects and "let the viewer work on it". He sees the exhibitor as an agent whose main task is not the interpretation of culture,

⁴⁵ Cp. Black (2005). p. 30-31.

⁴⁶ Hooper-Greenhill (2007). pp. 189-190.

“which is his own construct, but rather [...] setting up nonmisleading and stimulating conditions between the exhibitor’s own activity (selection and label making) and the maker’s object. The rest is up to the viewer.”⁴⁷ Many museums ask the visitor to immediately give their opinions on the exhibition through interactive displays or share their interpretation or remaining questions with others. Elements like these will be analyzed in the case studies for their potential to induce discussions among the audience and stimulate critical thinking.

Most museum exhibitions revolve around objects, usually the most powerful tools exhibition makers work with. According to Hooper-Greenhill, it is the tangible character of museum objects that makes them meaningful to the individual viewer: “Objects can bring together and give material form to elusive intangible abstract ideas such as ‘home’, ‘nation’, ‘sacrifice’.”⁴⁸ They can carry multiple meanings⁴⁹ which is why exhibition makers have to be careful to exhibit them in a context that allows for different interpretations to unfold as Baxandall suggests. Curators might be very knowledgeable about the cultures they study but, like every other viewer, they are biased by their own interpretive framework. If they were authorized to disregard the relevance of the objects to the public, as Appleton demands⁵⁰, the possible interpretations would be limited. The involvement of source communities, which has been discussed for its ethical reasons in chapter 1, can open up interpretive frameworks outside the curator’s scope.

Hooper-Greenhill’s evaluation of learning outcomes of museum programs for schools offers a general reflection of the characteristics of learning in museums. According to the author, the so-called floodlight mode of attention can be observed with learners of all ages. Unlike a focused spotlight, the attention of a floodlight learner is open and receptive and able to detect wider patterns and connections.⁵¹ With the end of grand master-narratives, strictly structured

⁴⁷ Baxandall, Michael: Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects. In: Karp, Ivan and Levine, Steven D. (eds.): Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display. Washington and London, The Smithsonian Institution Press. 1991. p.41.

⁴⁸ Hooper Greenhill (2000). p. 108.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 111.

⁵⁰ Cp. Appleton, Josie: Museums for ‘The People’? In: Watson, Sheila (ed.): Museums and their Communities. London, Routledge. (2007). p. 120.

⁵¹ Hooper-Greenhill (2007). pp. 38, 172.

exhibition designs have lost their instructional importance. The notion of the visitor as a floodlight learner provides an additional argument for non-linear exhibitions that allow the visitor to follow their own paths according to personal preferences and follow spontaneous impulses. Outline and guidance are therefore important tools of exhibition making and will receive considerable attention in the analysis of the selected exhibitions.

Approaches to engaging the visitor and have him reflect on the contents of the exhibition involve the creation of new methods of display that are often interactive, multi-sensory and make use of modern technology. Ethnographic exhibitions, for instance, that are often concerned with everyday objects not all visitors are familiar with, can choose to offer experimental learning techniques based on the use of replicas. Some museums organize special events in which the audience can engage in specific cultural practices, such as the workshops for Balinese dancing or playing the African djembe that Museum Volkenkunde currently offers to visitor groups.⁵²

While such innovations are widely embraced by those who expect the museum to lower thresholds and become more inclusive, more critical voices consider them a sign for the intellectual decline of the institution. Journalist Josie Appleton (2007) claims that museums nowadays neglect their original purpose of collecting, studying and exhibiting objects for the benefit of a people-oriented approach that lacks a rational foundation. In her opinion, scholars should not have to answer to the demands of politicians and the needs of the diverse public but be first and foremost concerned with original research and intellectual concentration. She criticizes museums for incorporating playful manners of display that, in her opinion, are only needed for child education while adults learn best through concentration in stillness.⁵³

In consideration of the changing nature of the museum that has been elaborated in chapter 1, the shortcomings of Appleton's argumentation are striking: by referring back to the origins of the museum as a lost ideal, Appleton completely disregards the development of the self-conception of the institution from a temple for an intellectual elite to a meeting place for

⁵² Cp. Museum Volkenkunde: Rondleidingen en Groepsbezoek. URL: http://volkenkunde.nl/nl/rondleidingen_en_groepsbezoek. (01/05/2014).

⁵³ Cp. Appleton (2007), p.124.

the entire society. Her thoughts on the learning habits of adult visitors are inherent in the aforementioned barriers that prevent intellectual and cultural access to museum exhibitions. The emphasis on quiet contemplation and intellectual reason presupposes that all adults who enter the museum have the same reference framework and the same level of intelligence and education at their command and appreciate the same learning styles. Chapter 3 and 4 will analyze how multi-sensory and interactive tools can complement traditional methods of display and deepen the experience for museum visitors.

Especially for ethnographical museums where people of many different cultural backgrounds have to be considered, Appleton's mindset can be risky. The interpretation of an object or a collection of objects inevitably happens within the viewer's cultural framework. In 2013, Museum Volkenkunde housed the travelling exhibition *Fetish Modernity*, which critically examined the past role of ethnographical museums as promoters of racial stereotypes. The photographic series, *Xenographic Views* by Austrian artist Lisl Ponger showed European people dressed up as representatives of other – mostly non-Western – cultures. The photographs referred to ethnic stereotypes that Western visitors are most likely familiar with. Even the most critical viewer who is attempting to free his own mind of such clichés can probably easily identify the belly dancers as depictions of Arab women and the pipe-smoking man in his leather chair as the embodiment of an English gentleman. He has encountered images like this before, they are embedded in his reference framework, and in the context of this critical exhibition he will be able to 'read' them as satire or interpret them as naïve or idealized ideas of foreign cultures. Visitors with a different background however might be confused without the additional information that the photographs depict stereotypes. They can choose to consult the info sheet on which the museum introduces the basic intentions of the artist, thus offering access to the Western frame of reference and suggesting ways of approaching the artworks without foreclosing an interpretation. Panel texts and other written information within the exhibitions will therefore be analyzed as essential exhibition tools that may offer or deny access for visitors.

Displays as idealized by Appleton that focus on contemplative learning and assume "that visitors are intelligent enough"⁵⁴ furthermore complicate the intellectual access for slow learners, illiterate visitors, people with short attention spans and everybody who does not appreciate learning in silence. Museums that embrace interactive or multi-sensory methods of display demonstrate awareness for individual learning styles and levels amongst their visitors. Furthermore they have to adjust to different levels of literacy and language skills for example by avoiding difficult language in the basic information boards and explaining expressions that might be unknown by many visitors.

In order to remain inclusive for all, a good exhibition still acknowledges visitors who are more receptive to the contemplative approach and appreciate structure and elaborate written information. It lays out a visible path through the collections that the audience can choose to follow or neglect and offers sources of additional information, for instance in the form of booklets or audio tours, to every visitor who wants to increase his factual knowledge. Additional information can also involve access to other objects that are not directly included in the exhibition but might be perceived as relevant by the audience. Many museums therefore make their entire collections digitally accessible on their websites or create visible storage areas within the museum. Others offer the visitor opportunities to get in contact with curators or other staff members, either directly within the exhibition space or via interactive displays, and ask questions about the objects.⁵⁵ Furthermore, exhibition making is becoming increasingly transparent as exhibitions like *The Story of the Totem Pole* demonstrate. Through video documentations or photographic display visitors are often granted an insight into the fundamental ideas of an exhibition and intentions of all contributing parties.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.125.

⁵⁵ Cp. Gurian, Elaine-Heumann: Noodling around with Exhibition Opportunities. In: Karp, Ivan and Levine (eds.) (1991), p.186.

Potential Learning Outcomes.

Museums nowadays offer many different possibilities for learning. They encourage the visitor to increase and expand existing knowledge or explore areas that are entirely new to them. Museum displays are more than just representations of a culture; the preservation and display of the objects alone is not more than a snapshot of a specific moment in human history. Only the interaction with a viewer makes an object meaningful and generates knowledge. According to Hooper-Greenhill, cultural symbols in the form of museum displays have the power to mobilize emotions, perceptions and values and influence the way we feel and think about ourselves and others. They are culturally generative because they shape identities and our framework for social understanding.⁵⁶ The possible outcomes of learning processes in the museum have been increasingly theorized in the past thirty years but they are all but new findings. A look back at museums that have their origins in colonial times illustrates that for a long time exhibitors have been aware of the influential power of museum displays when it comes to the promotion of nationalistic feeling and control of lower social classes.⁵⁷ This entails a social responsibility on museums to neither use their generative nature for purposes that conflict with the moral values of contemporary society nor become governmental instruments for social inclusion. Richard Sandell (2002) argues that museums “must consider their impact on society and seek to shape that impact through practice that is based on contemporary values and a commitment to social equality.”⁵⁸

Various aspects of accessibility have been discussed in the previous sections as fundamental requirements to make people feel welcome and catered to in the museum. When museums lower the barriers that prevent underrepresented groups to come to the museum and enjoy their visit, they potentially arrange for individual visitors or whole communities to feel included into the societies they represent. A basic sense of unity can have an influence on people’s identity and can possibly encourage the wish to better understand other members of a society that is acknowledged as one’s own. Identity however is a concept that is hard to grasp and that

⁵⁶ Cp. Hooper-Greenhill (2000). pp.13 and 20.

⁵⁷ Cp. chapter 1.

⁵⁸ Sandell, Richard: Museums and the combating of social inequality: roles, responsibilities, resistance. In: Idem (2002). p. 21.

changes with time and circumstances.⁵⁹ It can be determined by many different factors such as ethnicity, nationality, gender or education, which poses a challenge for museums to tackle specific aspects of identity that they want to challenge or reinforce. Prejudices about members of other cultures for instance are usually constructed in relation to one's own identity and therefore often deeply embedded in people's mindset yet not impossible to contest.

As mentioned in the previous section, it is the material character of objects that gives a tangible form to abstract ideas such as identity. According to Hooper-Greenhill, objects are used to create meaningful environments, structure common sense categories and consequently understand a culture in its material form as well as for its thoughts, attitudes and beliefs.⁶⁰ Seeing one's own culture concretized in a museum display might give deeper insight to convictions, experiences and feelings while the manifestations of a foreign culture might make it more relatable and allow for unexpected associations with personal experiences.

The diversity of learning styles and interpretational frameworks and the fluidity of the concept of identity make specific learning outcomes difficult to predict or measure which is why most studies about them are based on assumptions.⁶¹ It appears that the most useful study concerning the evaluation of learning outcomes can be found in Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's aforementioned publication from 2007. The findings are based on research regarding different programs for schoolchildren in regional museums, conducted by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester. The research team had developed a method of measuring that combined quantitative statistical data gathered through surveys of participating students and teachers and additional qualitative data in the form of open-statement questions, follow-up interviews and case-studies. This approach takes into account that statistical data alone cannot encompass the full range of learning processes that occur in informal learning environments such as museums or libraries. The quantitative surveys give evidence about what teachers and students value most in a museum visit and which outcomes are most likely to appear.⁶² The advantage of adding qualitative data is that it allows

⁵⁹ Cp. Davis, Peter: Place Exploration: museums, identity, community. In: Watson (ed.) (2007). p. 55.

⁶⁰ Cp. Hooper-Greenhill (2000). pp. 110-111.

⁶¹ Cp. Sandell (2002). p. 3.

⁶² Cp. Hooper-Greenhill (2007). pp. 24, 75-76.

for a deeper insight into how and why these outcomes occur. The open-statement questions, interviews and case studies generated new insights into the depth of learning experiences, inspired follow-up questions and conclusions about long-term outcomes and opened up opportunities for more explicit research within a certain group or a specific museum program.⁶³

The occurring processes were mapped in five broad categories, the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs), taking the individual and unpredictable nature of learning in museums into consideration. The five GLOs are: 1. Knowledge and Understanding; 2. Skills; 3. Attitudes and Values; 4. Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity; and 5. Activity, Behavior, Progression. They can be short-termed and occurring during a visit or have a long-term impact still be observable for months afterwards.⁶⁴ Furthermore they serve as evidence for the impact of multi-sensory learning: remarkable and unusual experiences make for deep understanding and long-lasting learning. The GLOs stimulate and reinforce each other, the closer the links are, the deeper the learning impact seems to be.⁶⁵ This becomes clear when examining mutual understanding as a learning outcome. Mutual understanding can be associated with GLO number 3 but a change in attitudes and values seems unlikely to occur without an increase in cognitive understanding (1). Since the ultimate goal is a peaceful and socially inclusive coexistence, shifting attitudes and values do not seem sufficient if they are not followed by a change in behavior (5).

Due to their general nature, the GLOs can be used with reference to learners of different ages in various sorts of Western museums, which is why they serve as a framework for the case studies in chapter 3 and 4. Unfortunately, comparable approaches do not appear to have been established in Dutch museums yet. As will be shown in the following chapters, audience research prior to the selected exhibitions is not conducted on a large scale but rather focuses broadly on expectations and concerns of communities. Displays within the exhibitions that ask visitors for personal evaluation and reflection will be shown to serve as powerful learning tools but do not offer sufficient data for extensive visitor studies.

⁶³ Ibid. pp. 76-77, 111.

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp. 52-57.

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 165-166.

As this thesis focuses on adult visitors, it is important to note that previous knowledge and experiences play a greater role with adults than with children and are more difficult to modify with advancing age. As Sandell states, “whilst a single museum visit is unlikely to overturn the most entrenched attitudes, nonetheless, more inchoate values and perceptions may be open to challenge, question, modification.”⁶⁶ In addition, it would appear that museums need to bear in mind that learning can take a negative turn. If they fail to create inclusive and stimulating environments that relate to the visitor’s realm of experience, they are unlikely to accomplish satisfying learning outcomes. Instead, it seems likely that a disappointing visit will evoke or reinforce negative attitudes towards the museum or the cultures whose heritage is exhibited.

⁶⁶ Sandell (2002). p. 17.

3. Case Studies

The two exhibitions chosen as case studies, *Longing for Mecca* and *Black&White*, have been selected for their relevance to largely represented groups in contemporary Dutch society. As elaborated in chapter 1, relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims and the position of black citizens in the Netherlands are often problematic and rational debates are frequently hindered by one-sidedness and mutual accusations. Furthermore chapter 1 and 2 have illustrated that museums of ethnology today more and more seek to cater to the interests of the communities whose cultural heritage they exhibit and increasingly facilitate open-ended interpretation processes to their diverse audiences, thus offering a basis for balanced discussions. Since the exhibitions were organized by the two major ethnological museums of the Netherlands, it can be assumed that they reflect current exhibition practices of this type of museum and engage with questions that are relevant for the general public. Both museums have been very cooperative in finding suitable interview partners for this research. Floor Scholte of Museum Volkenkunde and Titia Zoeter of the Tropenmuseum have been selected for their involvement in the planning of the respective exhibitions and their knowledge of educational processes.

Both exhibition analyses begin with a general overview of the purposes and contents of the exhibitions and carry on to what extent the museums have sought cooperation with respective communities. Next, the outline of the exhibitions and guidance provided by the museums are examined for the way they appeal to different learning types and provide intellectual and cultural access to various visitor groups. The chapter on *Longing for Mecca* will subsequently analyze the use of objects in the exhibition, the impact of narratives and personal stories, possibilities for physical engagement and the potential learning outcomes. As these different aspects are more strongly intertwined in *Black&White*, the subsequent chapter will examine them more concertedly. While visitor feedback receives considerably more attention in *Black&White* than in *Longing for Mecca*, both analyses end with an assessment of the ways in which the museums might encourage the visitor to reflect on their personal viewpoints.

3.1 Longing for Mecca – Reenacting the Hajj in Museum Volkenkunde.

*Longing for Mecca*⁶⁷ was on display in Leiden from 10 September 2013 until 9 March 2014. The exhibition was a collaborative project between Museum Volkenkunde and the British Museum in London who together had gathered more than 250 objects from Islamic art collections all over the world. It centers around the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca during which Muslims fulfill rituals that symbolically take them back to the times of the prophets Adam, Abraham and Mohammed. The city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia and the Kaaba, the cube-shaped building in the middle of Mecca's Al-Masjid al-Haram, the largest mosque in the world, form the religious and geographic center of Islam. The Hajj is one of the five pillars, the mandatory religious duties, of Islam and has to be performed by every Muslim who is physically and financially capable of it at least once during his or her lifetime. For the audience of Museum Volkenkunde personal stories in the form of video interviews and souvenirs of Dutch Hajj pilgrims have been added to the collection, indicating that "Mecca is more part of our Dutch culture than we might realize."⁶⁸ The exhibition attempted to show a comprehensive picture of the pilgrimage to Mecca and offer insights into the personal motivations and experiences of people who have concluded the Hajj or are planning to do so.⁶⁹

Floor Scholte, Exhibitions and Education Developer at Museum Volkenkunde who acted as an interview partner for this case study, elaborated on the collaboration between the museum and Muslim communities. The exhibition team had hired a Muslim employee from a cultural organization in Rotterdam who had been on Hajj herself as an advisor for all aspects of the exhibition. She recommended ways of appropriate representations of the Hajj and above that initiated contact with Muslim organizations and religious communities, which resulted in many group visits. The fifty personal souvenirs from Mecca displayed in the exhibition were borrowed on a collecting day that the museum organized in order to stay true to its motto: "Not about them without them".⁷⁰ This attitude ties in with Clifford's understanding of museums as

⁶⁷ Dutch: Verlangen naar Mekka – de reis van de pelgrim.

⁶⁸ Museum Volkenkunde: Verlangen naar Mekka – de reis van de pelgrim. URL:

<http://verlangennaarmekka.volkenkunde.nl/nl/verlangen-naar-mekka-de-reis-van-de-pelgrim> (09/05/2014)

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Museum Volkenkunde: Inzameldag groot succes. URL:

<http://verlangennaarmekka.volkenkunde.nl/nl/inzameldag-groot-succes>. (09/05/2014).

contact zones that share control over the objects they represent and allude to the present-day realities of the objects' cultures of origin.⁷¹ The museum furthermore reached out to a potential Muslim audience by advertising *Longing for Mecca* on blogs and different social media such as Twitter, since many members of the Muslim community do not read Dutch newspapers.⁷²

On-site the museum presents itself as welcoming and easily accessible to its visitors. The receptionists provide the visitors with a map of the exhibition rooms and take the time to explain the way to the special exhibition rooms, which are located behind the Indonesia section on the right side of the ground floor. They also specifically point out that visitors of all ages can use their entrance tickets to activate video screens that have been set up in every room and participate in a quiz about the Hajj. The exhibition is divided into nine sections that succeed each other based on the chronology of events: the dreaming and longing for Mecca, preparations, the journey, the Hajj itself and the homecoming (fig.1). According to Scholte, this way the museum is inviting the visitors to go on Hajj themselves.⁷³ Each exhibition room has been given a number so that visitors who wish to follow the chronological route are able to orient themselves. It would however be possible to follow one's own path or even skip entire sections since they do not strictly build on factual knowledge acquired in previous sections. People who choose to visit section five about the Hajj and its rituals first for instance will not necessarily miss the information offered in section two about the journey to Mecca in case they have skipped it. With the basic information about the Hajj given in room one as a background, each individual room can be approached as a logical entity and one component of the pilgrimage. Many rooms are interconnected, which makes it easy to move freely between the sections and follow impulses. Visitors who follow the proposed route, on the other hand, will be able to draw connections between different aspects and form a more detailed and comprehensive image of the Hajj and its impact on the pilgrims. By proposing a path through

⁷¹ Cp. p.16.

⁷² Cp. Interview Floor Scholte. Leiden. 13/05/2014. See Appendix.

⁷³ Ibid.

the exhibition rooms but not imposing it on the visitors, the museum does justice to both the open floodlight mode of attention and the structured spotlight mode of attention mentioned in chapter 2. Floor Scholte pointed out that it was a big challenge to attract a Muslim audience while maintaining connections to the average, mostly non-Muslim, audience of the museum.⁷⁴ It seems that by inviting every visitor to retrace the pilgrimage or parts of it, the exhibition makers have created an attractive environment for all: non-Muslim visitors are granted an insight into religious practices that are usually inaccessible to them while Muslim visitors get the chance to reenact their own pilgrimage, find inspiration for a future Hajj or get in close contact with Mecca if for any reason they are not capable of going on the actual journey.

With the inclusion of a Muslim advisor the museum laid the foundation for cultural accessibility for the desired yet infrequent Muslim visitor. Representations of religious practices within the exhibition are therefore unlikely to conflict with their values and beliefs or offend members of their community. The cultural access for other visitors has been provided for through information panels with background information about Islam and the Hajj that can be found in every exhibition room. Another attempt to communicate Islamic practices to non-Muslim visitors are comparisons to Christianity and Judaism that are mostly indirect and integrated in panel texts or object descriptions throughout the exhibition such as recurring references to Abraham the common patriarch of the three religions. A comparison can be seen for instance when looking at the showcase with white and beige clothes that are worn by Muslims for 'Ihram', the state of purification that they have to achieve before entering Mecca (fig. 2 and 3). The underlying notions of purity, equality and peace allow for comparisons with the white garments worn during christening or first communion in the Catholic Church, likewise religious duties that are supposed to lead towards spiritual transformation. Through these subtle connections, the museum makes use of different cultural frameworks and possibly achieves Scholte's expectations that visitors leave with "the thought that different religions like Christianity and Islam have more in common than we would think at first."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Cp. Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

The written information inside the exhibition rooms is kept short and avoids difficult language apart from specific Islamic terms, which are explained clearly. Therefore it can be assumed that the main panels, which are written in Dutch and English, are comprehensible to people at an intermediate level of language skills. The video interviews on the screens are subtitled in English but most object descriptions are only available in Dutch. Overall the museum seems to have demonstrated awareness for the needs of its diverse audiences and seems to have facilitated access to a large number of visitors.

The objects on display are multifaceted and demonstrate different degrees of material value. As elaborated in chapter 2, objects give tangible form to abstract ideas and shape the visitor's experience and learning outcomes. Objects of great material value, such as the precious book that shows a map with Mecca as the center of the world and textiles with embroidered Qur'an-verses, displayed in room 1, seemingly appeal to the visitor due to their rare nature and religious connotations (fig. 4 and 5). The museum offers the opportunity to engage with the 'real' thing and approach it in a worldly manner, yet it does not separate the objects from the reverent notions associated with them. A thin veil with one entrance, on which moving Qur'an verses are projected, surrounds the precious artifacts at the center of room 1. The movements of the verses and the veil itself makes it appear dynamic and open; the transparent fabric seems to protect the objects and add a sense of mystery while at the same time it invites all visitors to step inside and behold them (fig. 6 and 7). According to Floor Scholte, a special attraction for authentic objects can be witnessed in room 6 in which 'Kiswa' cloths, the preciously embroidered coverings of the Kaaba that are replaced every year, are exhibited (fig. 8). Visitors "were astonished by those objects because they were once on the Kaaba and you can never come so close to those textiles as you were in this exhibition" says Scholte.⁷⁶ Mecca's center and all the spiritual notions connected to it are within reach in this room. The souvenirs displayed in room 7 are of lesser value but they seem to have the same effect of materializing abstract ideas (fig. 9). From beautiful prayer rugs to cheap souvenirs such as key chains with

⁷⁶ Ibid.

illustrations from Mecca, all souvenirs seem to embody the personal experiences of the Hajj pilgrims and their most cherished memories. As for the visitors, Scholte explains: “people love to see something in a showcase which they have at home themselves and which they recognize”.⁷⁷ Discovering connections to one’s own life seems likely to stimulate the creation of personal meaning. Bringing souvenirs from enjoyable travels or finding other forms of material reminders of significant events is most likely a familiar concept, or part of the cultural framework for all visitors, which allows for connections to personal experiences even for non-Muslim visitors.

Potential effects of the engagement with objects in the exhibition can be assigned to the Generic Learning Outcomes, introduced in chapter 2: Seeing authentic objects in their context points out connections and patterns which can lead to an increase in *knowledge* for Muslim and non-Muslim visitors and to *understanding* of the close links between religious practice and deep-felt beliefs. People who find notions such as memory, dedication or longing materialized and *enjoy* these feelings might experience a change in their *attitudes and values* such as increasing religious devotion or pride of their cultural heritage. Attitudes of non-Muslim visitors can for instance be changed when they relate and compare their interpretation of objects to their own lives as mentioned above and as a result experience an increase in empathy towards Islamic people. This in turn might encourage people to go on Hajj themselves – a change in *activity and behavior*. Expressing personal meaning in words or performance suggests a development of emotional *skills*.

The selection of objects, their arrangements and the themes addressed in the exhibition demonstrate that the museum is refraining from the construction of unified perspectives that are characteristic of master narratives.⁷⁸ Instead, *Longing for Mecca* emphasizes diversity and tells the story of the Hajj from many different perspectives. The video interviews, which can be found in several rooms, are the most striking example of this: women and men are equally represented. Some have already been on Hajj and some are planning a journey or talk about what Mecca means to them. Their reports touch a large variety of aspects, for instance the

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Cp. chapter 1.

emotional stability they are hoping to find through the Hajj, closer bonding they share with their spouse after taking the journey together or reflections on their lives in the Netherlands after returning from Mecca. Section 3 about the journey adds a geographical and historical perspective to the exhibition. A large map of the world with Saudi Arabia at the center illustrates the routes to Mecca, taken by pilgrims from all over the world, reminding the visitors of the diverse origins of Muslims undertaking the Hajj (fig. 10). Further ahead in the section, manners of transportation to Mecca in the past and present are displayed. Large photographs on the walls and objects in wall niches illustrate the rough conditions people had to endure, for example when travelling in caravans, before manners of mass transportation made the Hajj easier (fig. 11 and 12). By including many smaller narratives that are not restricted to time, space or gender, the museum shows that it is working in a democratic way. For Muslims of many different origins this can evoke the feeling of being respected and valued. It appears that the democratic approach has a potential to contest stereotypes rather than reinforce them as exhibitions based on master-narratives have done in the past. Non-Muslim visitors might be encouraged to reassess generalized views of Muslims and their religious practices when confronted with the diversity represented in the exhibition.

The exhibition makers have made many efforts to include the audience by means of exhibition design and educational facilities. Many rooms are designed in a way that reflects the topic they present and appeals to the visitor's physical experience. Section 1 does not only create an inviting yet mystifying atmosphere by surrounding the objects in the center with the aforementioned veil, but it also uses the sound of the video interviews. Most of the screens that show interviews are put up in room 1; unlike in other sections, here they are not entirely muted and only hearable through headphones, but instead are adjusted to a low volume. This way many voices can be heard at the same time while walking around the exhibition room which again alludes to the multitude of possible perspectives. The adjacent room 2 displays its objects in a round display in the middle and offers facts and figures about the Hajj and the preparation of the journey on the surrounding walls (fig. 13). The round design and the blue color of the room in addition to the illustration of a large compass on the ceiling above the objects creates a

resemblance to a globe. The numerous facts and figures on the walls are arranged tightly and reach up to the ceiling, overwhelming the viewer with information. Rather than offering knowledge that has to be remembered, the room seems to serve the purpose of illustrating the enormous dimensions of the Hajj and drawing attention to very practical and worldly aspects such as medical care during the pilgrimage (fig. 14). In part 3, 'The journey', which has been discussed earlier in this chapter, it is the shape of the room itself that emphasizes its theme. The long and narrow room offers no seats for pauses and ranges from the back side of room 1 to an extensive hallway at the end of which visitors can enter section 4 or 8, illustrating the often long-lasting journeys of Hajj pilgrims. In room number 5 about the Hajj rituals, a video of pilgrims completing the Tawaf, the ritual of walking around the Kaaba counterclockwise seven times, is projected on the walls. The constant movement evokes the feeling of being in the middle of the ritual and slowly moving into the same direction as the masses (fig. 15). A work of art that underlines the significant power of attraction of the Kaaba, as well as the design of the room, has fittingly been set up in a showcase in the center of the room, the installation 'Magnetism' by Ahmed Mater (fig. 16). An iron cube and small metallic particles surrounding it symbolize the Kaaba, the pilgrims and their longing for Mecca that has given the exhibition its name. As a contemporary artwork it seems to demonstrate that the Hajj and the traditional rituals have not lost importance in the present day. Room number 7 centers around Medina, the city in which the prophet Muhammad was buried, which is visited by many pilgrims in addition to the Hajj rituals. The floor of the room is covered in colorful Arabic carpets and a sign at the entrance announces that visitors are allowed to take off their shoes and place them on a shelf. On both visits it could be observed that many people followed that invitation and walked around the room on socks or even sat down on the carpets for a while. Here the museum recreated a simple Islamic ritual, the removing of footwear when entering a Mosque, for all visitors to participate in. Furthermore, the comfortable atmosphere of the room seems to act in a calming way and encourages visitor to stay for a little longer and take their time to look around.

According to Hooper-Greenhill in her study on learning outcomes (2007), museum settings that enable physical engagement provide excellent conditions for learning. In her opinion,

“immersion in experience is an unconscious and natural way to learn.”⁷⁹ As introduced in chapter 2, the occurring GLOs are interconnected and gain strength from close links to each other. When looking at methods that stimulate physical engagement in *Longing for Mecca*, for instance, the following linked outcomes seem possible: Even though it is unlikely that visitors will remember all numbers presented to them in section 2, they probably leave with more concrete knowledge about the extent of the Hajj and its practical issues. People who are planning to go on Hajj might benefit from the tips for the preparation of the journey and the stories of experienced pilgrims and thus in addition to an increase in knowledge gain new skills. After crossing section 3, visitors have probably also gained more knowledge about the often exhausting conditions people have to endure when travelling to Mecca. In section 5, when immersing in the experience of moving with the masses, this factual knowledge might lead to a greater understanding of the physical strain the Hajj as a whole entails and the degree of devotion pilgrims demonstrate in Mecca and Medina by willingly undergoing these obstacles. Another example of linked outcomes can be found when considering the enjoyment people experience in the exhibition. This can be stimulated by seeing precious objects and interesting artworks on display, finding connections to one’s own life, as exemplified above, and walking around in atmospheres that evoke positive feelings or a combination of these aspects. Enjoyment can lead to interest in gaining more knowledge and approaching the exhibition in a more thorough way. Looking for additional information inside or outside the exhibition in turn can be categorized as a change in behavior.

So far, the quiz and the coloring workshop have not been discussed in detail. This is because the outcomes of these two explicit educational approaches seem less in-depth and connected than the more subtle means of exhibition design. The quiz has shown to be very successful in including Dutch-speaking visitors of all ages and disregarding the notion that playful exhibition methods are only supposed to be accessible for children. Yet it focuses strongly on factual knowledge that can be quickly acquired and retrieved by reading the information panels. While it is informative and possibly meets the interests of cognitive learners, it seems to lack the depth that converts knowledge into understanding of details and connections (fig. 17). A

⁷⁹ Hooper-Greenhill (2007). pp. 170-171.

reflective approach that encourages the visitor to think about the objects or give feedback seems more likely to work towards this goal. The strong potential of the quiz lies in the fact that it can be started and finished at any point of the exhibition and the reward – a cardboard Kaaba that can be assembled at home – that seems likely to increase the overall enjoyment of the activity. In the workshop/coloring section, visitors can color Islamic patterns and hang them on the wall among contributions of other visitors (fig. 18). This is indeed “a nice break”, as Scholte states⁸⁰ but it misses the chance to be more than that since it shows very little connection to concrete objects within the exhibition and restricts the visitor’s creativity to filling pre-printed patterns with colors and – in some cases – notes. The workshop would have been more likely to inspire the audience and generate learning about Islamic patterns if it had made clear links to the exhibition and offered a more open-ended and personalized creative activity.

These smaller findings of room for improvement can however not diminish the overall impression that *Longing for Mecca* makes good use of its educational potential and can make important contributions to the fostering of mutual understanding. Visitors who expect the museum to engage in a critical discourse about Islamic ideology or integration policy will be disappointed. In a review of the exhibition by *The Post Online*, Maarten Hilbrandie accuses Museum Volkenkunde of avoiding difficult questions surrounding the Hajj such as the demolition of large parts of the city of Mecca, remaining superficial and loyal to the main sponsor of the exhibition Saudi Aramco, the Saudi Arabian Oil Company.⁸¹ While interests of sponsors might indeed have an impact on the museum’s approach, this critique disregards the fact that the entire exhibition follows an intentionally apolitical concept. Photographs of the Al-Masjid al-Haram mosque and large construction works that have significant impact on the historical center of Mecca are displayed in room 1; the photographs might initiate a discussion among visitors but the museum does not actively encourage one. As illustrated in chapter 1, critique of Islam and harsh backlashes are very present in the Netherlands. If a museum chooses to engage in such loaded debates, it has to be very careful and establish a neutral stand,

⁸⁰ Scholte (2014).

⁸¹ Cp. Hilbrandie, Maarten: Museum Volkenkunde: De VVV van Mekka. In: *The Post Online* 14/10/2013. URL: <http://politiek.thepostonline.nl/2013/10/14/museum-volkenkunde-de-vvv-van-mekka/>. (01/07/2014).

otherwise it will be accused of acting as an agent for a particular position, which consequently might further incite the debate and cause *misunderstanding* amongst the participants. By focusing on peaceful aspects of Islam and relatable sentiments rather than political stands, *Longing for Mecca* might contribute to easing the tensions.

According to Floor Scholte, many Muslim visitors felt that the Hajj had been represented in a respectful and non-judgmental way and left the museum with a sense of pride for their own culture and the fact that it received so much attention.⁸² Reviews of the exhibition written by Muslim visitors and authors of Muslim art magazine confirm this impression: “It is fascinating to be witness of the continuing impact that the centuries-old Hajj-customs have on the contemporary, international Muslim community, through the Leiden exhibition”, says Aya Johanna Daniëlle Dürst Britt of *al.arte.magazine*.⁸³ Faisal Mirza, author of the website *wijblijvenhier.nl* is similarly impressed by the depth and extend of the exhibition: “*Longing for Mecca* has successfully shown that the Hajj is a massive and collective event but that every individual has a unique experience.”⁸⁴

It is important to note however that visitor feedback deriving from conversations with individual visitors and comments posted on social media such as Twitter and Facebook can only give a broad overview of the experiences had. Large-scale visitor research would most likely back up these impressions with statistical data and assist the museum in learning about individual visitor’s experiences, wishes and motivations during a museum visit which can be used for the planning of future exhibitions. If large-scale research is not possible, the museum might benefit from recording visitors’ responses within the exhibition, which unfortunately has not been done in *Longing for Mecca*. Immediate and individual feedback adds a qualitative dimension to visitor studies as illustrated in chapter 2. It helps to explain why visitors experience the exhibition in a certain way and might furthermore provide the museum with comments about its practical accessibility and exhibition design.

⁸² Scholte (2014).

⁸³ Dürst Britt, Aya Johanna Daniëlle: Hadj Tentoonstelling in Museum Volkenkunde. In: *al.arte.magazine* 27/09/2013. URL: <http://www.alartemag.be/art/hadj-tentoonstelling-in-rijksmuseum-volkenkunde/>. (01/07/2014).

⁸⁴ Mirza, Faisal: Hadj tentoonstelling Leiden: Verlangen naar Mekka. In: *Wijblijvenhier.nl*. 10/09/2013. URL: <http://wijblijvenhier.nl/20784/verlangen-naar-mekka-leiden-museum-volkenkunde/>. (01/07/2014).

The feeling of being taken seriously, which has been noted in the abovementioned occasional feedback, appears to be an essential requirement for the building of understanding. The exhibition makers have demonstrated interest in and awareness of how to reach their desired audience and meet their needs from the planning of the exhibition to the detailed setup of the displays. This might help Muslim visitors to overcome negative attitudes such as the feeling of being unwelcome or misunderstood and inspire a more positive self-image of themselves as part of the Dutch culture. Non-Muslim visitors of the exhibition can see their attitudes about Islam and their behavior towards fellow Muslim citizens contested by learning about their motivations for the Hajj, seeing similarities to their own experiences or simply enjoying beautiful Islamic artworks. A final example demonstrates how several interrelated learning results can challenge the view on Muslim culture: in section 8 there is a video interview with a woman who reflects on her return from Mecca. Back in the Netherlands she was negatively struck by an advertisement board showing a woman in her underwear, something she had considered normal before but that has become intolerable to her after the beautiful experience of the Hajj. As a visitor who has just gained an insight into the spiritual meaning that Mecca holds for many Muslims by listening to personal stories, being confronted with facts and immersing in direct experiences, it is not difficult to follow her thoughts: for her it appears that instead of being a valued member of a worldwide community and experiencing a state of purification, the woman on the board becomes an object. This part of the exhibition might stimulate non-Muslims to reflect their notions about the degree to which Muslim women think of themselves as oppressed. They might also consider this testimony in the context of integration and gain a new perspective on the difficulties Muslims face in adapting to Dutch culture.

3.2 *Black&White* – Discussing Relationships in the Tropenmuseum.

The exhibition *Black&White*⁸⁵, which was on display in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam from 1st November 2013 until 1st July 2014 was concerned with the ways in which ‘black’ and ‘white’ Dutch citizens live with each other in the present day. Between 1600 and 1830, over 600.000 Africans were brought to the Dutch colonies in Suriname and the Dutch Antilles and sold as slaves for plantations or domestic service where they experienced inhumane and often violent treatment. In 1863, slavery was officially abolished and about 45.000 people in the colonies formally received their freedom and the Dutch citizenship. Many of their descendants came to the Netherlands in the 20th century to study or work and later many settled there permanently. The exhibition raises questions about identity and power relations in the past and present and engages the visitor in a discussion rather than giving answers.⁸⁶ It is largely based on personal stories that are told with the aid of video documentations and interviews, photographs and documents; furthermore the exhibition has artworks, historical documents and a few objects on display and offers different methods for the visitors to reflect on the displays and their own viewpoints.

The exhibition was specifically advertised within black communities through *Radio mArt*, a Surinamese radio station located in Amsterdam Bijlmer where many black citizens live, and through contact with elderly homes. According to Titia Zoeter, exhibition maker at the Tropenmuseum and interview partner for this case study, the museum reached out not only to Surinamese and Antillean communities but also to white people who are concerned with the subject. She adds that the museum is always trying to attract its regular audience of broadly interested visitors above the age of fifty but that this exhibition and the additional events reaches out especially to young visitors because “they have the future [...] we would like to create new perspectives for young people to interact with each other”.⁸⁷ Special events created for a young audience for instance include *Straatbeeld: een ode aan stijlmakers* in March, an evening about Dutch street style and the influence of hip-hop culture on fashion, or the *Good*

⁸⁵ Dutch title: *Zwart&Wit*.

⁸⁶ Cp. Tropenmuseum: *Black&White*. URL: <http://tropenmuseum.nl/en/black-white>. (19/05/2014).

⁸⁷ Interview Titia Zoeter. Amsterdam. 19/05/2014. See Appendix.

Hair festival in June, concerned with topics surrounding black and white hair and hairstyles. Both events offer discussions, performances and tours and include a variety of guests such as designers, fashion bloggers, artists and scientists.⁸⁸

Black&White is set up in the Great Hall of the Tropenmuseum as one connected exhibition space. Temporarily set up walls structure the exhibition and create a round path through the Great Hall that is easy to follow and does not require a map or guide. The exhibits and written information are mainly displayed on these walls and on the inside and outside of six oval-shaped pavilions, three on the left and three on the right long side of the exhibition hall (fig. 19). All written information from the general introduction to the smallest object labels is available in both Dutch and English and does not make use of difficult language, which guarantees access for a large number of visitors. For visitors who are not familiar with particulars of Dutch culture such as Zwarte Piet and Sinterklaas, the labels offer additional information so that the displays can be considered in their cultural context.

The visitors enter the temporary exhibition space and the Great Hall through the stairs or the elevator leading up to the first floor. The exhibition begins in the hallway with screens showing videos or photos of black and white people reflecting on their own identity (fig. 20). The visitor can choose to enter the gallery at the end of the hallway in which artworks related to the topic of the exhibition are exhibited.⁸⁹ The main exhibition space is arranged chronologically but the individual sections are not separated from each other; written information on the walls mark the beginning of a new section and introduce the conditions of black and white living together at a particular time. The first section concerns slavery and apartheid until 1863, followed by the abolition of slavery, the fascination with and exhibition of black people in the Netherlands between 1863 and 1900, their migration to the Netherlands between 1900 and 1950, living together from 1950 until 2000 and a section labeled 'Now', concerning the time from 2000 until the present day. Even though the exhibition follows a chronological path, it is not creating the

⁸⁸ Cp. Tropenmuseum: Zwart&Wit evenementen. URL: <http://tropenmuseum.nl/nl/evenementen/zwart-en-wit>. (19/05/2014).

⁸⁹ The exhibitions in the gallery have changed three times to this day (22/05/2014). Considering that they do not all directly relate to the relations between black and white Dutch citizens and that the site was under construction during the second visit when the photos were taken, they will not be discussed in this thesis.

image of a singular historical narrative and a logical progression of events. Every section gives room to personal stories of several black and white people that cannot be summed up in a single canon. The timeline offers a basic orientation while the multitude of stories evoke a sense for the different mentalities in Dutch society at a respective point in time, and the problems as well as the positive changes deriving from it. Titia Zoeter explains that the section with current interviews and personal stories was chosen to be placed before the chronological path in order to open the visitor's minds and make clear that *Black&White* is about the present.⁹⁰ The entire arrangement of the exhibition underlines its general purpose of discussing current relationships. About 1/3 of the exhibition space is dedicated to the section 'Now' and an area for reflection and feedback while the parts discussing the past make strong connections to the present day, which will be elaborated on in the following section of this chapter.

The power of personal stories, opportunities for physical engagement and characteristics of exhibition design are closely related in *Black&White* and bear much potential for impacting the visitor's experience.

As introduced above, personal experiences are embedded in a historical context. Next to the walls displaying the history of slavery and later its abolition in the Dutch colonies, there are four enormous pillars, each serving as a 'monument of 11.000 names' which were imposed on former Surinamese and Antillean slaves in 1863 (fig. 21 and 22). The large monument can be approached and interpreted in different ways. It might be seen as the potential starting point for personal stories as it gives a (sur-)name to people formerly regarded as property. Visitors of Surinamese and Antillean descent might recognize their own names or those of friends and relatives on the pillars, which could reveal relations with the past, make the history of slavery more relatable to one's own life and inspire interest to learn more about it. Much like the facts and figures on the Hajj in room 2 of *Longing for Mecca*, the sheer number of names on the monument serves as a visual illustration of the extent of slavery, which possibly reinforces knowledge and creates understanding for the impact of the abolition on people's lives. True to

⁹⁰ Zoeter (2014).

the overall intention of the exhibition, this display has the potential to inspire a discussion: Is it a monument of freedom and the starting point of civil rights for former slaves or does it rather testify for ongoing oppression considering that people were not free to choose their own names but were assigned their names by the government?

Strong links to the present like the display of surnames can be found in all sections dealing with the past, as introduced above. The showcase about the abolition of slavery draws a connection to the present by displaying photos and traditional headscarves of *Keti Koti*, the annual Surinamese celebration of slavery or the “breaking of chains”, taken in Amsterdam in 2012 (fig. 23). A personal story embedded in the section about the time from 1900 until 1950 is linked to the present more subtly: A film excerpt of four minutes, taken from a documentation from 1999 on the life of Anton Kok, a member of the Dutch communist party, and his campaigning for the rights of his fellow Surinamese people and the working class. Kok was shot for resisting the German occupation of the Netherlands in the Second World War. The story is told by a narrator and additional interviews of a fellow party member and Kok’s son and daughter who comment on the personal problems their father encountered as a black man in the Netherlands such as rejection on the part of the white family of their mother (fig. 24- 26). The retelling of events that took place before 1940 gains narrative strength from including the perspectives of Kok’s living relatives. The interviews, which are more recent than the otherwise black and white footage, demonstrate how events from the past can still have an impact of people’s lives in the present. They might encourage visitors to compare the problems Anton Kok had to face with the situation of black people in today’s society and detect differences and similarities. All displays that draw this kind of strong connection to the present might stimulate the visitor’s empathy for people in the past while raising the question how far gone that past actually is.

Empathy and understanding for somebody else’s situation can be stirred by having the visitor relive similar conditions, which is made possible in the section about the years between 1863 and 1900 in a striking way. This part of the exhibition is concerned with the curiosity about ‘exotic’ black people who were hired for displays in Europe. As Titia Zoeter points out, no research can give information about the feelings of the people who were exhibited: “we wonder: how did he feel (...) was it strange for him, was he afraid or maybe he was proud?”, she

explains referring to a picture of a boy who was made part of the World Exhibition.⁹¹ By entering the first of the oval pavilions, the visitor activates a video projection on the two inner walls. Standing in the middle of the pavilion, he is surrounded by a crowd of people observing him, talking about him, taking pictures, awing, laughing and even offering a piece of candy (fig. 27-29). By immersing in this experience, the visitor is given the chance to find the answer to the question how it felt to be exhibited for himself, as Zoeter explains.⁹² People might feel uncomfortable or exposed but it also seems possible that some might appreciate the attention from the public; the experience is likely to stimulate further thinking for instance about the ethical concerns related to the practice of displaying humans. In any case, the museum provokes feelings and thoughts but it does not claim authority on the answers to the emerging questions. Again, the exhibition suggests that the questions posed in this display are still up-to-date as the people in the video projection represent different ethnicities, genders and ages, reflecting the diversity of present-day Dutch society.

The section 'Now' is looking at the relationships between black and white people from the year 2000 onwards. With question like "Does *the* Dutch person exist?" or "What does a Dutch person look like?" posed on the introduction panels, the audience is explicitly urged to think about their own skin color and contemplate their identity and social affiliation. The label next to a large photograph on the outside of a pavilion, showing a scene on a busy shopping street in the Netherlands asks people to picture themselves on a street like this (fig. 30). Inside and on the back side of the pavilion, the exhibition discusses skin color and hairstyle of black and white people. Photographs and additional quotes discuss the reasons for bleaching or tanning skin and straightening or curling hair, ranging from mostly fashionable aspects to deeply felt convictions that skin color or hairstyle determines one's chances in society (fig. 31-33). The section is very informal for every visitor who has not considered the social aspects of fashion before; it is a topic that can be approached in a personal way and that relates very clearly to the everyday life of Dutch citizens. White visitors might be taken aback by the radical and dangerous practice of bleaching skin and moreover by the comparison to the equally risky aspects of sunbathing. The

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

juxtaposition of a black woman straightening her hair and a white woman wishing for curls might be understood as evidence for how similar people are in their wish for traits they do not have which in turn could make other people's struggles more relatable. What is striking about this part of the exhibition is that, in contrast to previous sections, it offers less factual information and instead uses the info panels to pose even more questions. It appears that these displays in which people speak for themselves and bring their struggles to the fore, rather than being interviewed and used as proof for set theories, are what turns the exhibition into a contact zone according to Clifford.⁹³ The museum shares authority over the stories it displays, not only with the people telling them but also with the visitors who are free to create personal interpretations and individual answers to the questions posed.

The last of the oval pavilions assembles the arguments surrounding the annual Sinterklaas celebrations and the racist associations with the character of Zwarte Piet in the Netherlands. Bearing in mind that only a few months ago, in the fall and winter of 2013, the debate was dominating the media once again, the museum again implies a relevance for the present. Photographs from the past and present, newspaper articles, tweets and video interviews express arguments for and against the depiction of Zwarte Piet and attempts to find a compromise (fig. 34-38). Given its currency, it seems likely that visitors have been confronted with this particular discussion before and have formed opinions and arguments. By granting equal attention to both sides of the argument as well as to possible compromises, the museum refrains from taking a stand, which might be perceived by visitors as assurance that their views are taken seriously. The museum does not add any new arguments but by including this controversial topic in the exhibition it raises awareness for the fact that it has an impact on the ways black and white people see each other and interact with each other. This display might not have the power to overcome the most rigorous viewpoints on either side but its place in an exhibition that also engages with racism and injustice in the past might debilitate the widespread assumption that the discussion is exaggerated and that the character of Zwarte Piet has always been harmless.

⁹³ Cp. p. 16.

The exhibition contains very few three-dimensional objects and instead uses many photographs and some other two-dimensional objects like historical documents or paintings. Together with the questions posed in the panel texts, many of the photographs prompt the visitor to reconsider his way of looking and subsequent interpretations. This can for instance be noticed in a photograph of the Dutch football team, taken during the 1996 World Championship in England, showing them sitting at two tables with only white teammates and one with mainly black players (fig. 39). The initial interpretation of some viewers might be that black and white players did not get along or that one group deliberately excluded the other. The text next to the photo explains that the division could have been caused by the discrimination felt by black Ajax players at home but it also suggests other ways of analyzing the picture by asking if it might have been a coincidence or whether it is natural for people of the same skin color to spend more time together. 'Exercises' like this in approaching pictures from different angles can be found at multiple points in the exhibition. The museum helps the visitor in developing broader interpretation skills by encouraging him to set aside his initial response and examining a picture from different angles before settling on an interpretation.

The lack of three-dimensional objects was not intended but rather derives from the fact that the museum holds many objects on the history of slavery but few on present-day relationships between black and white Dutch people, as Zoeter explains.⁹⁴ As has been elaborated in the previous chapters, the materiality of objects can help the beholder to concretize abstract notions and form personal answers to questions about identity and values. The two-dimensional objects in this exhibition undoubtedly have the potential to evoke strong reactions concerning visitors' attitudes and sense of belonging. The abovementioned photograph of the football team, for example, might encourage visitors to reflect on the degree to which their everyday lives are determined by their affiliation with an ethnic group; it seems possible that the photo evokes strong feelings of belonging or encourages the wish for more unity by pointing out potential divisions within this team that represented the Netherlands in an international sports competition. What distinguishes *Black&White* is that with every new section or object, the exhibition adds questions and thought-provoking impulses. Visitors who

⁹⁴ Zoeter (2014).

engage with the questions might remain in a state of shifting thoughts and answers throughout the exhibition rather than immediately completing their interpretation processes.

It appears however that a floating progression of interpretations runs the risk of remaining vague and superficial if it is not brought to a conclusion. The museum makes it possible for the visitor to collect his thoughts and enunciate personal meanings by including displays that encourage him to reflect on the exhibition. Most of these can be found towards the end of the exhibition in a section set up around a tribune that can seat whole groups and from which visitors can watch the documentation about Anton Kok on two larger screens. They can sit down on the tribune or at a table next to it on which they can find magazines from the past months that engage with topics that have been addressed in the exhibition (fig. 40). A panel on the wall asks the visitors to give their opinion on the statistical data about black and white Dutch citizens, concerning for instance education, income and involvement in crime, which is presented on a screen (fig. 41). This section offers the possibility to sit down and actually engage in a discussion with other visitors while being presented with the most current data and opinions. On a wall next to the tribune, visitors can fill out comment cards and share their individual impressions and interpretations with others. An interactive screen across from the wall invites people to react to statements concerning relationships between black and white people in the present day and record their answers on video for other visitors to see (fig. 42-44). Immediate responses like these are furthermore beneficial for exhibition makers as they offer a first impression of learning outcomes among the visitors, which could be used as a starting point for further visitor research. It also seems likely that evaluation at the end of an exhibition brings out feedback on the exhibition design, the atmosphere and accessibility that may not be remembered in great detail if the evaluation is conducted at a later point.

According to Titia Zoeter, the main ambition of *Black&White* is to spread awareness of ongoing struggles for and between black and white people in present day society while also showing positive aspects.⁹⁵ The mass of personal stories from the past and present together with constant references to relatable aspects of people's lives most likely convince visitors that Dutch

⁹⁵ Zoeter (2014).

society has notably evolved from former oppressive structures but still is not free of prejudices and boundaries that prevent equal chances for all citizens. This awareness is an effect of learning outcomes such as increasing knowledge, developing skills and enjoyment and at the same time provides a basis for mutual understanding and a change in people's attitudes and behavior. It can be assumed that people who are aware of ongoing difficulties are more receptive to the different perspectives presented to them in the exhibition and more likely to reconsider their own views than people who underestimate the currency of these difficulties. Furthermore, it appears that the exhibition has the potential to make these outcomes long-lasting: The discussion that is triggered by the numerous questions on the information panels finds temporary closure in the last section where people voice their own opinions and give feedback on the exhibition. A lot of the questions however remain unanswered for the time being, but might be recalled by the visitor at a later point as the displays very clearly refer to the everyday lives of Dutch citizens. For instance, a visitor might see a black woman with straightened hair on the street, remember that many people think it increases their chances if they adapt to European looks and reflect on the way he looks at the woman. The museum wishes to support the decrease of stereotypical thinking⁹⁶ and it seems that with this exhibition it lays a foundation for better understanding between people of different ethnicities without instructing the audience about a specific way of thinking. Soufia Zahri, author at online magazine *One World*, praises the neutral position of the museum: "I was expecting a serious remembrance exhibition with endless facts of the kind 'white people were mercilessly cruel and Africans have suffered tremendously'", but "as a visitor you are not instructed but made part of the truth."⁹⁷ Her astonishment illustrates that museum visitors are still familiar with the traditional transmission approach and set interpretations and that the Tropenmuseum explores exhibition methods that might redefine people's conception of museums. Some people, including staff members, were not content with the way the exhibition questions things and instead had wished for a clearer stand on part of the museum as Zoeter explains.⁹⁸ Her

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Zahri, Soufia: Nederland: tolerant en racistisch. In *One World* online, 13/11/2013. URL: <http://www.oneworld.nl/wereld/nederland-tolerant-en-racistisch>. (12.07.2014).

⁹⁸ Zoeter (2014).

objection that this might have led to people feeling accused or patronized refers back to the essentials for this kind of exhibition: when engaging with present-day relationships between ethnic groups, the museum has to be aware of the fact that it has the power to impact people's experiences in a very personal way. By letting people speak for themselves and including all sides of an argument, the museum acts as the moderator of the discussion and facilitator of direct engagement between the included parties.

Conclusion.

The case studies conducted in the two leading ethnological museums in the Netherlands have shown that the museums facilitate mutual understanding between people of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds by bringing them into contact with each other and presenting them with possibilities to gain deep insight into each other's situations. These museums present their exhibitions in a way that connects to the experiences of the people whose cultural heritage or present-day situations are represented while enabling all visitors to draw connections to their own realm of experience. The methods used can affect the entire outline and design of the exhibition, as for instance demonstrated in the first case study where visitors are invited to go on a literal journey to Mecca; often they are more incorporated in object labels or information panels that imply relevance for people's lives or prompt the visitor to discover personal meaning by asking for their opinions. Both museums have explored various ways of offering physical experiences of their exhibitions, for example by offering the opportunity to visit a mosque in socks or inviting the visitors to fully immerse in the interactive display that simulates the conditions of human exhibits. By showing many personal stories and displaying various perspectives alongside each other, the museums dedicate themselves to a democratic manner of exhibition making and enable the visitors to get into indirect or direct contact with people and viewpoints they might not encounter in their daily lives. Thus, not only in the planning stage have the exhibitions chosen for collaboration with communities, but the exhibition rooms themselves become 'contact zones' in which ongoing histories and struggles of different groups

come to the fore. Illustrating diversity seems to be one of the most crucial premises for fostering mutual understanding. Both exhibitions emphasize that they are dealing with ethnic groups that are imbedded in Dutch society: *Longing for Mecca* shows the relevance of the Hajj for Dutch citizens and *Black&White* stresses similarities in people's way of living and constructing identity. They do not present opposing and self-sufficient groups but rather place an emphasis on unity by showing intertwined identities, such as the story of Surinamese-born Anton Kok, his Dutch wife and their children.

It appears that the most important contribution that these exhibitions make to mutual understanding is the prevention of *misunderstanding*. The museums create a framework in which all involved parties speak for themselves. People who were consulted for photographs and video interviews express very personal sentiments; documents and documentations from the past do not follow one narrative and the visitor himself is given the freedom of independent interpretation and, in some instances, even encouraged to share his views and contribute to the multitude of perspectives. The museum itself provides information, establishes contact between these parties and opens up a forum for exchange in which mutual understanding can begin. Especially in an exhibition like *Black&White* that initiates discussions, a neutral stance is essential since it prevents the museum from being accused of being biased and serving only one community, which in turn could lead to tensions with other communities.

As stated in the introduction, understanding can be seen as a precondition, a mindset that allows people to approach each other in the most respectful and unbiased way possible for them and might have a lasting effect on their actions. According to Hooper-Greenhill's evaluation of Generic Learning Outcomes, changing *activity, behavior and progression* may indicate longer-term learning outcomes but it cannot be said from which changes in *knowledge, attitudes and values* acquired in a museum they derive.⁹⁹ Looking at the two case studies, it appears that museums can direct their exhibitions to such broad outcomes as 'understanding' but that they do not have the potential to predict specific long-term results for all visitors since they bring various learning styles, motivations and interpretive frameworks to the museum. The interpretation of displays elaborated on in chapter 3 and 4 suggests possible outcomes that

⁹⁹ Cp. Hooper-Greenhill (2007). p. 57.

probably were intended by the exhibition makers but it does not claim completeness. In addition to that, chapter 1 and 2 have shown that forcing interpretations and values on their audiences is neither common nor approved of in the contemporary museum world. The museums discussed in this thesis appear to be aware of their possibilities, responsibilities and limitations, which is why they strive for broad goals in their temporary exhibitions: Museum Volkenkunde hopes to inspire better understanding for Muslim people and positive encouragement for the Muslim community and the Tropenmuseum wishes to raise awareness of people's struggles.

While this research has highlighted how both museums make extensive use of their educational resources in order to facilitate understanding, it has also brought forward some aspects that might hold the museums back in their attempt to cater to all their audiences. As discussed in chapter 3, Museum Volkenkunde creates a stimulating environment that alludes to the senses and guides the visitor on his 'journey'. Its educational units, however, remain largely uninspired and, in the case of the coloring workshop, disconnected from the exhibition. It appears that the museum is not fully embracing the possibilities of playful manners of display and underestimates the impacts of creativity on the visitor's learning experience. By integrating more creative and interactive displays in future exhibitions, the museum might deepen the impact on the experience of visitors who prefer multi-sensory learning. As brought forward throughout this thesis, more extensive and qualitative visitor studies would put forth visitors' preferences and highlight advantages and disadvantages of existing learning opportunities. While it does not deliver sufficient statistical evidence or insight into long-term learning processes, evaluation methods within the exhibition are easily realizable and disclose the most striking immediate outcomes.

Another challenge that remains despite the promisingly inclusive exhibitions is the establishment of enduring relationships between the museums and their underrepresented visitors. While it has been established that both *Journey to Mecca* and *Black&White* received positive feedback from the desired audiences, yet future exhibitions and accompanying events will show whether the museums continue to cater to them. In this context, an argument

introduced in chapter 1 has to be revisited: Temporary exhibitions alone cannot change the image of ethnographical museums. At present, leaving *Black&White* or one of the other ever-changing, modern exhibitions in the central hall of the Tropenmuseum and walking through the outdated Indonesia section can feel like a journey back in time. The rich permanent collections are the core of the museum and as long as they do not fully advance from outdated mindsets, ethnological museums will not fully become inviting environments for people from various cultural backgrounds.

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Interview transcripts

Repetitions, filler sentences and parts that in retrospect are considered not relevant for the thesis have been omitted and are marked with (...).

Interview 1

Floor Scholte, exhibitions and education developer at Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden

13/05/2014

(...) How did you make the exhibition accessible to the Dutch public?

We looked at the exhibition in the British museum and although they had very beautiful objects, in a way there was a bit of a distant exhibition. So we wanted to integrate the Muslim community in the Netherlands and therefore we made some major changes, for instance we decided to make interviews with about ten different Muslims from different backgrounds (...) men, women, young, old from different countries. We interviewed them on different subjects for instance in the first area of the exhibition we asked what does longing for Mecca mean for them? The question about Longing for Mecca is not only if you haven't been there yet but if you already have been there you keep longing for Mecca so it is like a universal emotion for a lot of Muslims. That was an important question, the other one was "what was your finest moment in Mecca or your finest memory of Mecca?" and we integrated that in the exhibition room on Mecca and in the final room on the homecoming and the souvenir area. We asked them what did the Hajj bring them, what was the outcome of the pilgrimage for them. (...) The other thing that we added to the exhibition was that we asked Muslims to bring their souvenirs from the Hajj and we had a lot of responses to that. People who came with the souvenirs that they had brought from Mecca themselves for instance but also souvenirs which they were given as a present from relatives or friends who were in Mecca. There were all kinds of interesting stories about these souvenirs which we could use in a little storybook which is to be made. (...)

To what extent have members of the Muslim community been involved in the creation of the exhibition? Was it mainly through the interviews and souvenir collecting or did you also have curators or museum educators with a Muslim background?

For the exhibition we had a freelance Muslima who had been on Hajj in 2012 and she worked for a cultural organization in Rotterdam and we asked her to work with us and she was a great advisor on every topic. How to deal with the Muslim community, what are the 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' in the exhibition (...) She also was our communication to the Muslim communities, so she really tried to reach them personally by phone or she went by all kinds of Muslim organizations; she went to Mosques and spoke to boards and all kind of Muslim groups and that resulted in a lot of group visits purely due to her efforts. She also advised on the exhibition (...), she actually advised on every part of the exhibition, the educational program, the exhibition itself, the marketing, the PR, the images you can use (...).

(...) Did you do any sort of big advertising within the Muslim community?

I don't believe we really advertised. We worked a lot with blogs, with all kinds of social media, she did a lot on Twitter because we knew that a lot of people from the Muslim community were not reading Dutch newspapers so we had to reach them in a different way. We noticed that it took like a month before the exhibition really got started with the audience and that really started after the moment people were blogging and putting pictures of the exhibition on their website or account.

Did you create the exhibition with a specific visitor in mind? (...)

The challenge was to get a new audience, a Muslim audience, but also keep your average audience which is mainly a non-Muslim audience. By observation we found out that it worked well because lots of non-Muslims found the exhibition informative and they also liked to get in contact and in dialogue with Muslim visitors and a lot of Muslim visitors (...) had very different reactions from very emotional, getting all these memories back by seeing this exhibition, but also a lot of mainly younger Muslims who said: "this is so informative, I didn't know all this information on the Hajj so it's really adding something to my own education." And a lot of different generations came to the exhibition so parents and grandparents with their children

and they were informing each other very well so I think we succeeded in reaching both target groups.

(...)

Is there a specific kind of atmosphere that you wanted to create in this exhibition?

In a way we wanted people to make the journey to go on Hajj themselves. So we started with the longing for Mecca, then we started with preparations of the Hajj, the journey itself, the arrival at Mecca, going to Medina and going home with or without a souvenir. (...)

(...) What can these personal stories contribute to the visitor's experience?

I think quite a lot because a lot of people were quite honest about what Islam means for them or what going on a Hajj means for them. They are all very well integrated Dutch citizens whom you maybe not expect to be having such deep feelings towards Islam or going on a Hajj. For instance there were two boys, fifteen, sixteen years old I guess; I know them personally because they are in the school of my daughter and they are very modern, Western boys but they have very private parts of religion which they shared with our visitors which everybody found very special. I think a lot of those interviews were very special because people shared private information with the audience which you usually don't hear when you communicate with them.

(...)

How do you think the objects themselves influenced the visitor's experience? Do you maybe see a difference between the precious objects and the personal souvenirs?

Yes, a lot of personal souvenirs are not of special value but of emotional value and a lot of people love to see something in a showcase which they have at home themselves and which they recognize. The last room (...) which has all these cloths and textiles which were on the Kaaba is like a treasure room. Especially Muslim visitors, they were astonished by those objects because they were once on the Kaaba and you can never come so close to those textiles as you were in this exhibition. This had a very special attraction to mainly Muslim visitors but also non-Muslim visitors really valued the beautiful textiles and techniques. (...) Also the modern art was very well evaluated by a lot of people. In the first room you had all these paintings,

photographies and special souvenirs with Mecca on it and I noticed that people were very long looking at objects. (...)

What do you think were the benefits of the quiz?

(...) This is the third time we do a quiz like this in the exhibition and we noticed before that we started to do the quiz for children but we never do it in a childish way so everybody can do it. We very soon noticed, also in this exhibition, that everybody likes to do it. It's a fun way of testing your knowledge. It's also adding some extra information which you can't find in the text. Due to the techniques you can offer more detailed information on several topics for instance on the beautiful miniatures of Halili which you could zoom in and discover all kinds of special details. What everybody loves is that you get a reward afterwards if you've done the tour. It's not so much a reward for getting ten points as well as for having done this tour; you get rewarded for the fact that you tried to find the answers and even if you had only three answers you get your reward. Really, people loved it; we had a very large number of Kaaba 'bouwplaten' and they were all finished at the end of the exhibition and we didn't expect that to happen. (...)

(...) What do you think are the benefits of the coloring workshop?

I don't know exactly. I think people like to do something. It's a nice break in the exhibition of watching, hearing and looking at things. A lot of children like to do that and the Islamic patrons are very universal in the Islamic world so we could easily add that to the exhibition (...).

Overall, what would you say is it that you would like to have your visitors leave with?

I hope a lot of people, when I think of non-Muslim visitors, leave with more understanding of the Islam and Islamic people and also with the thought that different religions like Christianity and Islam have more in common than we would think at first. That's what I hear from a lot of people as well. For the Muslim community I noticed that we managed to get these people very proud of their culture and background. We spend 800 square meters on their religion, their pilgrimage and we very soon noticed that as soon as Muslim people came into the exhibition that they were glowing after ten minutes, they really enjoyed it and they recognized things, they were telling stories(...). A lot of people wrote down that they were very impressed by the way

we did it and they enjoyed the exhibition, that they were informed. They also thought we did it in a respectful way, not judgmental at all.

I thought it was a very peaceful exhibition that is very consciously unpolitical (...).

We are a governmental institute so we don't take sides in political situations and I think that's easily respected by the Dutch government and also other countries.

(...)

Interview 2

Titia Zoeter, exhibition maker at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam.

19/05/2014

Titia, thank you very much for this interview. I would like to talk to you about the exhibition Black&White. I noticed that it's largely based on personal stories from people in the past and the present and I would like to know why the museum approached it this way and what do you think are the benefits of this?

We thought there are a lot of perspectives on how black and white live together today, that's what the exhibition is about. The museum doesn't want to put a statement like "it is this way" or "it is that way" because it depends on what your experiences are and what your history is on how you view this so we wanted to insert a lot of personal stories to give the visitor the feeling, it is not black or white but there are a lot of ways of dealing with this subject and a lot of ways of viewing it. That's why we chose this. Also to keep an open mind when you enter the exhibition you don't have the feeling that it's this or that and this is wrong and this is right, no there are a lot of possibilities and I as a visitor can choose what I think. That's why we chose for the personal approach.

I noticed that you started the exhibition with the interviews and then moved on more chronologically. Is there a certain reason you start with the interviews and switch to chronology then?

Yes, exactly this, we want to get the visitor into an open-minded position or attitude. Actually, we want to have the exhibition on the present day and not on what happened in the past.

So the past is an addition?

Yes and also an introduction because you need the past to understand how it is now. So we started in the present at the introduction with the interviews of the people and also to create an open mind because we would like to end in the present but we need the past to explain the present s (...) It's like a framework, the present in the beginning and the present in the end and then we have the past in the introduction.

How did you get in contact with the interview partners? How did you select them?

The curator of this exhibition, he has a big network, he knows a lot of people and they know a lot of people and they know a lot of people. So it's researching actually but you ask people and we wanted to show a lot of different people from different ages, different sexes, different education and different color of the skin of course to explain what their color means to them, so that's also a way of selecting the people.

Have you approached black communities with your advertising?

(...) We approached *Radio mArt* in Amsterdam Belmer, we approached with communication special groups in elderly homes or those people and of course we spoke to people who are in relation to the subjects, so not only the Surinamese and Antillean community but also white people who know a lot about it.

(...)Who do you want to reach with this exhibition?

Well, we want to reach everyone of course. We always have a specific group that's coming to the museum. Those are people mostly over fifty years old and interested in a lot of subjects so we always want to reach them because they belong to the museum. But because this is a subject that is about our society and also with the intention of discussion and hopefully to

create a better society we want to reach young people especially because they have the future and it's really a discussion that is very up-to-date now; it's really important and we would like to create new perspectives for young people to interact with each other, that's why we wanted to reach them. We have a lot of events and they are mostly focused for these groups. They are about hair and how you can dress and also (...) you can actually do your hair on those events so it's a mix of styles and a mix of ways to reach them.

Let us talk about the displays that have the visitor participate within the exhibition (...) What do you think are the benefits of that?

We wanted the visitor to create an answer for himself to the question "how do black and white Dutch people relate to each other?" It always helps when you create something where the visitor can do something because then you are not in the modus of just viewing but also you have to do something so you have to think. It's a way of making the visitors alert and motivating them to think for themselves. So with the screens when you enter the pavilion and you see the people looking at you, it's making the subject more close, more nearby because on the other side you see a photograph of a boy that is exhibited in the world exhibition a century ago and we wonder: "how did he feel (...)? Was it strange for him? Was he afraid? Or maybe he was proud?" We don't know, we asked people who have researched the subject but we are not sure and that feeling we want to experience the visitors themselves.

I felt very uncomfortable standing in there, you know it's just a video but it's really getting to you.

Yes and hopefully you feel more related to the subject then, to create your own answers in the end of the exhibition where you have to leave them in the computer screens or you can leave your film. So that's why we tried these things to make the visitor more aware and also more nearby the subject.

The parts of the exhibition where the visitors reflect on their own thoughts (...) What kind of feedback did you get from your audience? Did you get direct feedback on the exhibition?

We have the wall with the cards and there you can read it yourself as well. We get a lot of different feedback. The positive feedback is mostly "I didn't know this" and "that is an

eye-opener” and that’s really what we wanted to do. A lot of people live together and say “Oh, everything is okay, no problem” but they are not always aware of what happens so that’s what we do in the exhibition as well. But they are also people who say “well, this is from the 80’s, it’s not important anymore and now we have the discussion with the Moroccans (...)” so we get different responses but mostly it’s positive I guess.

The awareness for problems that are still existing in our society, would you say that is what you would like to have your visitors leave with?

Yes awareness, really. But not only problems, also good things; we also show the positive sides and also awareness that you (...) when you walk in the streets that you don’t judge someone immediately on how he or she looks or how he or she acts but that you think a second time and then maybe you can have an opinion but not stereotyping it.

(...) How do you think objects and artworks can add to the visitor’s experience? (...)

We are a museum and we wanted to put in more objects but we have a lot of objects on the history of slavery itself but not so much on present-day relationships between black and white Dutch people. That was really difficult so we added a lot of photographs and I think it’s a pity we didn’t have more objects because it’s another way of looking. When you see a photograph, when it’s from an artist it’s different than from when you see a photograph that’s just documentary and you are passing by more quickly than when you have a 3-d object and you have to watch very carefully and slowly and then you are going to think as well. So that’s a bit of a difficulty in this exhibition that we didn’t have enough objects.

Did you consider collecting objects from communities themselves? I know for example, Museum Volkenkunde did that with the Mecca exhibition; they borrowed souvenirs from Mecca and gave them back afterwards (...).

We did consider that, to put them next to the interviews exactly. But then we thought ‘that becomes really personal’. The story in the interview is personal but when you add an object, it supports the story already here but we were searching for objects that were giving answers to the central question “how do black and white Dutch people relate?” And we thought it’s a full exhibition, there are a lot of things to see, so we wanted the right objects not these objects (...)

The Mecca exhibition has a different story, it's a different theme and also a different kind of exhibition. This is a discussion and Mecca wasn't so I think that is different. We added objects from artists that made it especially for this exhibition, so that's the artist's point of view.

The artworks at the beginning of the exhibition?

Yes, we have the white tent, now it is gone already. In a separate 'zaal' there were two artists who discussed the subject together with their artworks(...). It would have been better if we had added more objects at the right locations but it was too difficult for us (...).

That brings me to my last question: Is there anything you would do differently?

Yeah, that. But still it's difficult to find these objects. Maybe it's necessary to adjust the storyline and that's a big change. A few people are not content with the way we constructed the exhibition being an exhibition that questions things. They wanted us to state a lot of things so say "this is the way how it goes and this is the way how it was in the past" but I'm not sure we should have changed it because I like the open-minded way, a visitor can walk around and otherwise a lot of people would have said "no I don't like this because I'm not the one who is the victim" or "I'm not the one who did it". I think the way we ask questions is a good way to do it but there's a lot of discussion about it, a lot of people, also inside the museum, think it's better to do it another way.

List of Illustrations

Fotos: Linda Goltsche, unless stated otherwise.

Figure 1.

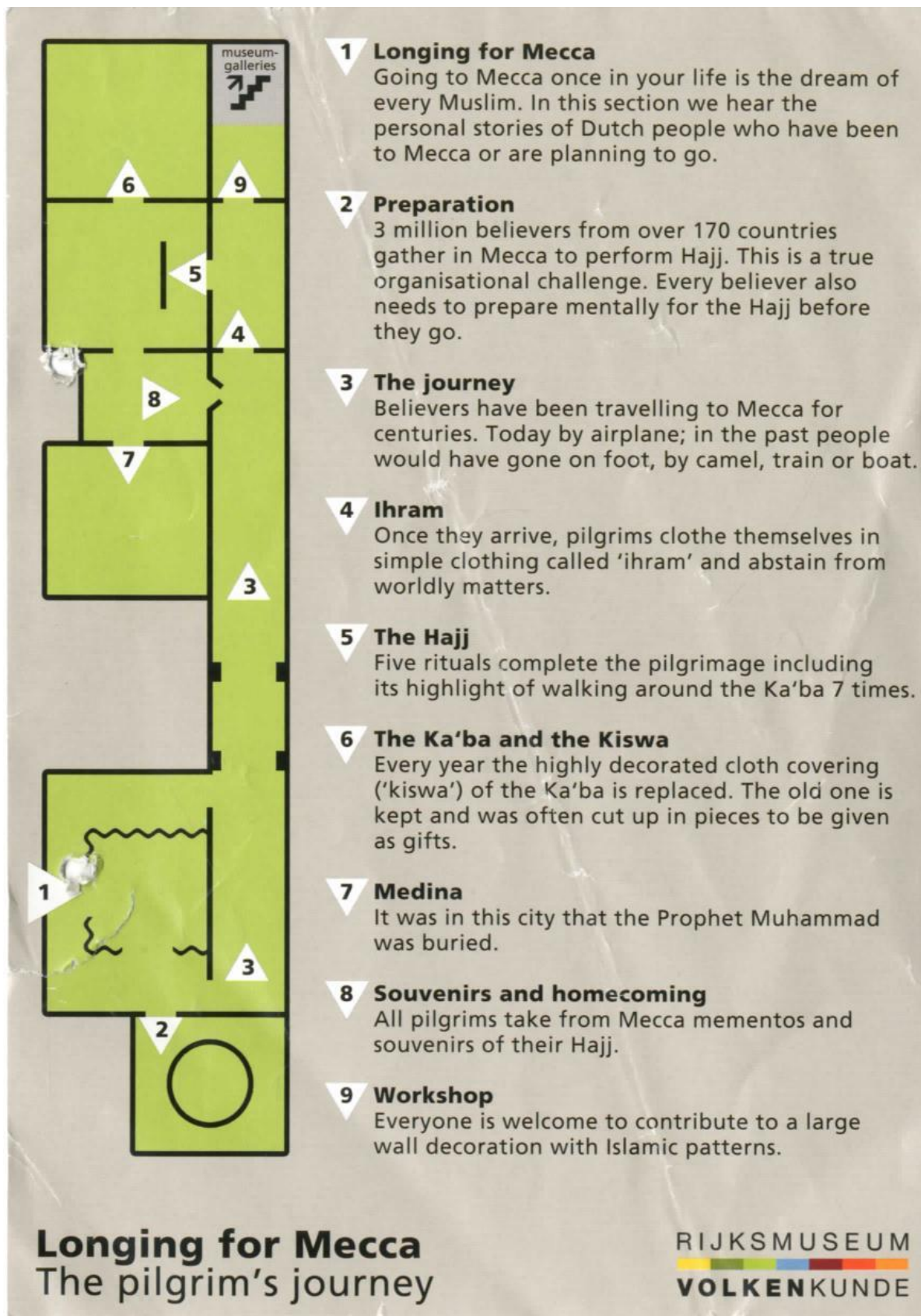


Figure 2.

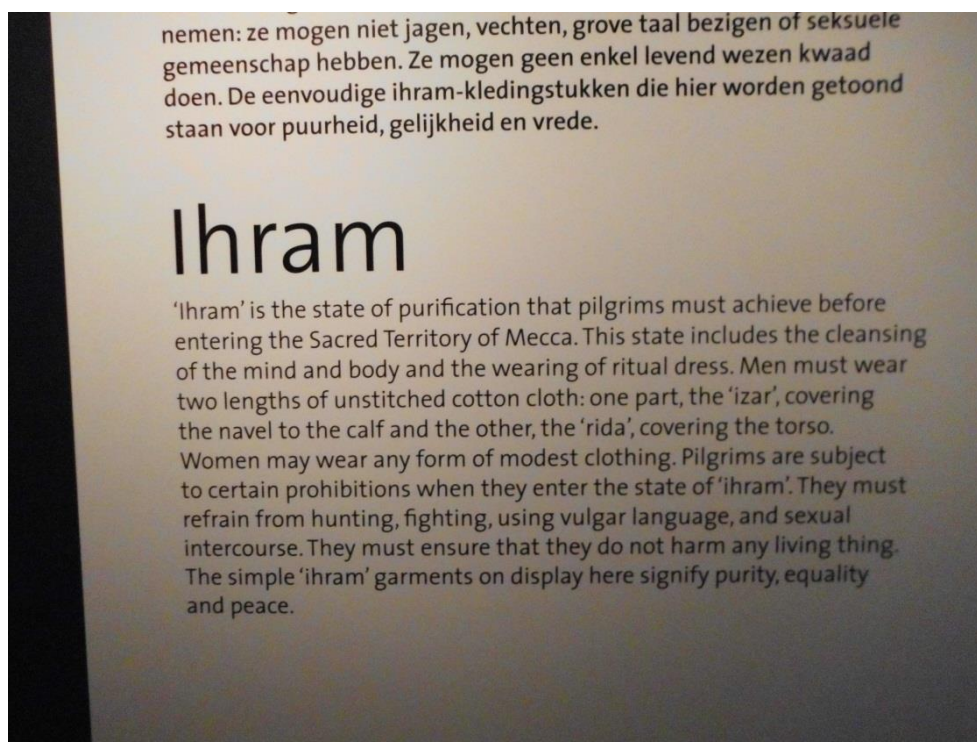


Figure 3.



Figure 4

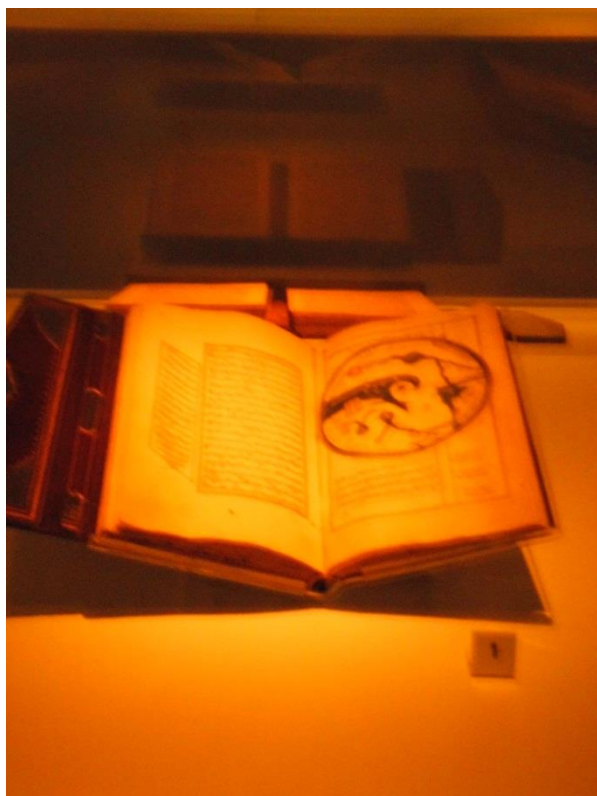


Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

Foto: Faisal Mirza. URL: <http://wijnblijvenhier.nl/20784/verlangen-naar-mekka-leiden-museum-volkenkunde/>. (14/05/2014)



Figure 9.

Foto: Thijs Wolzak. URL: <http://www.dearchitect.nl/nieuws/2013/09/17/verlangen-naar-mekka.html>. (14/05/2014)



Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.



Figure 13.

Foto: Thijs Wolzak. URL: <http://www.dearchitect.nl/nieuws/2013/09/17/verlangen-naar-mekka.html>. (15/05/2014)



Figure 14.



Figure 15.



Figure 16.

Foto: Bram Sas. URL: <http://www.bramontdekt.nl/uncategorized/de-magneet-mekka/>. (15/05/2014)



Figure 17.



Figure 18.



Figure 19.



Figure 20.



Figure 21.



Figure 22.

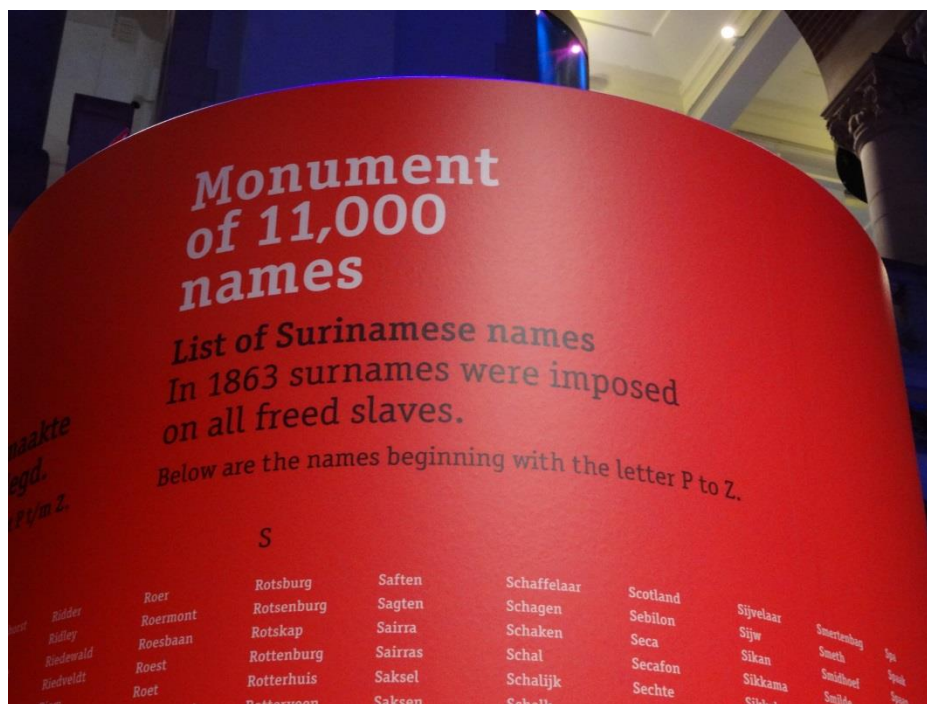


Figure 23.



Figure 24.



Figure 25.



Figure 26.



Figure 27.



Figure 28.



Figure 29.

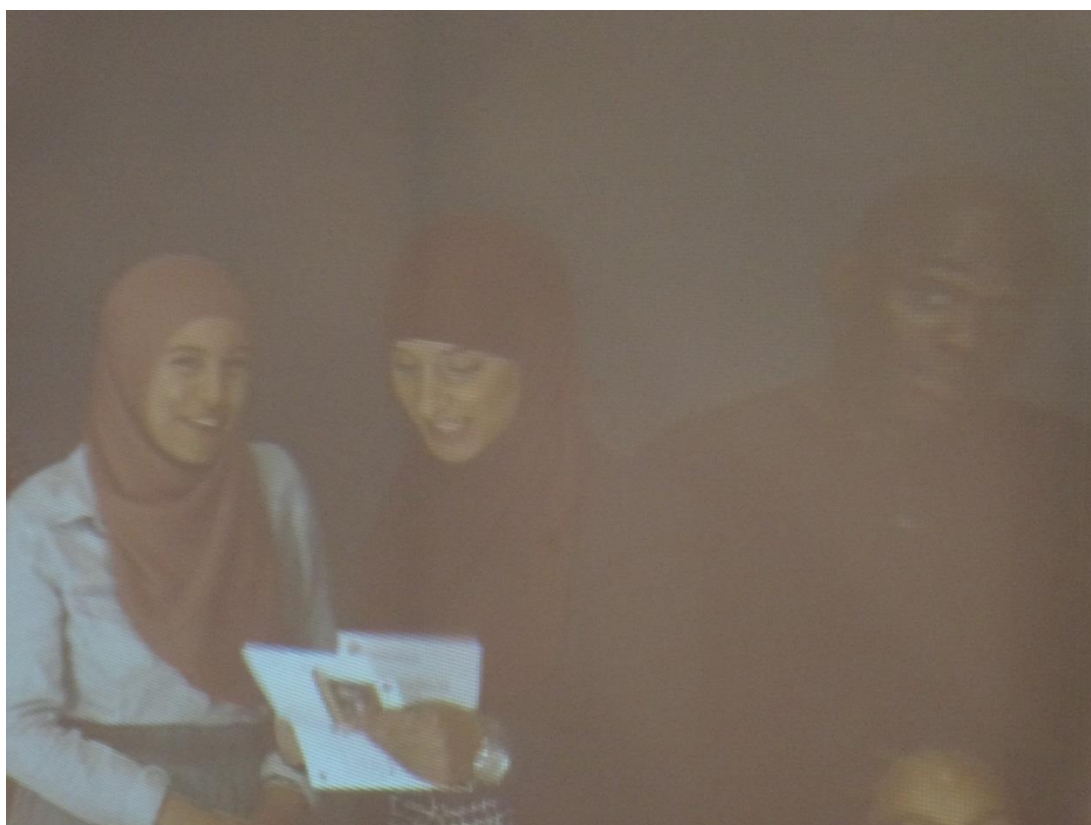


Figure 30.



Figure 31.



Figure 32.

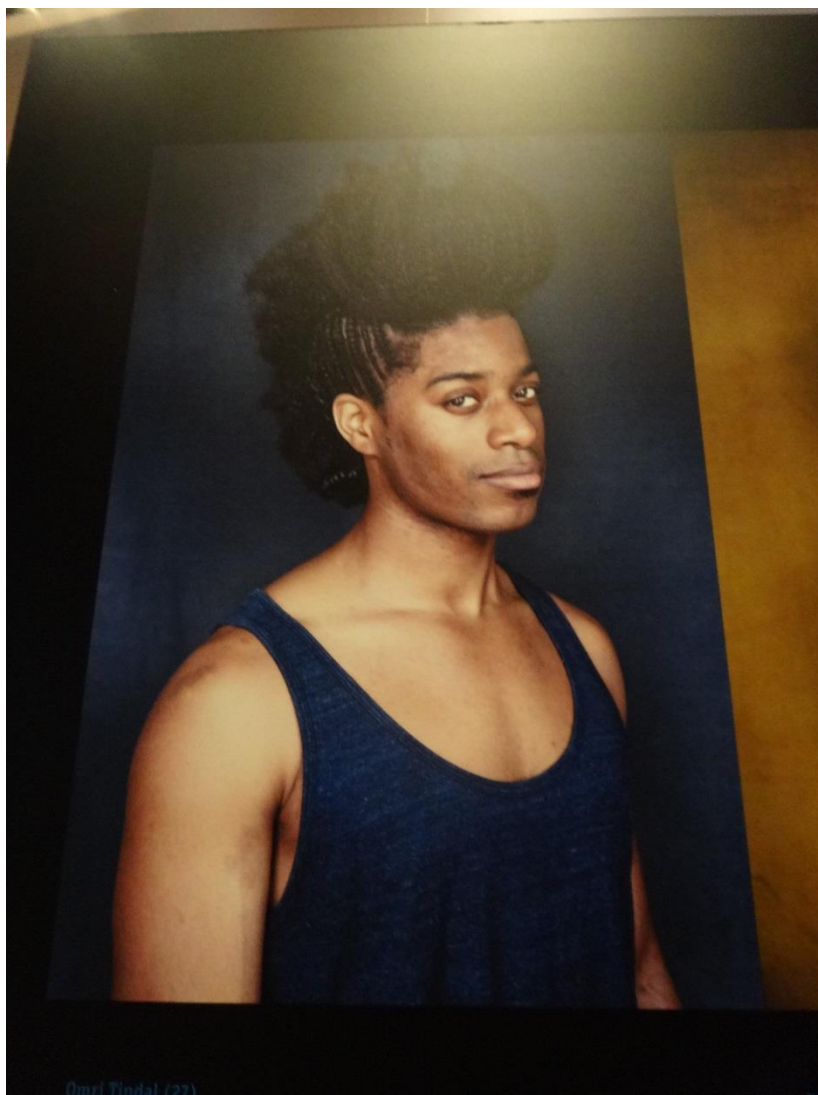


Figure 33.

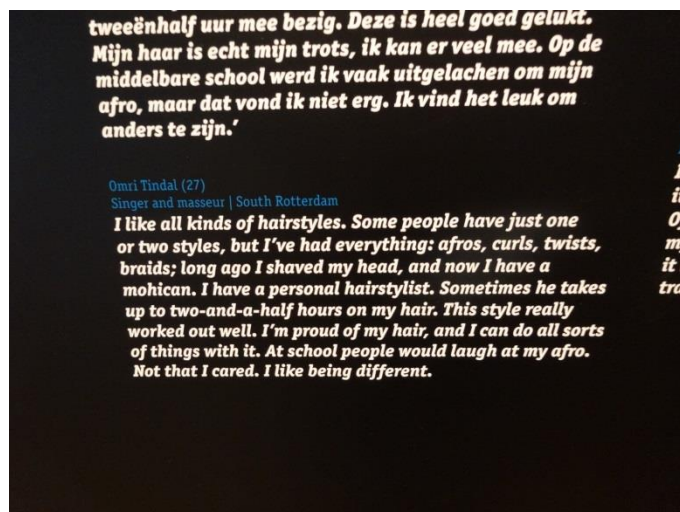


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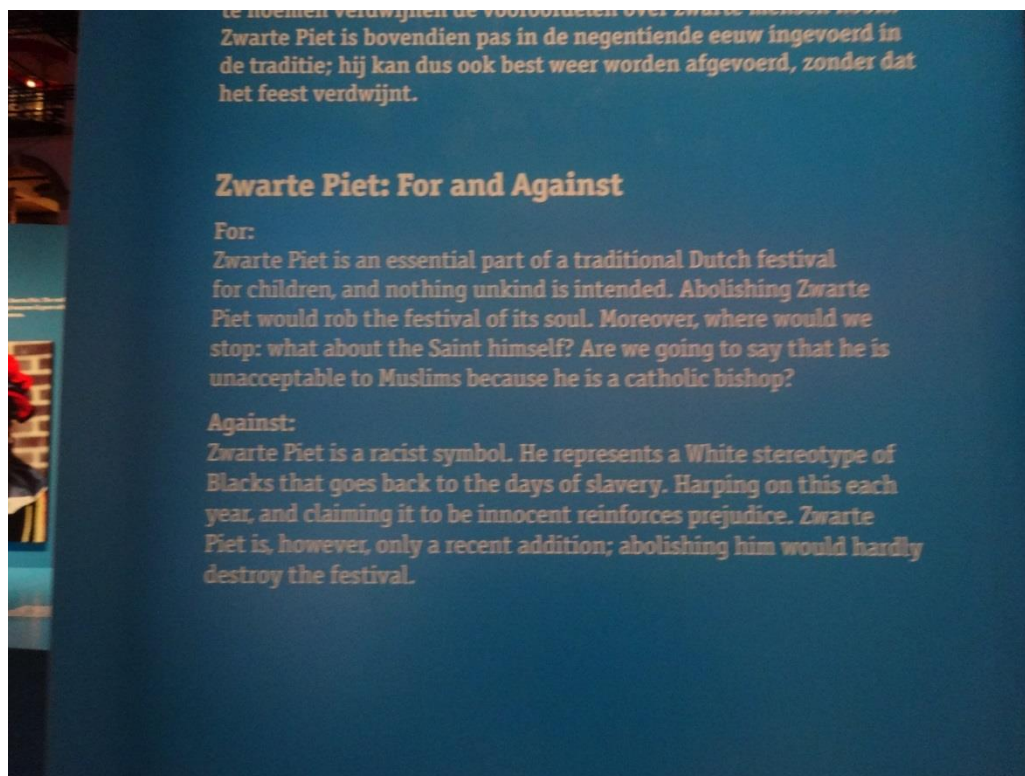


Figure 35.



Figure 36.



Figure 37.

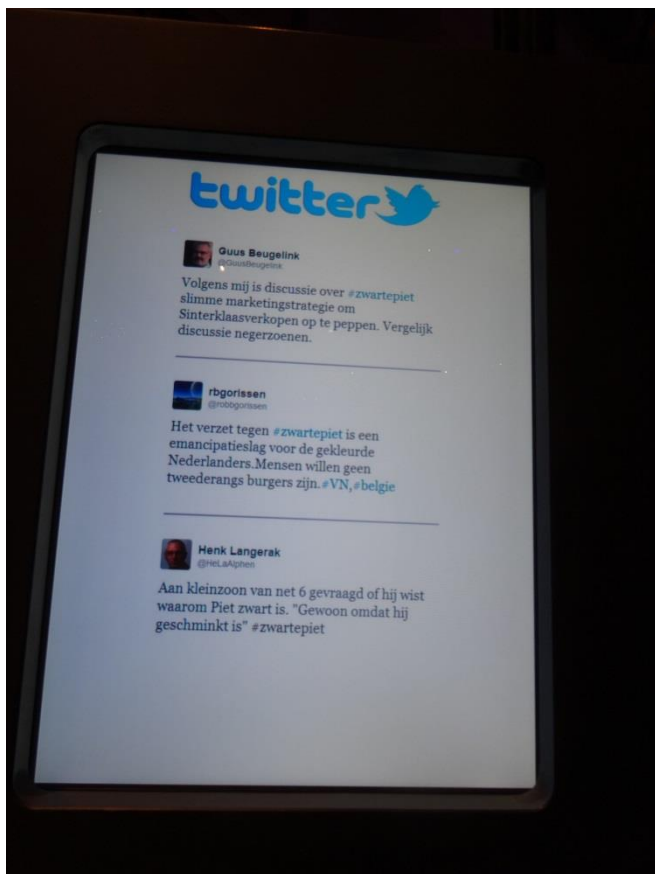


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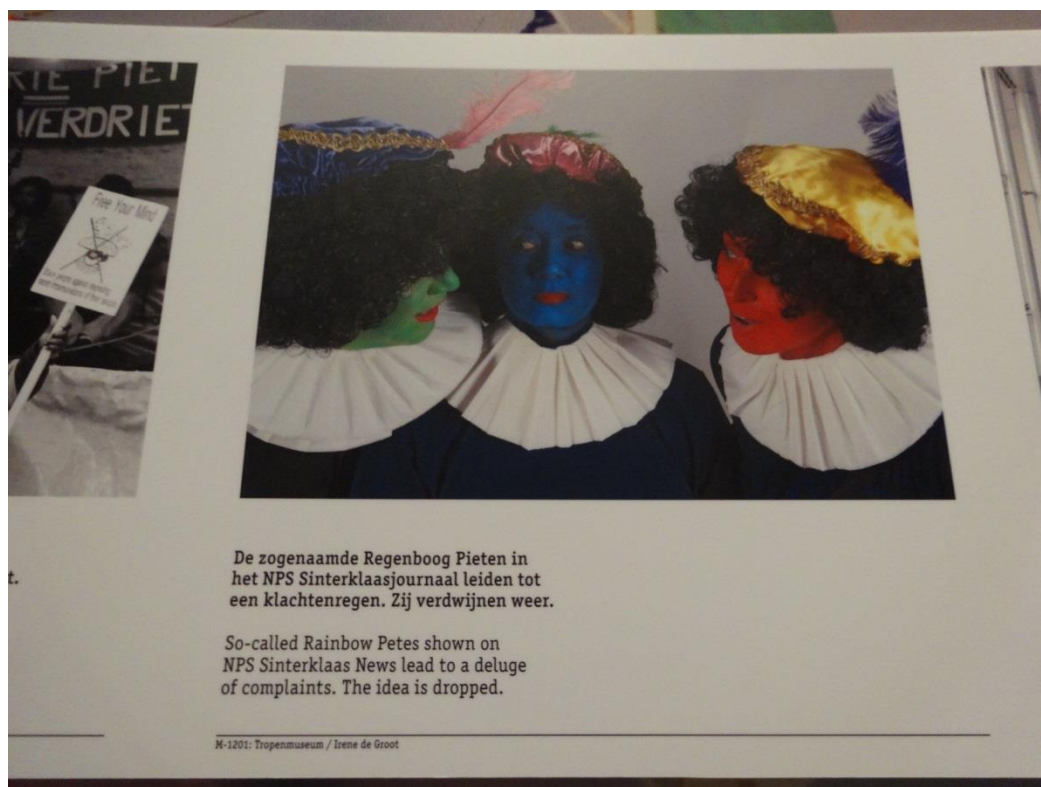


Figure 39.



Figure 40.



Figure 41.

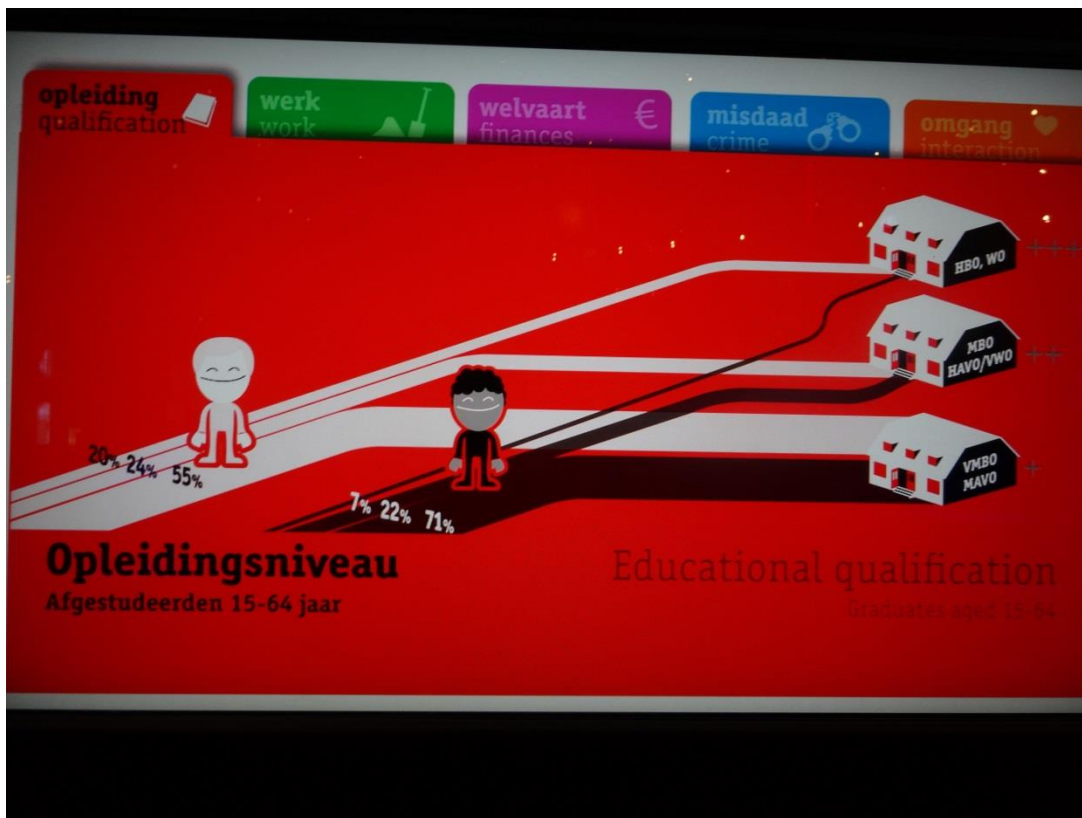


Figure 42.



Figure 43.

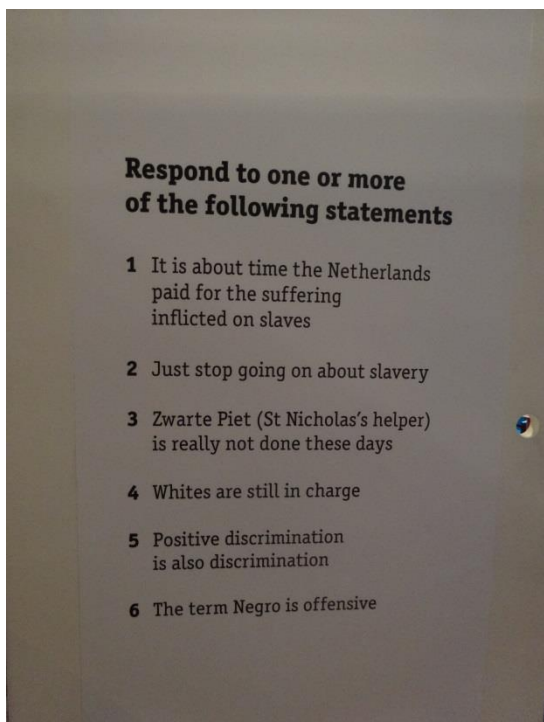
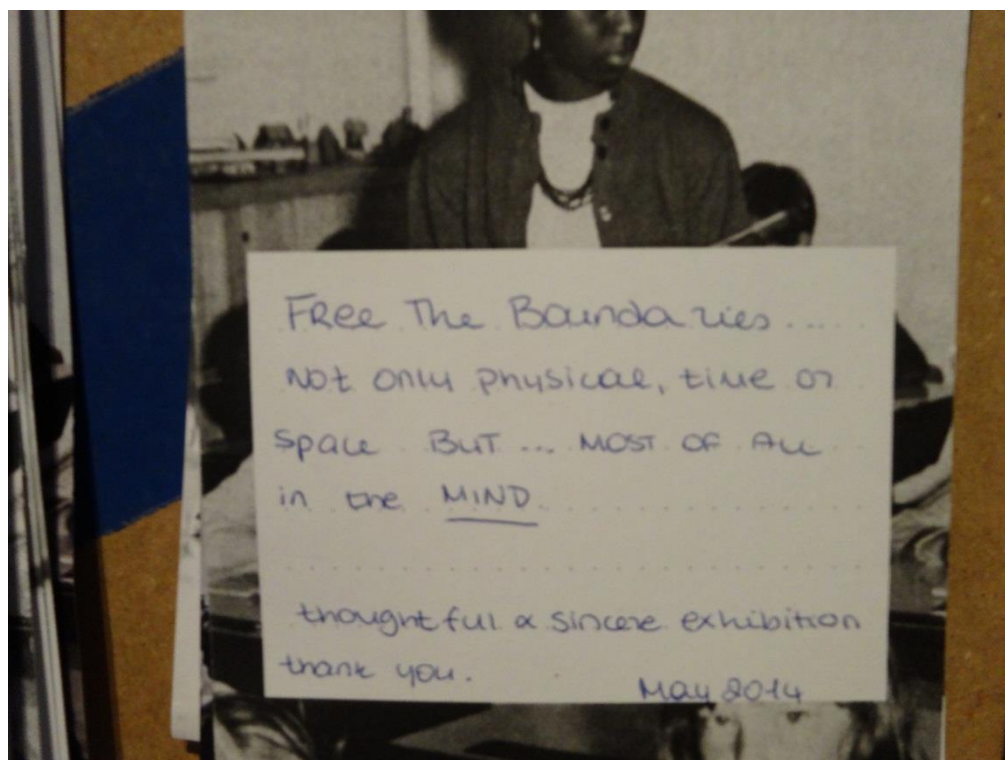


Figure 44.



Declaration of Academic Integrity

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Linda M. Goltsche

28 July 2014